

Swansea & District Beekeepers Newsletter Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch

Wallace's giant bee (*Megachile pluto*)



This enormous bee, *Megachile pluto*, is the largest known living bee species. The species was originally collected by Alfred Russel Wallace in Indonesia in 1858, and given the common name "Wallace's giant bee". It was believed to be extinct until several specimens were discovered again in 1981; there were again no further sightings until this year when a single live female was found and photographed.

Wallace, who co-developed the theory of evolution with Charles Darwin, described the bee as, "a large black wasp-like insect, with immense jaws like a stag-beetle". It has an estimated wingspan of 6 cm (2½ inches). The female makes her nest in termite mounds, using her large jaws to collect sticky tree resin to line the nest and protect it from invading termites.

See the BBC science website <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-47311186> for more details.

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Editor: D. Salkilld

“More About Bees” by Tom Davies

With all the rain we've had since the snow cleared, everything in the garden is very wet, so all I've done lately is cleaning the greenhouse, and filled up the pots ready for tomatoes.

Got some dahlias out to check up on them, and they seem fine, so shortly I will tray them up to start them off again for an earlier start this year.

Our Bee Tent winning the Best Trade Stand in show at the Vale of Glamorgan Show was good news, I think that the Bee Tent has done far more for the craft than anything else that has ever been available, to bring the bees nearer to the public, bringing in new members and more importantly an influence on the youngsters that go in and handle combs of bees. They are not likely to ever forget the experience.

I hope that the making of dry mead in the last issue will tempt some of you in at least having a try at its making. I made a lot of meads and wines years ago, best at dry types, my favourite dry red made from a mix of blackcurrant and elderberry, and my dry mead with a mix of clover with a little heather honey.

We used to have 4 wine classes in the Gower Show, and when they were removed from the schedule, the entries for meads seemed to reduce, perhaps the winemakers are few and getting old these days, and don't bother so much as they used to.

More next time, Tom.

Annoying Little Creatures

Have you ever noticed that wax moth larvae seem to get into the most unusual places? We know that they can carve out a snug little 'cwtch' in wooden hives, in which to anchor their cocoons. I've also seen neat holes 'bored' by greater wax moth larvae in frames and in wooden hives.

Recently though, I was sent a photograph of a greater wax moth larvae emerging through the side of a modern poly nucleus! It's just one more thing to be aware of, particularly when sterilising poly hives. D. S.

Notes from the A.G.M.

Unfortunately, our outgoing chairman, David O'Carroll, was unable to be with us on the night and the vice chairman, Paul Lyons, was ill with flu, so the incoming vice chairman, Nicola Oulton presided for the evening. Our thanks to David O'Carroll for doing a splendid job during his time as Chairman.

Following the formal part of the meeting, we had a break for buffet refreshments, followed by a talk on the Asian Hornet, given by Frank Gellatly, who updated us with the latest information, outlining the situation to date and reinforcing the message to be vigilant and always on our guard. Although the Asian Hornet hasn't been seen in Wales yet, we have to be aware that it could turn up at any time.

We should also express our thanks to the outgoing secretary, Julian Caruana, who, with Marilyn, is in the process of moving to the West Midlands to be closer to his daughter and grandchildren. Until someone is appointed as Secretary, members of the Committee will undertake the Secretary's duties.

Our thanks go to Gerti and the New Lodge Social Club for the wonderful buffet supper they provided.

The Society's Officers and officials are as follows:

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|----------------------|--------------------|
| Chairman | Paul Lyons |
| Vice Chairman | Nicola Oulton |
| Secretary | <i>Post vacant</i> |
| Treasurer | John Gale |
| Membership Secretary | Sue Lawrence |
| Education Officer | Nicola Oulton |
| Events Secretary | Gerti Axtmann |
| Apiary Manager | Mike Grinter |
| Gower Show Secretary | Gill Lyons |
| Bee Tent Manager | Martin Davies |
| Librarian | Paul Lyons |
| Newsletter Editor | David Salkilld |

Forthcoming Events

March

Tuesday 12th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. (for 7.30p.m.) "The Bumbles of Honeywood". Sue Poole talking about her books.

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

April

Tuesday 9th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. (for 7.30p.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, 7.00 p.m. (for 7.30p.m.) "History of the Penclawdd Cockle Basket" by Claire Willow. This talk is about the history of, and how to make, cockle baskets, the techniques for which are related to skep making.

June

Tuesday 11th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. (for 7.30p.m.) "Preparation for Honey Shows"

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, 7.00 p.m. (for 7.30p.m.) To be given by Lucy Winters 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.

And now, Something Tasty to make for the Gower Show!!

In the 2019 Gower Show schedule, a couple of new classes have been added. These additions include Honey Snickerdoodle Biscuits. By printing the recipe early, we are hoping you will have a go at baking them and getting used to the recipe before the show. Do have a go at them, they're really nice.

HONEY SNICKERDOODLE BISCUITS

7oz self raising flour
5oz butter
3oz caster sugar
2 large tablespoons honey
1 egg yolk
Plus 1.5 oz caster sugar for rolling dough balls in

Method

Cream sugar and butter. Mix in the honey and egg yolk and sift in the flour mixing well. Form the dough into walnut size balls and roll in caster sugar place on a baking sheet covered with silicone or greaseproof paper and flatten with a fork. Cook in a medium oven, gas 4, 180°C/350°F for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown. The recipe makes 20 biscuits.

