

# Swansea & District Beekeepers Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch

[www.swanseabeekeepers.org.uk](http://www.swanseabeekeepers.org.uk)

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Over the next months you will be hearing more and more about the Bee Conference because we in Swansea and District Beekeepers' Society are hosting it later this year at the King Arthur Hotel, Reynoldston.

Let me put you in the picture. The Swansea & District is a member of the Midland and South Western Counties Convention of Beekeepers (MSWCC), a non-profit making group of nine county beekeeping associations throughout England and Wales who hold an annual conference in different parts of the country every year.

It started in Gloucestershire, sometime in the 1920s, and over the years, the group has held almost ninety conferences, excluding the war years. By holding the conference in different locations, news, best practice and information on beekeeping is spread throughout the UK.

Swansea hosted previous recent conferences in 1985, 1994, 2003 and 2010 and I'm sure that many of you will remember the last ones which we held at the North Gower Hotel.

Our conference this year will have about nine lectures, spread over three days, starting on the afternoon of Friday 14<sup>th</sup> October, and finishing in the afternoon of Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> October.

The lectures will cover a wide range of beekeeping topics from the practical through the theoretical with something for all levels of beekeepers. As well as lectures, there will be an inter-county honey show and a series of hands-on workshops. On the Saturday evening we will hold a Conference Dinner.

It is not unusual to have a small number of visitors from overseas, particularly from Ireland and, this year, one of the speakers will be from the U.S.A.

A small team of us have been working on this for the past year, putting together a programme, finding interesting speakers, sorting out the finance, organising workshops, liaising with the hotel, getting the website up and running, etc.

As the date gets closer, we will be asking for volunteers to help out with various aspects during the conference weekend and will welcome anyone who offers. For now, we are still meeting regularly and working on the topics as they come up. Remember to put these dates in your diary. More next time.

## **Forthcoming Events**

**Informal meetings** are held on **2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **March**

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m. Talk at the Con Club by Emily Carne, an Advanced Nurse Practitioner, Immunodeficiency Centre for Wales, University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff who will speak on 'Bee Venom Allergy'

### **April**

Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> WBKA Spring Convention, Royal Welsh Showground, Llanelwydd, Builth Wells. Open from 08.30 a.m. See page 3.

Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m. Talk at the Con Club to be given by Robert Gray. Robert advises that we look up his web site before attending the talk.

### **May**

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m. Bee Forum ~ "What can we look forward to in May"

### **August**

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> The Gower Show.

### **October**

Weekend of 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> 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.

## **Spring Feeding.**

With the recent unseasonably warm weather, stored honey is likely to be diminishing at a far greater rate than we would normally expect, so keep a watch and feed if necessary. To date, I am feeding with fondant but sometime in April, dependent on the weather warming up and the bees flying regularly, the feed will change to a liquid feed but only if the bees are in need of it

Knowing when to feed is a judgement call but err on the safe side. It is always better to give them too much than too little, so keep a regular check on the hive weight and, if it feels light, feed them.

## **Spring Inspections.**

March and April are vital months in which to set your colonies on a good footing for the year's activities. By now most of us will have cleaned and prepared our equipment in readiness for the season but, if you haven't, there's still time in which to do it. Get everything ready because you never know exactly when it will be needed and experience shows that it is usually when you least expect it!

In the past I've usually carried out my spring inspections in April but, if the weather is really warm, that can come forward into March. As I say, it all depends on the weather and this year, the weather pattern has been strange, to say the least. With the recent warm spell, queens should be laying at

higher than normal rates and we need to keep an eye on the amount of food available, perhaps even feed with pollen patties.

As a rule of thumb, if you can go outdoors in shirtsleeves, it is warm enough to open the brood area. This generally means somewhere above 14° C. Colder temperatures are likely to chill (kill) the brood, so be careful and work quickly. One option is to use a pair of manipulation cloths, which cover the brood area and are rolled back leaving only a small working area open, thus retaining the warmth of the rest of brood area. My experience is that the bees are generally quieter if these are used.

The fundamental check is to see that the hive is queenright. You may not actually see her but will be able to tell that she is there if you see eggs, pearly white larvae and nice regular slabs of sealed worker brood. At this time of year there should be no drone brood in the hive, so if there are domed drone cappings, the colony may have a problem. Also if there are multiple eggs in cells there is the likelihood of a laying worker in the hive.

During the inspection I usually change at least four of the brood frames for new comb, thereby, over a three year period, replacing all of the comb. That way the comb doesn't get too dirty and decrepit. Take out the oldest, but try not to disturb the brood area too much.

If a colony has died out, close it up so that other bees can't rob it. This way, we try to prevent the spread of disease to other colonies. Use a blow torch to sear the inside of the brood chamber and replace all the frames with new ones and new foundation before using it again.

During March and April, activity at the hive entrance can also tell you if everything is OK. Workers should be flying positively and bringing in pollen to feed the brood. This is always a good sign of brood rearing.

The presence of brown stains on the top bars or at a hive entrance usually indicates a problem with Nosema. Also take the opportunity during the inspection to do a varroa mite count.

