



## Apiary Coordinators Report

Our Shugborough and Hilton Green Association Apiary Coordinators are pleased to report continued success over the past year.

Key achievements across both apiaries include:

- Managing the health and wellbeing of over 30 colonies.
- Successfully bringing the majority of colonies through the winter, ensuring regular checks, feeding, and treatments were implemented.
- Maintaining an environment with experienced beekeepers that provides support and learning opportunities for new beekeepers.
- Learning and developing new beekeeping practices, particularly Varroa Sensitive Hygiene (VSH), as part of our gradual move towards treatment-free beekeeping.
- Harvesting and extracting two honey crops yielding approximately 675 lbs (306 kgs.)
- Continuing to contribute to and support simultaneous Beginner Beekeeping Courses across both apiaries.
- Supporting the Education Team with teaching, examinations, and Honey Bee Experience events.
- Creating and selling seven nuclei of honey bees, generating an income of £1,225.00.
- Recycling, cleaning, and repairing equipment through scheduled maintenance days to remain as cost-effective as possible.
- Providing a collection service for quartermaster orders and selling honey to the public on Saturday mornings.
- Collecting factory-waste discarded sugar for distribution to members for bee food

### Shugborough Apiary

The Shugborough Apiary has had another successful year, providing an established beekeeping environment for members and new beekeepers while supporting training opportunities. We continue to support our sister apiary, Hilton Green, particularly at the start of the season by supplying nuclei of bees to replace winter losses.

We harvested approximately 650lbs (295 kgs.) of honey over two extractions in June and August, achieving the best yield for a number of years. We extend our thanks to members who supported extraction days and assisted with the challenging task of removing supers and determined bees from supers before loading for

transportation.

In July, NBU Bee Disease Inspectors visited the apiary and inspected all colonies. Apart from a minor recommendation regarding cleaning smokers, we received a clean bill of bee health.

Attendance at weekly meetings has decreased slightly; however, we remain extremely grateful to Apiary Leads and members who regularly support our meetings and care for our bees whilst coaching less experienced beekeepers. Special thanks are given to Alan Greenman for mentoring six new members following their Beginners Course and overseeing their inspections prior to purchasing their Nucs from the apiary.

Our queen rearing programme continues to develop, with ten viable queens raised. Our intention is to focus solely on VSH queens in 2026 and increase numbers in order to aid distribution to members.

Of the 14 hives taken into winter, six were identified as VSH and left untreated. Unfortunately, three of these colonies were lost. Additionally, two nuclei vacated their homes in October despite adequate stores, highlighting the unpredictable nature of beekeeping. We have regularly monitored the colonies over the winter period and treated appropriately. Currently we have 11 hives and 4 nuclei of bees in residence.

The top bar hive has proven difficult to manage, we were unable to re-queen after discovering a drone layer so we have decided to allow the bees to remain undisturbed and have prepared it as a bait hive. A long hive has been purchased to support members with physical challenges and will provide experience with alternative hive configurations to all members.

We remain vigilant regarding the threat of the Asian Hornet and continue to raise awareness.

Our thanks are extended to the National Trust and particularly Caroline Beacall for her continued support.

Alan and I will be stepping back from the Apiary Coordinators role this year but will continue to support the apiary where possible. The apiary will move to a rota-based management system, we ask members to support the new Apiary Leads during this transition.

## Plans for 2026

- Implement a new rota system for weekly apiary meetings.
- Populate the new long hive and share learning.
- Continue vigilance against Asian Hornet threat.
- Develop the queen rearing programme using VSH queen eggs.
- Closely monitor colonies for VSH traits and implement careful selection for non- treatment.

On a personal note, Alan and I wish to thank everyone who has supported us over the past four and a half years. We couldn't have done it without you!

## Hilton Green Apiary

Hilton Green Apiary is restricted to 7 hives on the site with a more flexibility about the number of nucs we can run. Although we went into the 2024 winter with five hives, the spring of 2025 saw only two healthy colonies surviving the cold and damp winter. We were grateful to our sister Apiary at Shugborough transferring 3 nucs to the Apiary to bolster our viable hives for the busy beginners' season. These colonies were greatly welcomed, for as well as having varroa resistant traits, they were also gentle and calm bees.

At the start of the 2025 season there was a consistent but small cohort of members regularly supporting the Apiary and attending to the collection of surplus sugar from Bidfood. However, a successful beginners' course ably led by Tony and Alison gave fresh impetus to the number of members supporting the Apiary throughout the remainder of the season. To encourage this commitment, each novice beekeeper was allocated a hive to take through into the new season, supported by experienced members. Members jointly committed themselves to meeting monthly throughout the winter months to check the hives, stores and undertake any necessary maintenance work. This has included attempting to remedy the damp conditions on the Apiary site by replacing netting, removing overgrown hedges and giving more ventilation to the colonies. Maintaining colonies and ensuring that they had sufficient stores was the overarching priority of the Apiary throughout the season to which end, on 3 January, despite challenging winter conditions of snow and ice we took the opportunity to heft the hives and check that the entrances remained clear of both snow and any dead bees.

The monthly bee chats at Hilton Green have been well attended throughout the season including Chris Shaw & Tony Ward gave us an impromptu mead making demonstration including the chance to sample different meads; no amount of bribery could tempt Tony to give us his Christmas mead recipe.

At the end of the season, we said 'au revoir' to Alasdair who acted as Hilton Green's quartermaster, as well as being the primary key holder. We've now set ourselves the challenge of labelling shelves in the storage container as "ask Alasdair where we

keep the ...”! won't work now. Although Alasdair remains as the Association's remote membership secretary, we have greatly appreciated and will now miss his calm beekeeping interventions and quiet efficient Apiary support.

We are, as always, grateful to Dave Knowles's team at the Forest of Mercia site who host us, and more importantly our bees, with vigilance, interest and patience and who have become adept at spotting swarming bees.

Going forward, we will continue to manage the Apiary on a collective basis, and we hope to maximise our nuc production next year, support novice beekeepers to become practical beekeepers on future beekeeping courses and take any steps to avoid colony losses.

## Sugar Sales

For some years the team at Hilton Green have arranged the collection of sugar donated by Bidfood which is unfit for human consumption. This is stored in buckets in the Forest of Mercia's container at Hilton Green. Throughout the season the sugar is used by both apiaries to make into sugar syrup to feed the Association's bees and, importantly, the surplus is sold to members at £3 per 10k bucket. In spring and autumn, we are inundated by members asking for sugar to enhance the bees' honey stores. We are particularly grateful to those Members who forward plan and obtain sugar from us when we have a glut, those that don't run the risk of us having to restrict the amount that each member can be given.

We can report that sugar sales raised over at least £700 during the year.

We acknowledge all those members such as Alasdair Lewis, Mel Slater, Lorraine Parker, and Chris Shaw who have turned out sometimes in rotten weather to do this. They are a great team who work in all weathers to sort out the deliveries all for a cup of tea at the end. Thanks also to those in the past who have collected sugar when the regular team are not available.