

# Swansea & District Beekeepers

## Newsletter

### Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch

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Editor: D. Salkilld



#### The Microscopy Class

On Saturday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, Stephen Davies ran a microscopy session at Pontarddulais Comprehensive School, attended by ten members of the Society.

During the course of the day, they made pollen slides using pollen previously collected from local flowers. They were able to study bees under the compound microscopes and were taught how to embed bees in wax for dissection. Later they were able to dissect the abdomen, thorax, and the head.

The day was greatly enjoyed and positive comments were received from those who attended. Stephen tells me that further microscopy sessions can be arranged on request.

## **“More About Bees” by Tom Davies**

Easter weekend and a glorious spell of weather, lots of forage around for the bees, and with a bit of luck, hives should be building up well towards the new season.

Here I've been nursing along some of my dahlias in the greenhouse, and they have come on so well that I will be planting them out shortly, and if frost threatens, I will cover them at night with large pots. By the look of them, I should get some early flowers.

Also, I have dwarf French marigolds just about to the flowering stage, and I will treat them in the same way. I have quite a lot more dahlias in two cold frames. They are a lot slower than the ones from the greenhouse but should catch up in time.

Plenty of queen bumblebees are flying at the moment and I have seen quite a lot of queen wasps about, more than normal I would say, but no honeybees yet. Perhaps as the season goes on, I will see some.

The winter seemed to drag on and on, and the chilly nights we've had must have put a strain on stores, so I hope that your bees have come through alright. To lose bees these days can be quite a costly business, as well as being disheartening.

More next time, Tom.

## **Observation Hives**

At the Gower Show there will be several observation hives in competition for first prize. The concept is not new, people have been trying to see the workings of bees for many centuries. The first recorded observation hives with a single comb and glass sides were constructed somewhere around 1810. One such was described by a M. Feburier, in France.

Rev. William Dunbar of Scotland described and illustrated a similar hive in 1820. Then Rev. L. L. Langstroth of U. S. A. produced a “Parlor-Observing” hive in 1857 which held a comb in a frame, much as we know them today.

And here we are; some 160 years later we are still observing bees with these hives!

## **It's Swarm Time Again.**

Several early swarms have already been reported and some of our members have been out to collect them. From now till the end of June (or even later) be aware that your colonies might decide to swarm so keep a close watch on them and be prepared to make an artificial swarm if it is needed.

The general advice is to inspect them at weekly intervals and, if queen cells are found, then make an artificial swarm. There are several variations on the theme but all work on the basis of moving the old queen and flying bees to a new site, thus imitating a natural swarm, whilst leaving the brood, queen cells, nurse bees and most of the food behind on the original site. The debate then is whether to leave one or two queen cells.

It's best to prepare all necessary equipment ahead of time and keep it handy. This will include a spare floor, brood chamber with drawn comb if available (or with foundation as a second choice), excluder, crown board and roof, etc. Then, when they are needed, you don't have to scramble around at the last minute looking for them.

By now, I hope you've found and marked your queens. It is so much easier to do it in early spring with small colonies, but if you haven't, there is still time. It reminds me of the time when one of the Bee Inspectors was inspecting my hives and a queen needed marking. Together, we had to go through that hive three times before we found her.

Because they are all the same colour, finding a single queen can be very difficult, but persistence and help from a friend makes it easier. A second pair of eyes can make all the difference when looking at a frame of brood. When the time comes to artificially swarm a colony, having a marked queen makes the manipulations much, much easier.

If you're are still having difficulty finding the queen, one way to help is to reduce the search area by splitting the brood. This is done by moving half of the frames with brood into a separate brood chamber above a queen excluder. The queen will continue to lay in her half so on inspection four days later you will know which half she is in by the presence of newly laid eggs. Normally we expect to see the queen on the brood, but don't be surprised if she is somewhere else. Once you have caught and marked her, replace her in the original brood chamber. An alternative at this stage is to leave the second chamber on the hive to double-brood the colony.

D. S.

## **Forthcoming Events**

The Society's Events Secretary, **Gerti Axtmann**, has asked me to add a note for beginners to say that the talks and social meetings are held, 7 for 7.30 p.m. at The New Lodge Social Club, Alexandra Road, Gorseinon, SA4 4PR.

### **May**

- Thursday 9<sup>th</sup>** East Carms BKA. Specialist talk and social evening. Derek Mitchell talks about bees and how they use/manage energy. Cottage Inn, Pentrefelin Llandeilo SA19 6SD
- Saturday 11<sup>th</sup>** Teifiside Bee & Equipment Auction. Coed-y-Bryn Village Hall, SA44 5LQ.
- Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup>** Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. "History of the Penclawdd Cockle Basket" by Claire Rivera. This talk is about the history of, and how to make cockle baskets, whose techniques are closely related to skep making.
- Saturday 18<sup>th</sup>  
& Sunday 19<sup>th</sup>** RWAS Smallholding & Countryside Festival. Bee Tent Outing.  
(set-up Friday 17<sup>th</sup>)

### **June**

- Saturday 8<sup>th</sup>  
& Sunday 9<sup>th</sup>** Neath Vintage Steam Rally. (to be confirmed) Bee Tent Outing.
- Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup>** Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. "Preparation for the Gower Show" by Emyr Jenkins.
- Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup>** Pontarddulais Carnival (to be confirmed) Bee Tent Outing.
- Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup>  
& Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup>** A comprehensive Bee Health Event at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, run in collaboration with The National Bee Unit Wales, open 10.00 a.m. to 18.00 p.m. on both days

## July

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup>** Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m.  
“The Society’s Apiary in Llys Nini” by Mike Grinter.

**Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup>** 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 4<sup>th</sup>** The Gower Show, held at Penrice Castle Grounds, Gower. **Bee Tent Outing.** Note that your help will be welcome in setting up the marquee on the previous Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> and Saturday morning 3<sup>rd</sup>. Judging is on the Saturday afternoon.  
The Gower Honey Show is a “**Blue Ribbon**” honey show. The Blue Ribbon is designated as the premier award at honey shows round the country and can only be awarded by a qualified National Honey Show Judge.

**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup>** Vale of Glamorgan Show, **Bee Tent Outing.**

## September

**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup>** Heart of the Valley Show, Pontardawe, **Bee Tent Outing.**

**Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup>** Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. by Lucy Winters about new research on Pollinators conducted at the National Botanic Garden of Wales and giving advice on creating a wildflower area including perennials.

## October

**Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup>** Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m.  
“Hygiene” by Stephen Davies

## November

**Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup>** The Society Honey Show at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m.

## December

**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup>** The Society Christmas Dinner, Venue to be advised later.

## Bees and the Fire at Notre-Dame Cathedral

Good news! The bees in hives on Notre-Dame Cathedral survived the devastating fire, which occurred on 15<sup>th</sup> April.

Nicolas Geant, the French beekeeper, kept his hives on the roof of the Sacristy, some 100 ft. below the main roof, and though they were affected by smoke, they were not engulfed by the flames. He was able to report that “the three beehives are still in place and seem to be intact”.



### The Survivors

Notre-Dame Cathedral is not the only building in Paris to play host to resident honeybees. Urban beekeeping is a popular past time there, and hives can also be found on the roofs of the Opera Garnier, the Musée D’Orsay and in the Luxembourg Gardens. Some locations sell their honey in gift shops but Notre-Dame honey is given to the poor.

### Other News

There hasn’t been much relating to bees in newspapers lately, just an article in the [Daily Mail](#) on 20<sup>th</sup> March, concerning a survey by the National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS), which monitors the habitat of wildflowers.

Their concern about the spread of Himalayan Balsam, a nitrogen-loving plant, which thrives in areas of high pollution.

First introduced to the U.K. in 1839 Himalayan Balsam has the ability to ‘throw’ its seeds up to 6 metres away. It forms dense thickets and shades out other vegetation and, according to the article, was more frequently recorded in woodlands than native plants such as wild garlic, woodruff and bugle.

Now I must admit to being torn because it does give a lovely honey but, on balance, I feel that I have to support those eradicating this invasive plant.

The other article which caught my eye was written by Kari-Astri Davies in the April edition of [Landscape Magazine](#), where she mentioned the work of Dr. Natasha De Vere and her team at the National Botanic Garden of Wales. Some of you may remember Natasha speaking at the MSWCC Conference our Society held in 2016, where her subject was “Plants for Honeybees”. Having completed the DNA barcoding of the native flora of Wales, (a world’s first) she was able to sample honeys at the botanic gardens and tell which plants the bees had been foraging on.

This latest mention of Natasha’s work notes that in the spring, honeybees choose predominately native woodland and hedgerow plants. Of the approximately 80 plant families available in the Botanic Garden grounds during April, honeybees visited only 23%, including such favourites as salix, prunus, malus, gorse, ash, hellebores, caltha, dandelions. Other plants were visited to a much lesser degree. D. S.

### **Basic Assessment Presentation.**

At our AGM meeting in February, **Kush Buhda** and **David O’Carroll** were presented with their **WBKA Basic Assessment Certificates** by Nicola Oulton. **Ciaran O’ Brian** also passed the assessment but was unable to be at the meeting.

I must apologise for being a little late with this article but I hope you will forgive me.

D. S.

#### **Contact Numbers**

**Chairman: Paul Lyons**

**sd\_bks@btinternet.com**

**Secretary: Contact**

**sdbks.secretary@gmail.com**

**Treasurer: John Gale**

**07855 451 781**

## **“When Bees Were Bees”** by Tom Davies

Mr. Wesley Foster, of Boulder, Colorado, U.S. wrote in to “Gleanings in Bee Culture”, for October 1932, urging beekeepers to avoid importing the Caucasian bee into areas where the Italian strain of bee was prevalent.

He stated that while pure Caucasians have their good sides in gathering nectar and pollen in not-too-good weather, should they cross mate with Italian bees, the results are very bad.

He went on to say that Caucasians gathered too much propolis, making inspections much harder, also more difficult to find the queens, any cross-breds would boil up, ignore smoke, and burrow into one’s clothing to sting.

Isolated mountain valleys were the best places to keep Caucasians, Mr. Foster recommended, as he was aware of a good many instances where the Caucasian had been taken into an Italian area and the results were always bad.

I had a problem like that. I started off with an Italian colony that would boil up as soon as the hive was touched, and had a lot of stings until I found the queen and destroyed her. They bred a new queen and peace was restored.

Till next time, Tom.

The next newsletter is due out on 1<sup>st</sup> July. Please let me have your articles / items by **20<sup>th</sup> June.**