### **WBKA Spring Convention.**

This year the Spring Convention is being held on Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April in the Old Food Hall at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Showground, Llanelwydd, Builth Wells, opening at 08.30 a.m. The entrance fee is £9.00 at the door but if you pre-book your ticket, the cost goes down to £7.00.

Speakers include Natasha de Vere of the National Botanic Garden of Wales, Clive de Bruyn, the well known beekeeping author and Mike Brown from the National Bee Unit. There will also be a Beekeepers' Question Time.

This is a great place to get any of those beekeeping bits and pieces from the many trade stands. Equipment, books, bee suits, gloves, flat-pack hives, nick-knacks etc. You name it and it will be there. One aspect which our newcomers will see is trade-in vans where people can sell off their surplus beeswax to Thorne or Maisemore for credit against purchase of equipment. In recent years it has been possible to pre-order anything you need, thus avoiding the mad crush for bargains we used to see. There's all day refreshments and free parking too. Don't miss it.

## **When Bees Were Bees** by Tom Davies.

An experience with package bees was the subject of a report sent in to “Gleanings in Bee Culture” magazine for January 1933, by Richard Hansen, of Kenosha, Wisconsin.

On April 28<sup>th</sup> 1932 he received 5 three pound packages of bees from the south which were twenty five per cent overweight when shipped. It was early in the day, which was fairly warm, and they were placed in a dark corner of a cellar, after having given water, where they were allowed to settle.

Late afternoon they were given plenty of sugar syrup and early evening were taken to the apiary for placing in hives, which were 10 frame hives.

Placing six combs of foundation in each hive and inserting the queen in her cage between the combs, he next placed a package alongside the frames, put on a cover board and feeder with more syrup and also reduced the entrance to an inch or so.

The next day, leaving the queen cage alone, he removed the package cages adding 4 more combs of foundation to each hive. On removing the queen cages on 1<sup>st</sup> May he found them all empty and inspected again on 4<sup>th</sup> May. All the queens were found to be laying, sugar syrup was given continually.

With plenty of forage around as well, by 18<sup>th</sup> June, two brood chambers were almost full of brood, excluders were put on, room for storing honey was added as required. His take of honey was 1,300 lb extracted. He left a shallow super on each hive completely full and each hive had drawn out 60 frames of foundation ready for his next season.

More next time, Tom.

*Ed: That's an average of 260 lb per hive. Given strong colonies, the right weather and the availability of good forage, it's amazing what honeybees can do. I wonder if today's beekeepers in that part of Wisconsin are getting such bumper harvests as they were in 1933.*

## **At the AGM, 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2016**

Once again we were in the upstairs room of the Con Club at Gowerton with sandwiches, drinks and snacks provided after the formalities. It was good to see so many people attending the meeting. Nicola Oulton, our Chairman, had been set a challenge to hold the time under 40 minutes and she did, with time to spare, leaving plenty of time over for networking and chatting.

The minutes of the AGM were circulated by email on 13<sup>th</sup> Feb. so I won't go into much detail here except to mention a few things for those of our members who are not computerised.

The Society funds are in good health, the updated Constitution was adopted with some minor cosmetic changes and the deletion of the word 'hobby', as there was no clear definition of what a hobby beekeeper is. The Officers were all re-elected, and Mr. Tom Davies was made a Life Member instead of an Honorary Member. Membership fees for the year 2017 were discussed and will be held at today's level.

The Bee Tent had 685 visitors pass through it in 2015 and raised £1,200 from donations. Nicola congratulated the 12 people who passed the WBKA Basic Assessment and thanked Steve for his work in training them.

The Gower Show was a great success again and, thanks to Gill's efforts, was recognised as a 'Blue Ribbon' event. The Apiary has gone from strength to strength with 13 colonies going into winter and two new people joining the Apiary Management team.

Lastly, Nicola thanked Chris Bown, who is stepping down from the Committee, for the work he has done over the past years.

**“More About Bees”** by Tom Davies

Hope your bees have come through the winter in fair shape, they must have had a rough time with very few periods of cold weather for them to cluster properly and by now their stores must be well down.

I have not been able to get out and do some work in the garden, but have managed to make a start in the greenhouse sowing some seeds, and my potatoes appear to be shooting and should be ready to plant in the next few weeks. I've also got some tomato seeds on the windowsill just coming through the soil.

In the next few days I will get my dahlia tubers out of store and get them started for the new season. They are very reliable in giving a good display, as well as attracting bees of all kinds, so are well worth taking up and storing away for the next season.

In the winter edition of the Welsh Beekeeper, No. 191, there was an interesting article on European foulbrood, compiled by Frank Gellatly, Dr. Giles Budge and Mr. Ben Jones. On one occasion I went to the hives in my garden very early in the morning, I had been working a night shift, and decided to have a quick look to see if the bees were out and about.

In front of one hive were some grubs on the grass, I went to bed and later I examined that hive thoroughly and nothing appeared to be wrong. I believe that I had caught an infection of EFB in its early stages and that I prevented a larger outbreak by that very early look around the hives. I made a point of an early inspection from then on every time I was on night shift, but never had any more problems. Tom.

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