

Swansea & District Beekeepers Newsletter Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch

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Editor: D. Salkilld

The Llanedi Job! By Martin Davies.

So, it started innocuously enough, an email through the Society website contact page that someone had bees under their floorboards, the property in question being the Old Rectory in Llanedi. The message was sent out to members to see if anyone was interested and after one of our members contacted the house owner to discuss the situation, he decided that it was too big a job and passed the owner back on to the society, which is where I became involved.

Now the property is only a short drive from where we live, so I contacted the owners and agreed to visit, more out of courtesy than anything, as I had not tackled anything like this in the past, and didn't really intend to remove them this time, thinking that it would be a case of referring them to a pest controller. However it just so happens that the owner is a surgeon in Moriston hospital, where a good friend of mine works as a theatre nurse,



and this happened to be one of the surgeons he works with, so with a mutual friend I felt a small amount of obligation to try and help with his problem.

The house, being quite old, is stone built and impressive, with lots of annexes and wings and it was in a corridor running between two of the wings that the bees had decided to make their home.

In the outer wall was a small, lead shielded vent, leading to the joist space above the kitchen, and this is where the bees had gained access.

The bees had been at the property for a few years, 4-5 was the owner's estimate, so were quite a large and apparently healthy colony.

During the first visit, in May, they were bringing in large amounts of pollen with a lot of activity. Although the owner had not experienced any problems with the bees up to that point, he could now clearly hear them through the carpet/floorboards when walking down the corridor so decided it was time to do something about them before they became a much bigger problem.

Discussions took place both outside and inside and the services of a carpenter were to be engaged to remove the carpet/floorboards and gain access to the hive. The plan was to tape up door-frames and "seal" the corridor with sheets to prevent the bees accessing other parts of the house.

Due to family exams etc. the removal was delayed by a few weeks and a planned date in July was agreed. That gave me time to figure out how to remove the bees without causing them too much harm and without ruining the ceiling beneath with the potential honey-pot that must have accumulated. A plan was duly hatched....

Now, a few of our members have removed bees from roof spaces and a couple also have bee “vacuums”, special pieces of equipment that they have designed to suck out bees from awkward locations using a separate box and vacuum cleaner. There are also several articles/videos available online to copy equipment from. So, a bee vacuum was designed and built that would hopefully help remove the awkward bees and capture the flying bees that would be trapped in the corridor. A trip to the local vacuum repair shop provided the necessary parts that could be adapted to work, much to the bemusement of the shop owner, who must have thought I was a little lacking in the grey matter to attempt such a feat.

A standard National brood box was adapted by securing a solid floor, using sealant to prevent air leakage. A solid roof was made that then had two holes cut into opposite corners, one for vacuum entry, the other for the actual vacuum hose to be attached. The roof was located and attached to the box using 4 over-centre catches and clips added to secure the vacuum hose when not in use.

A trial was conducted to test the vacuum strength and deemed to be enough to suck up the bees but not enough to cause them harm, hopefully!

Now a job like this is not a one-person operation, so the assistance of a good friend and new member of the society, Mandy, was welcome. She also doubled as photographer and moral support to the owner, the carpenter and myself.

“E” Day was Friday 5th and we arrived early to begin the extraction. Both the owner and the carpenter were provided with suits and gloves, luckily they were roughly the same size as me, so had my older ones, equipment positioned in the corridor, that had already been sealed by the owner, and then we began.

The carpet was removed and the centre floorboard prized up to reveal whatever chaos was underneath. Surprisingly, considering the bees had been prevented from flying outside since the previous night, there were few flying bees emerging from the exposed comb.

Removal of the remaining boards revealed a nest that almost covered the entire width of the corridor and extended to just over 3 joists, centred on the external vent. Now the fun began!



With the use of a highly specialised tool, aka breadknife, the



exposed comb was cut away from the joists. The initial comb contained honey/nectar and, unfortunately, once removed from the security of the joists became very flimsy. A lot of the initial removal was placed in a large plastic tub, for convenience, some was placed in smaller bowls as a sample for the owner. Where it was more stable it was carefully relocated into several empty

frames, secured by the obligatory elastic bands, and then placed in a polynuc. Thankfully, the depth of the joists was very similar to the depth of a shallow frame, so the removed sections fitted quite well.



