

**Swansea & District Beekeepers
Newsletter
Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch**

**A Happy New Year
To You All**

Let's hope that 2019 is as good a beekeeping year
as 2018 was.

Last Year's Honey Crop

In talking with Society members, it seems that most have had their best honey crop for several years. As a beginner, I was told by old timers that there is a direct correlation between the average temperature and honey yields, the higher the average temperature, the higher the honey yield, and in 2018 we had a very high average temperature.

Apparently this is not true for all locations, for instance, in the Midlands and in Cornwall, I have heard that honey crops have been somewhat reduced, due to the dry summer.

Anyway, enjoy your honey and let's hope for another good year in 2019. **We beekeepers are always optimistic about the coming season!**

Issue No. 125 January ~ February 2019

Editor: D. Salkilld

“More About Bees” by Tom Davies

The third week of November, and winter closing in. The early frosts have killed off my dahlias, and I've got them all dug up and stored away for next season.

With all that sunshine we had this season, the dahlias, along with French marigolds, and backed up a little later with Michaelmas daisies, gave a very good display and attracted not only bees, but butterflies in fairly good numbers.

As far as my bees were concerned, I found winter-time ideal for getting equipment cleaned and / or repaired, making up frames and the like. Working shifts actually helped, although there were times when I would be required to work overtime. That could make things a bit difficult.

In the South Wales Evening Post for Thursday, 29th November, a snippet caught my attention, as it was about mead. The charity English Heritage, which cares for more than 400 buildings, is selling a bottle of mead every ten minutes.

Also, the charity has seen its mead sales increase by an average of 10% over the last three years, this is nice to know. I wouldn't like to see mead disappear from the craft of beekeeping.

More next time, Tom

Topical Tips

The most obvious tip at this time of year is to check varroa mite levels in your colonies by counting dead varroa mite drop and, if necessary, to treat against the mite. Hopefully you will have seen the email of 9th December, which details current advice from the Veterinary Medicines Directive, and have done your treatments already.

For myself, I use oxalic crystals in a vaporiser. At the recent WBKA 75th Anniversary Weekend, I talked with beekeepers about some of the practical issues and found that some had successfully treated with a vaporiser through the varroa screen base of their hives.

The Bee Experience, 2018 by Martin Davies

Well it's been a busy year for the Bee Tent. We attended 6 events in 2018 and these included our regular trips to Builth Wells, Gower and the Vale of Glamorgan show as well as the new venues of Go Wild, in Tredegar, Pontarddlais Carnival and the Heart of the Valley Show in Pontardawe.

In total we had 815 visitors through the tent, including 493 children. The Vale Show was the most popular, with 163 people experiencing bees up close and personal. However, the Heart of the Valley Show was a very close second with 146, not a bad return for our first visit to this show. The organisers have been asking if we could attend for a few years but as it is in September the timing/weather hasn't normally allowed us to do so, this year the weather and timing of the event fell just right, and we had a very enjoyable day at a lovely village event.

The Builth weekend suffered a significantly lower attendance than previous years, probably since there was the FA Cup Final and a Royal Wedding on the same weekend, and possibly also that the weather was very pleasant, meaning people decided to head for the beaches instead of the hills.

It was at the Vale Show that we had our biggest surprise of the year as we won the Best Trade Stand in show and Julian had the honours of accepting the trophy on behalf of the Society along with a large rosette that we displayed with great pride on the day.

I must give special thanks to the 43 members of the Society that helped at these events throughout the year. We wouldn't be able to run the tent without your help and the valuable time you give up to assist. It was also nice to see so many new faces amongst the team, especially those who did the beginners class from last year and the year before. Hopefully, you all found it an enjoyable and rewarding experience and I look forward to seeing you help out in 2019.

Very Many Thanks

Martin Davies, Bee Tent Lead.

Forthcoming Events

January 2019

Tuesday 8th Talk "Preparing for Spring" by Ade Bowen at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00p.m.

February

Tuesday 12th The Society's A.G.M. at the New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00p.m. followed by a talk about a national update on the Asian Hornet (To be confirmed) and a buffet.

Wednesday 20th 7.00p.m. - 9.00p.m. Beginners Classes start at Pontarddlais Comprehensive School, SA4 8PD. (for 10 weeks)

March

Tuesday 12th Talk "The Bumbles of Honeywood". Sue Poole talking about her books. The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00p.m.

Saturday 30th WBKA Spring Convention, held at the RWAS Showground, Builth Wells. This is an opportunity to get goods and equipment at sale prices, and to hear some good lectures too.

April

Tuesday 9th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00p.m.

“The Evolution of a Beekeeper”, by Peter Tomkins, a beekeeper with 60 years experience in practical beekeeping but also in research.

May

Tuesday 14th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00p.m. “History of the Penclawdd Cockle Basket” by Claire Willow. This talk is about the history of, and how to make, one of these baskets, for which the techniques are related to skep making.

June

Tuesday 11th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00p.m. “Preparation for the Gower Show”

July

Tuesday 9th To be advised.

Tuesday 30th Tuesday before the Gower Show. Gathering at the New Lodge to hand in entry forms and for stewards to get their showground passes.

August

Sunday 4th The Gower Show, held at Penrice Castle Grounds, Gower.

September

Tuesday 10th A talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00p.m. by Lucy Witters about new research conducted on pollination at the National Botanic Garden of Wales. Lucy will also give advice about how to create a wildflower area and how perennial wildflower seeds can be sown.

