

Swansea & District Beekeepers Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch

www.swanseabeekeepers.org.uk



Some fun at the recent Christmas Dinner

Our thanks to Nicola for the photo.

It was great to see everybody enjoying themselves at the Christmas Dinner in December. As you can see from the photograph, we had a great time with some of the more light-hearted raffle prizes.

Happy New Year

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Forthcoming Events

Informal meetings are held on **2nd & 4th Tuesdays** of every month at the **Con Club, Church Street, Gowerton**, from 7.00 pm onwards. All are welcome. We look forward to seeing you there.

January 2016

Tuesday 12th Talk at the Con Club by Mr. Mark Russ on Wild Flowers. Mark was responsible for the wonderful wild flowers grown around Swansea this year.

February

Tuesday 9th AGM held upstairs in the Con Club, Gowerton, 7.00 p.m.

March

Tuesday 8th To be decided

April

Tuesday 12th Talk at the Con Club given by Robert Gray, the 'Bee Whisperer'. Robert advises that we look up his web site before attending the talk. We will give details of this site in a later edition of the newsletter.

Future programmes will be announced as they become available.

October

Weekend of 14th, 15th & 16th Our Society is hosting the 2016 MSWCC Bee Conference, a three-day event, which will be held at the King Arthur Hotel, Reynoldston, Gower. We have a small team working out details of the programme which will have speakers on all three days and, on the Saturday, a series of workshops. As we get closer to the date, more information will be given.

The Society Honey Show

Our thanks to Ade Bowen for organising a fun evening at the Con Club in November which gave us a chance to taste other people's honey.

He had the table set out for light, medium, dark, creamed and set honey categories. Everyone had a form to fill in, marking taste, flavour, clarity etc. for all of the honeys. We gave marks to each honey with points from 1 to 5 and the results were added up at the end of the evening. The surprising result was that the first two places were filled by granulated honeys and the third by creamed honey. It showed that, on the night, people preferred the set honeys.

In first place was Jonathon Bowen, second was Nicola & Steve, third was Marian & Jim Lyle and fourth was Ade Bowen. Our congratulations go to them all and our thanks to everyone who brought along a jar of their honey.

Winter Hefting

We all know about hefting hives in late autumn to check if the bees have sufficient winter stores or if they need feeding but there is another use of hefting, namely to find out if the queen has started laying in January and February.

Once the coldest parts of the year have passed, the queen will start laying small amounts of eggs and this requires the brood temperature to be raised from the over-winter cluster temperature of around 22⁰ C to normal brood temperatures of about 35⁰ C. How do they do this? Simply by eating lots and lots of their winter honey stores to generate heat. In other words, they change their behaviour from cluster mode to their normal mode. **Note:** Due to the unusually warm December, bees will probably start laying earlier than usual.

With regular weighing it is possible to chart this change and see that your colonies are behaving normally. If they do not, then there may be something amiss with the colony. Knowing the weight of equipment will enable you to accurately assess the actual stores left in the hive.

Equipment. My choice is a simple suitcase weigher with an attachment to allow the base of the hive to be gripped. I bought mine in M & S a few years ago and similar ones are available in many shops. It has a comfortable hand-grip and a clear scale in either kg or lb with a large hook on the bottom to which I attach a length of coat-hanger wire and a strong picture-hanging hook at the end. This allows me to stand upright and weigh the hives with minimal trouble.

Method. To weigh the hive, slip the hook under one side of the floor and lift it a very small amount. Note the weight and do the same thing on the other side of the hive. Add these two together and you will get the total weight of the hive. Though this is only an approximation, it is surprisingly accurate. Record this weight and continue to do the same thing every two weeks. If all is OK in the hive, you should see the weight decreasing as more eggs are laid towards the spring.

To Calculate the Weight of Honey. To get the actual weight of honey in the hive it is necessary to subtract the weight of the equipment, i.e. the brood box, super (if there is one), roof, floor, crown board, foundation and remember to allow about 1 kg for the bees themselves.

To get an accurate weight of equipment, weigh some of your own spares. In weighing my spare equipment I found small variations but, as a guide, I took an average.

Langstroth parts weighed approximately:

Brood chamber	6.5 kg	Super	4.9 kg
Mesh floor	not available	Roof	4.2 kg
Crown Board	0.7 kg	Wire excluder	1.1 kg

National parts weighed approximately:

Brood chamber	not available	Super	4.7 kg
Mesh floor	1.4 kg	Roof	not available
Crown Board	0.8 kg	Wire excluder	1.1kg

On 17th Dec. I weighed two of my hives. They weighed 24 kg and 33.4 kg. respectively. Using this system to assess honey available, I calculate they have approximately 5.3 kg and 16.7 kg of honey stored, meaning that I may need to feed them with fondant early in the new year.

Welsh Manuka Honey?

Researchers in the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at Cardiff University, under the direction of Prof. Les Baillie, working with the National Botanic Garden of Wales, have found a Welsh honey which they say is as potent as Manuka honey from New Zealand.

The honey, from Gwynedd, was in one of the samples sent by beekeeper Chris Hickman in response to the university's request for local honeys for their project to find plant-based sources for drugs capable of fighting antibiotic-resistant infections.

As we know, honey has been used for thousands of years to treat wounds and infections due to its bacteria-killing compounds. The antimicrobial activity of any particular honey will depend on the properties of the plants on which the bees have foraged.