A polynuc was chosen because of its light weight and ease of transportation. Plus, we had a number of them handy, complete with additional supers. They are light and the additional supers interlock to prevent them sliding off, meaning that they could be secured using a single strap and easily transported.

Once the bulk of the stores were removed it was then far easier to access the brood section. Again, honeycomb was carefully removed and transferred to the empty frames, with care taken to ensure that any remaining bees on them were not harmed, whilst also trying to locate the queen!

This is where the bulk of the bees were and once exposed they proceeded to find the windows in a bid for freedom amid the ensuing chaos of having their home ripped apart.

Eventually, the seemingly never-ending amount of honeycomb was removed from the joist areas, but with no sign of a queen amongst the many thousands of bees that were transferred! The removed comb filled the polynuc and two additional supers, plus a tub full of honey-laden comb. With all the comb bound bees safely transferred it was now time to use the bee vacuum!

Now I had tried out the vacuum strength during testing, but this was the first time it was to be used with live bees. Tentatively, bees were sucked into the box from above the exposed joists and the surrounding skirting board. Once these were dealt with and the vacuum proven to be successful at the task required the flying bees were “hoovered” up. By the time all of the bees were removed the box felt quite heavy and the number of bees in there started to slightly affect the vacuum strength. With only the stragglers remaining the windows were opened allowing them their freedom. The bees in the polynuc were secured with the lid and strapped up for transportation. The tub of honey moved



downstairs, a gauze fitted to the inside and outside of the air vent to prevent further re-entry of the bees and the refitting of the floorboards, was begun. The job started at 8.30 in the morning and it was now 2.30pm. All bees and evidence of their occupation was removed and although there were still a few flying bees remaining the owner was very pleased with the work done.

As for the bees, they were transported to an empty spot in our apiary and left to settle for 30 minutes before the vacuum box bees were re-united with the original honeycomb.

As I am writing this a few weeks after the event, I can update the story by saying that the owner was in touch the next day to say all the remaining bees had gone (there is a colony in the roof of another house close by). He has also visited our apiary to see “his” bees and after filtering the honey in the tub he had around 20lb returned to him.

It is likely that the original queen may have been damaged during the transfer; inspecting the colony a week later revealed sealed queen cells, which were culled down to one. Now hatched, the new queen is laying and been marked green. Still in the polynuc but running

double brood, they appear to be happy with their new location and are probably ready to go into a full-size hive.

Good harvest. Martin.

Ed: My thanks to Martin for this fascinating tale of Bee Rescue. The sheer scale of tackling the job and getting a carpenter willing to be subjected to hoards of flying bees, "Wow", that takes some doing. Congratulations also, to Mandy, a beginner, for helping in a most difficult task. What a way to learn! The successful outcome is a lesson to us all, nothing risked, nothing gained. Well Done Martin.

New Lodge Inaugural Honey Show - Saturday 31st August

By Claire Miller

First of all, huge thanks must go to Eric for organizing this show...from the first idea and getting the Social Club on board, to building the staging, doing all the admin - including dealing with entries on the day and ensuring that all went smoothly during the event – i.e. arranging everything! I'm sure Eric will want to acknowledge the help of his wingman, Ian Algie. (I was a fly on the wall to some of the discussions during building of the staging. Quite entertaining - say no more!) I must add that Eric also very kindly sponsored the generous prize money.

The Honey Show was hosted by the New Lodge Horticultural Society as a new addition to their Annual Flower and Vegetable Show. We had a wonderful welcome from the Society. Everyone I spoke to was very enthusiastic about having a Honey Show to complement the fruit and veg.

Plants and Pollinators, perfect bedfellows!