October

Tuesday 8th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00p.m. by Stephen Davies, about the importance of hygiene in beekeeping.

November

Tuesday 12th at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00p.m. the Society Honey Show.

December

The Society Christmas Dinner, date to be advised later.

Beekeeping Apprenticeships

An article in the Daily Telegraph of 1st December reported that the London grocery store, Fortnum and Mason, is launching a beekeeping apprenticeship scheme as it increases the number of colonies it has in the London area.

As well as having hives on the roof of its London store, it also has them at other locations including St. Pancras Station. The need of an apprentice has been made possible by the growth in sales of its quality British goods, including honey.

Mead

Have you thought about making some mead with last year’s honey crop. If you make it in the next couple of months it will mature nicely in time to be exhibited at the Gower Show in August, and, taken chilled, you will have a very nice drink for those hot, sultry summer days.

Basically there are two types of mead, sweet and dry. My preference is for dry mead as I find sweet mead just too cloyingly sweet, however, everyone has their own preferences. In making them, the

only real difference, apart from the amount of honey used, is that light honey is normally used for dry mead and medium, dark or heather honey is used for sweet mead.

As all crafts use their own vocabulary, we need to understand a few terms.

Must: The mixture of water and honey, neither of which will ferment on its own, but when mixed, the diluted sugars are attractive to yeasts.

Yeast: There are a wide variety of yeasts available. Most people use dried yeast, available from wine-making suppliers.

Nutrients: These feed the yeast and can be bought from wine-making suppliers.

Tannin: A substance which occurs in tea and in the skin and pips of fruit and can be obtained from wine-making suppliers as a powder.

Acid: Citric acid in the form of tablets or lemon juice is generally used.

The equipment is relatively simple. A large container where the must is prepared, demi johns for fermenting, an air-lock, a funnel used when putting the must into the demi johns and a syphon to transfer the mead.

Recipes for mead are available in many books but I am using the one given in a WBKA booklet, "Drinks From Honey", written by our own Tom Davies in 1992 in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the WBKA. Back then, Tom was renowned for his wine making and one year a bottle of his mead took Best In Show at the Welsh National Honey Show, a remarkable feat when up against the honeys, waxes and other exhibits.

We'll start with his Dry Mead, though he also wrote recipes for Sweet Mead, and variations of mead including Methelin, Pymment, Cyser, Melomel and Botchard.

Dry Mead. To make 1 gallon (4.5 litres)
3 ½ lb. (1.6kg) as light a honey as possible
1 dessertspoon citric acid
1 teaspoon yeast nutrient
1 teaspoon grape tannin
Maury or general purpose yeast

Bring the honey to the boil in 3 pints (1.7 litres) of water. Transfer to your fermentation bin when cooled off a bit, making up to a gallon (4.5 litres) with cold water, then add the rest of the ingredients and ferment for 4 days stirring once a day (twice if you have the time).

It is well to mention that the ideal temperature for fermenting is around 70^o F (21^o C). To go below that is not going to harm the mead as it only makes the yeast cells dormant but to go above 75^o F (24^o C) would cause the yeast cells to 'burn out', as it were, and give the mead a harsh taste.

Next, strain the must into a demi-john fitted with an air-lock (only fill to about 7/8 full). When fermentation is coming to an end and the mead is beginning to clear, it can be syphoned off the sediment into a clean demi-john, topping up with cool, boiled water, and the air-lock refitted.

Leave for about two months, after which time it can again be syphoned off the sediment into a clean demi-john, topping up as before, but this time, before refitting the air-lock, add a crushed Campden tablet to protect the mead against spoilage.

A cooler place is now required to store the mead for about 3 or 4 months, when it can be sampled. You can leave it longer if you wish, but keep an eye on the air-lock in case it should dry out.

Tom's recipe for sweet mead is slightly more complicated and will be published in the next newsletter. His advice in the booklet is to get a good book on wine making as the same general principles are used in both and it will help you along the path to successful brewing. He also adds the warning that it is illegal to sell your home-made meads.

Ed: so you'll have to drink them all yourself!!

One thing not mentioned in the information gleaned for the above, and one that cannot be stressed enough, is the need for cleanliness of **all** the equipment used. So before you start, and before using any equipment during the making of your mead, remember to STERILISE.

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“When Bees Were Bees” by Tom Davies

In “Gleanings in Bee Culture” for July 1930, the writer of a letter to the magazine, a Mr. A. C. Gilbert, of East Avon, New York, stated that whenever a colony overloaded the brood chamber with honey while ignoring the supers, he would change that queen.

In his opinion a good young queen, well mated, would keep on laying, thus denying room in the brood chamber for honey storage, and any colony slow to use the supers would be livened up with a new queen.

In the same magazine was this snippet:

The Honeybees Creed ~ I Do Believe ~

That you can find some sweet in any flower,
That there is joy in every working hour,
That she who claims the right to be alive,
Must show some service rendered to her hive,
That charity, if rightly understood,
Is justice, stern to guard the public good,
That every bee, however small or mean,
Must give her life, if needs be, for the queen,
That wings that soar, the tiny hearts that roam,
Shall find content in their own honeycomb.

Written by Clara E. Putnam, of Harmonsburg, Pa.

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year, Tom.

Reminder.

**If you haven't renewed your membership yet,
now is the time to do it.**

The deadline for articles / items for the next issue is **16th February.**