Instructions on the Show Schedule go on to say: Please enter your best 7 arranged on a paper plate provided by the Show Secretary or Chief Steward.

New Zealand Manuka Honey

Rod and Maxine Sewter have just returned from a trip to New Zealand and sent me a photo of 18+ factor Manuka Honey in a shop in Dunedin, showing 500g jars on sale for NZ \$269.90. At the current exchange rate of one NZ dollar equalling 51p, a pound of honey would cost about £125. I think we should all plant Manuka bushes in our gardens!! My thanks to Rod for the photo and information.

D. S.

Sweet Mead

I put Tom's dry mead recipe in the last newsletter and to complete the series, I am following it with his sweet mead recipe. This recipe is taken from a booklet Tom wrote, published by the Welsh Beekeepers Association in 1992, to celebrate their 50th anniversary:

To make 1 gallon (4.5 Litres)

3 lb. (1.4 kg) medium honey
1½ dessertspoons citric acid
2 teaspoons yeast nutrient
1½ teaspoons grape tannin
Maury or general purpose yeast
5 or 6 lb. (2.3 to 2.7 kg) extra honey, if possible including 1 lb. (0.5 kg) heather honey

Bring the 3 lb. of medium honey to the boil in 3 pints (1.7 litres) of water, add 2 pints (1.1 litres) of cold water, adding the rest of the ingredients when cool enough. If available, a hydrometer would be useful here to test the specific gravity after 3 days fermenting. We are looking for a figure of between 1005 and 1010. If the figure is higher than 1010, then put back in the bin to ferment for another day. If the figure is right, add another ½ lb. (0.2 kg) of honey, dissolved in about 1 pint (0.7 litres) of the must, return it to the fermenting bin and ferment for another 2

days. Repeat the procedure with more honey (the extra jars of honey can be either heated up in a saucepan of water or in a microwave), about 5 lb. (2.3 kg) is the usual need, but it could possibly take more, the final sweetening will be according to your taste.

Tom continues, I like the fermentation in the bin to be no more than 7 days before straining into a demi-john, if necessary I will taste the mead while in the demi-john, taking some of the must out to add more honey, if required, keeping any left over must in a bottle for topping up.

When you are satisfied that fermentation is coming to an end and it is sweet enough for your taste, proceed as before (*see the last newsletter for this*). The heather honey will give it that “something special” taste.

Ed: Again, we stress the need for cleanliness, before you start making your mead, remember to sterilise all your equipment.

Microwaving Honey

Until recently, if I needed to put a jar of honey into the microwave oven, I took the lid off because we are told not to put metallic items in. As usual, we tend to forget until something untoward happens, such as gold-rimmed plates sparking, which, in my case, reinforced the basic theme of never putting metal items in.

However, I was told recently that it was OK to microwave honey jars with their lids on as this concentrated the microwaves to the centre of the jar. Now, I don't know if the science of that statement is true, but I plucked up courage and tried it with some cooking honey, and it worked! No sparking and the honey melted nicely.

So if you need to melt some extra honey for Tom's Sweet Mead recipe, it's OK to use the microwave without removing the lid, but do remember to loosen it.

D. S.

A Surprise Meeting

On a recent visit to London, Jean & I called in to Fortnum & Mason's store in Piccadilly to have a look at their honeys; we never fail to be amazed at the varieties (and the price).

While we were looking at the honeys, we saw a man, who looked vaguely familiar. He was there with two companions and, because of what he was saying and the way he was handling the jars of honey, it was obvious that he was a beekeeper. So I got into conversation and he turned out to be Steve Benbow, of the London Honey Co., who is the Store's beekeeper and manages the hives they have on their roof.

Some of our longer-term members may also remember Steve because in September 2010 he came to Swansea and gave a lecture at our MSWCC Conference, entitled “Beekeeping in an Urban Environment”. It was a fascinating talk about city rooftop beekeeping, and it was good to meet up with him again in London. We just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

D. S.

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“When Bees Were Bees” by Tom Davies

In “Gleanings in Bee Culture” for June 1930, I found an interesting section in a report sent into the magazine, about queen rearing in Southern California, sent in by a Mr. L. L. Andrews, of Corona, California.

Mr. Andrews called in on a prominent queen breeder with a view to obtaining queens to improve his stocks, but was told that orders for queens were already booked for some time ahead.

On asking about queen cells, Mr. Andrews was told that he could have as many of those as he wanted, so some two hundred were ordered. These would be ready in ten days or so, giving Mr. Andrews time to prepare nuclei to receive them.

One or two days before arrival of the cells, the nuclei were made up, one frame of brood in a ten frame hive, plenty of bees, and filled with drawn combs.

The cells were brought some thirty-five miles to the nuclei, some packed in cotton, some on nuclei cell bars. The cells simply pressed onto the brood bar in each nucleus, then, after closing up, removed to a location some six miles away for emerging queens to mate.

Mr. Andrews claimed that this proved to be a good and profitable way to increase stocks, and if done by about mid April, each of these nuclei should produce a super of honey in a good season.

More next time, Tom

Ed: That's about 2½ tons of honey!!

The next newsletter is due out on 1st May. Please let me have your articles / items by **20th April.**