Eric hopes that the Horticultural Society will host a honey show next year. If so, further classes may be introduced to give more interest – and more opportunities to enter! Every honey show is a great opportunity to let people know what a wonderful product "real" honey is. A range of classes gives an idea of the other things that bees so cleverly produce, and what can be done with them.

There were three classes this year, Light, Medium and Dark Honey. Unfortunately, there weren't any dark honey entries, but there were 15 entries in the light and medium - a very pleasing first entry, and plenty to keep the judge occupied! After much consideration, comparisons and humming and haa-ing, some of the mediums were re-allocated to the light honey class as they were just lighter than the grading glass.



Eric and Ian at the Honey Show.

If I may, I'd like to offer some comments, which, hopefully, will help exhibitors when they enter again - or, indeed, for the first time:

✿ *All* of the jars, and most of the lids, were smeared with fingerprints, which was a bit peculiar. I found out after the show that there might have been a bit of (in)judicious polishing by a well meaning soul but, as all the jars were in the same condition, nobody lost out for this. Needless to say, both should be scrupulously clean, excepting a little honey on the inside of the lid - which may have got there during transit.

✿ Some of the lids had a dink or two, and one lid, ahem, was rusty! No names, etc. To be fair to the exhibitor and as a general heads up, this year I have been sent a few rusty lids direct from the supplier...

✿ It would be interesting to know if any of the exhibitors entered last year's honey. All entries, bar one, looked very fresh with plenty of tiny air bubbles and sometimes a resultant froth on the surface. The surface should be mirror bright and clean.

✿ A couple of jars had bits of debris, and one had a hair/fibre floating in it but, again, it happens very easily. A careful check of your entry, especially by shining a torch through from the back of the jar, will reveal any bits and pieces that shouldn't be in a show exhibit. An exhibit with "extras" will be marked down...

✿ There were some lovely honeys, with good colour, density, aroma and flavour - so, please, keep some back for next year, by which time all the air will have risen and it will be bright and clear. It may granulate but can be gently warmed to clear it. Any remaining froth can also be removed. Then you have honey ready to enter in any of next year's shows!!

Many thanks everyone who exhibited. It take's time, effort and expense to prepare exhibits, and it's very much appreciated and valued.

Congratulations to the prize-winners and many, many thanks to Eric, Ian and all the exhibitors for making a successful new, hopefully to be repeated, Honey Show.

Results:	<u>Light Honey</u>	<u>Medium Honey</u>
1st	Wendy Thomas	Keith Hall
2nd	Athur Bevan	Ade Bowen
3rd	Karen Squires	David O'Carroll

I asked Eric at the end if he had enjoyed the show and if it had been worth doing. He answered with an emphatic "yes", but immediately followed with "it's a lot of work though...". Take a bow, Eric!

Claire.

Topical Tasks by David Salkilld.

Autumn is virtually over and there are two 'must do' tasks to be completed before winter sets in: Treating for varroa and making sure the bees have enough feed to take them through the winter.

Varroa. Today there are many different brands of treatments available from suppliers including a number of non-chemical methods. All of them work to some extent but some are much more effective than others.

My personal choice is to use oxalic acid crystals in a vaporiser, which if used twice at about ten days interval, can be 98+% effective. The other treatments I use are Apistan and Apivar. Each of these treatments has a different method of application, which must be followed to get maximum effect. Also, **protective equipment is essential** when using a vaporiser. This comprises a pair of gloves, a pair of goggles and a protective mask, FFP3 S/L rated. The fumes can potentially do damage to your eyes and lungs.

Getting a 12 volt supply to the hives can be a problem. I solved it by using my car battery and driving my car as close as possible to the hives. An extension cable was then used for the final distance to the hives.

As for Apivar, it is not temperature sensitive as some treatments are but the honey must have been removed first. The Apivar strips stay in the hive for ten weeks, allowing several cycles of mite to be dealt with. It is said by the manufacturers to be in the order of 98% effective.

Other choices are available. Whichever you use, make sure you follow the maker's instructions. Some experts say that treating for varroa is best done in autumn so that brood reared as winter bees are not affected by the mite and the colonies therefore have a better chance of survival.