Since this study started, Cardiff University staff have analysed honey samples from 250 Welsh hives to find their antimicrobial properties.

Cardiff University working with the National Botanic Garden of Wales, in Llanarthne, Carmarthenshire, sequenced samples from 20 honeys with the highest antibacterial qualities and identified the plants which contributed to their properties.

Prof. Baillie said the joint study had created more excitement than anything else in his three decades in science. "It's one of those projects that has amazed us as we have gone through. Every time we turn around we find something else quite cool," he added.

By identifying the plants visited by the bees, the team hope to be able to increase production to a feasible scale.

They are now looking at growing those specific plants in various areas around Cardiff, including one site on the roof of the St David's Shopping Centre, which already has its own bee hives.

As and when we get more information on the subject, we will hope to bring you up-to-date with their progress. My thanks to Paul Lyons for sending me this information.

When Bees Were Bees by Tom Davies.

A question from Eva A. Brown, of New York was answered in "Gleanings in Bee Culture" for May 1930, on methods of uniting bees other than the newspaper method.

One method was to place a new hive body on a site and shake alternative combs from old stocks in front of the new hive so that the bees are mixed going into the new hive, the combs when shaken free of bees are placed alternatively in the new hive, ensuring a thorough mix of bees, thus intermixing their normal colony odours.

Another method given was to spray both stocks to be united with a strongly scented material like oil of wintergreen, before putting them into their new quarters, this spraying was to give the bees the same odour.

If uniting when bees have gone into cluster during a cold spell, it was suggested that the combs should be placed so that the clusters come into contact with each other.

It was stated that during a heavy flow that some strains of bee could be united without any problems.

I only united stocks using the newspaper method and had no problems whenever I used it, so that is the method I would recommend.

More next time, Tom.

Ed. Once again I would like to send a big thank you to Tom for contributing his regular articles to this newsletter, as he has done for the past 17 years. He finds some fascinating gems among the old magazines and it makes me wonder if there is anything in beekeeping which hasn't been tried before. Mind you, apart from new hive designs and new gadgets such as the One Handed Queen Catcher or the Flow Hive, little has changed in over one hundred years apart from the on-going need to keep our bees healthy and pest free.

Isn't our language wonderful. "One Handed Queen Catcher". Do they mean a gadget that can be used with one hand or someone who catches one-handed queens?

What The Papers Say

Once again, my grateful thanks to all those who send me cuttings from the newspapers.

Manuka Honey. We've all heard it before but the newspapers have now picked up on the fact that New Zealand produces between 2,500 and 3,000 tonnes of Manuka honey each year whilst 6,500 tonnes is sold worldwide by retailers!!! A survey by Rowse Honey estimates that nearly half of all Manuka honey sold in UK might be fake!!

To qualify as Manuka, honey must contain a sufficient quantity of the 'special' ingredient, Methylglyoxal, commonly known as MGO. In tests funded by Rowse, some products sold by well known stores were found to contain low levels of MGO and, in one case, none at all.

Still, some unscrupulous people will always get on the band waggon when money can be extracted from the unsuspecting public.

Help Save the Bees. The Environment Minister, Mr. George Eustice, speaking at a recent Bee Summit organised by Friends of the Earth and the W. I. said protecting our pollinators is a priority for this government. The Government's National Pollinator Strategy, called "Bee's Needs", encourages people to help bee pollination through five steps:

- 1) Grow more nectar- and pollen-rich flowers, shrubs and trees
- 2) Leave patches of land to grow wild
- 3) Cut grass less often
- 4) Avoid disturbing or destroying nesting or hibernating insects
- 5) Think carefully about whether to use pesticides

He went on to say that: "Numbers of honeybee colonies in the UK have slumped from about 250,000 in the 1950s to fewer than 100,000 today and that everyone can do their bit by planting to give a boost to our bees".

It is good to see that our local Council has been planting swathes of pollinator friendly plants along verges and on roundabouts, it helps out bees and brightens the place up. Do have a look at the Bee's Needs video on the website, Google Bee's Needs.

"More About Bees" by Tom Davies

I expect you must all be looking forward to 2016 as 2015 must have been a difficult year for looking after your hives with the weather so changeable.

I was grateful for that lovely spell we had in early October which allowed me to catch up with tidying up the garden, as well as digging up most of it ready for next year, and I was able to collect seed of runner and dwarf beans for drying, plus getting my dahlias up for storing.

To finish up, I have come across some adverts in "Gleanings in Bee Culture" for January 1933 which made my mouth water reading them.

The first – Clover extracted honey, water white, case or ton lots; six hundred dozen fancy comb, write to Morehead Apiaries, Conroy, Ohio.

Another – A carload of amber extracted honey, 10,000 lbs, (white), Hyde Bros, New Canton, Ill.

This one – Tupelo honey – will not granulate, packed in any size – 8 oz bottles to 50 gallon barrels, Anthony Bros. Honey Co., Apalachicola, Florida.

An unusual one this – Wanted – melexitose honey – a type of honey gathered by bees from an exudation on scrub pine or Douglas fir trees which crystallises in the comb within a few days after storage. For further particulars write to – Digestive Ferments Company, 920 Henry Street, Detroit, Michigan. This probably had some healing properties like Manuka honey.

Best wishes for 2016, Tom.