Feeding. The old adage is that if the hives feel as they are nailed to the ground, there are enough stores to take them through the winter. In practice, this means virtually a full brood chamber of stores, 18 to 23 kilos (40 to 50 lb.).

The question then is what to feed and when. Historically, winter feed was sugar syrup, made to the recipe 2kg sugar to 1 litre of water. Bring it to the boil and stir until the sugar is dissolved. Note that spring feed is a much thinner mix, only 1 kg of sugar to 1 litre of water. Remember to wait 'till the syrup has cooled before feeding it to the bees. Nowadays, invert sugar syrups are available from several suppliers. These have the advantage of being ready-made and are easy to use.

At a MSWCC Conference a few years ago, one of the speakers, who ran several thousand colonies, explained that he had experimented by feeding half his colonies on sugar syrup and half on invert syrup.

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The outcome was that the instance of Nosema was greatly reduced in hives fed on invert syrup.

When to feed? Now is a good time as the bees can store syrup in the combs and cap it ready for later use. We'll talk about spring feeding in the next newsletter.

D. S.

Forthcoming Events

November

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

December

Saturday 7th The Society Christmas Dinner at the Rake & Riddle. Details to be advised by email later.

January

Tuesday 14th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. “Preparation for Spring” by Stephen Davies.

February

Tuesday 11th The A.G.M. at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. Includes buffet.

March

Tuesday 10th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. “The Hover Fly” by Andrew Lucas, Natural Resource Wales.

“More About Bees” by Tom Davies

The second week of October already, and a nasty spell of weather. Strong winds and driving rain, makes visits to out apiaries more necessary than normal to make sure that the bees are safe. My bees used to be placed on concrete blocks and more than once after a bad spell, I would find one or two hive entrances almost blocked by a mound of fallen leaves.

With the colder weather, my bee-garden is looking a bit ragged and dying back, so a lot of cleaning up to do between drier spells. I’ve had a good display of flowers this year, well visited by bumblebees, some honeybees, lots of other wild bees and other fliers. What I haven’t seen much of this year are wasps, seen only one or two in the last couple of months, which is unusual for this area.

From mid-August, in this area, the blackberry flowered the best I've ever seen it, so everyone with hives close to blackberries should have had a tidy flow from it. I picked some lovely berries and am only sorry that the freezer was already filled up.

With all the improvements in modern day bee equipment, I wonder what threats to bees over the winters will be lessened in say, ten year's time. Will there be an almost indestructible Polystyrene hive, hard skinned to prevent woodpecker damage, and more efficient bee health treatments.

More next time ~ Tom.

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“When Bees Were Bees” by Tom Davies

On January 30th 1965, a reprint from the British Bee Journal, Vol. 93, No. 4079, was published by the Village Bee Members Association, Whitegates, Thurlston, Derby, author Beowulf A. Cooper B.Sc. A.R.C.S. the director of V.B.B.A.

Given the title Project No. 12 (Docility) it posed the question ~ “What Makes Bees Bad Tempered”.

Mr. Cooper described some obvious reasons like smells, thundery weather, rough handling, shortage of nectar and pollen coming in, opening hives late in the day when it had cooled down, rushed or rough handling late in the day. These are not the best ways to treat bees.

Called Project 12 because Mr. Cooper did some earlier experiments on bad temper inheritance, while the results were not entirely conclusive, Mr. Cooper hoped that further experimental work could be undertaken.

In 1962 Mr. Cooper removed three queens from touchy stocks, while introducing three sister queens from docile stocks. Within 24 hours these stocks were now docile, yet none of the bees were the progeny of the new queens.

In another experiment a touchy queen was removed, and a ripe queen cell was introduced. A virgin queen hatched some three days later and the stock became docile. The new queen began laying a few weeks later.

More on this next time Tom.

Ed: My deepest apologies to those who have sent me some fascinating clips from newspapers but I've just run out of space (in the paper edition) and will endeavour to put them in the next newsletter.

The next newsletter is due out on 1st January. Please let me have your articles / items by **21st December**. Thanks.