

Swansea & District Beekeepers Newsletter Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch

2019 National honey show

by Martin Davies



A “Honey for Sale” Display at the National Honey Show.

Photo By Martin Davies

Late October sees the running of the N.H.S. at its long-term home of Sandown Park Racecourse in Esher, Surrey. The 3-day event is packed full of lectures and workshops that have something to offer beekeepers of all abilities and the exhibits display an imaginative array of hive products as well as the standard displays expected of such a show. There are also a small number of trade stands, not as many as Bee Tradex but more than the Welsh Convention, with the usual suspects Maisemore, Thorne’s and Northern Bee Books present along with several others.

The show catalogue contains a large range of entry categories for hive products for both domestic (UK) and international entries covering just about everything you can think of and has categories for members, non-members and closed-to-club entries. This can be a bit bewildering as you try and navigate your way through it if you want to enter anything and our first visit to the show last year gave us some insight into which categories were more popular than others.

In contrast to the catalogue, the events programme is simpler to interpret. There are workshops and lectures, lectures being free, but workshops have a small additional charge. This year, between us, we did a number of workshops, including Mead Making, Food Safety and Marketing Legislation, Showing Wax, Pampering Potions, Beeswax Wraps and Making Products of the Hive plus a lecture about Superbugs and The Benefits Of Hive Products.

If your interest lies in showing then the workshops certainly provide an insight in how to prepare your entries and what the judges expectations are, typically because those providing the workshops are generally judges or highly regarded competitors/professionals. Even if competing is not “your thing” then the knowledge gained can be very useful and interesting and help you understand what can be done with a little time and effort.

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Editor: D. Salkilld

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So as mentioned above, the show not only has workshops/lectures but the most important part of the event, the display of honey and wax products. As well as the wide variety of honey on display there are also a large number of staged items and some of these are truly spectacular. There are specified displays, such as displaying “Honey for Sale” and Wax Flowers plus general displays where it is left to the exhibitors imagination to produce something special and this year there was a fantastic display which hopefully the pictures contained here will try and portray.

As well as the entries from the seemingly hundreds of English clubs there were also a significant number from the rest of the UK, including our own society.

Inspired by David Salkilld’s on going successes and freely available and very valuable advice, and, buoyed by our successes in the Royal Welsh and The Gower Show, we decided to try our luck at National Level. After working through the show schedule and looking at the entry notes we took from last year’s visit we elected to enter 8 different classes, these being for different classes of honey, wax candles, a show frame and a wax model.



**One of the Displays with Honey Show Benches
In the background.**

Photo by Martin Davies

This was all planned a few months before the actual show, because, unless you are very talented/lucky/well prepared (something we aren’t) then you wouldn’t normally have a range of items suitable for showing on hand. The only item we didn’t have to prepare for this show was the wax model, as we entered the wax Wishing Well that managed to win us 1st prize at the Royal Welsh.

The honey came from our summer crop and took a little preparing as it needed filtering and care to remove all bubbles and re-jarring into new, clean jars. Wax was cleaned and filtered then a mould selected that was relatively simple but allowed the quality of the wax to be displayed. After making several candles the show items were selected and put to short term storage (clean, air-tight container and wrapped to prevent damage). The show frame wasn’t quite so straightforward. Despite having over 200 frames from our hives this year we only had a small handful that could be considered for show use. Unfortunately, the one frame that won Karen “Best in Show” at the Royal Welsh was no longer suitable, as the judges had taken out a few cells during the judging process so we had to review our remaining frames and select one we thought was the best. This proved to be the one we entered at the Gower Show, which did us well there, and was our only real option as none of the remaining ones we had were better.

Staging exhibits at the show takes place on the Wednesday before the show with judging on the Thursday. The show is open to the public from lunchtime Thursday and by the time of our first workshop at 2 pm the judging hadn't finished so we had to wait until after the class to find out if we had had any success.

With so many categories of entries at the show we decided to work methodically through the judged exhibits looking at all the results and taking notes. Ours weren't the only entries from our Society, David Salkilld entered the Light Honey Open Class and was awarded a very creditable Very Highly Commended, yet another award to add to a very long list of his achievements. Gill and Paul Lyons also entered honey in the Medium Honey Open Class but missed out on an award in another highly competitive class. We managed to gain a 2nd place for our wax wishing well, a 3rd place for our frame of honey and a Highly Commended for our 2 jars of Light Honey in the Gift Class. Credit must go to David for his success, whereas our class only had 8 entries, and we came 4th, the Open Class had over 75 entries so was a lot more competitive, as was the Medium Class that Gill/Paul entered. There was also success for the National Botanical Gardens as Lynda Christie took a prize for her wax daffodils.

For the entries where we didn't find any success, we checked them at the show and in the bright lights of the show hall it was fairly obvious why some of the honey wasn't successful. Of the 3 jars of light honey we entered we noticed that one of the jars had a very slightly different shade of honey, very slight but enough of a difference at this level to stop it progressing through the initial stages of judging. One pair of light honey jars also had a slight difference in shade between the lids and another pair had a small fibre in the honey, possibly from the cloth used to dry/clean the jar before filling! All in all we are very happy with our successes and some very valuable lessons learned, both from the workshops and the show results/post mortem. Does this deter us from showing next year knowing now the painstaking care and patience/diligence needed to succeed, or do we learn from our experience and strive to do better next year? Tune in next year to find out 😊



A “Honey for Sale” Display at the national Honey Show
Photo by Martin Davies

Last Year's Honey Crop

For most of our members, 2019 was a very good year for honey production. The summer months were warm and mostly dry so there was plentiful forage around for the bees. It was a good year for the bees and it was good year for us beekeepers too. Mind you, they did their usual bit of swarming, typically while I was away for ten days in May, but partially made up for it with a reasonable amount harvested in September.

Now we mostly agree that beekeepers are in the hobby for the honey and wax harvested, but the bees' main aim in life is to reproduce! So, as mentioned above, it was a good year for the bees, at least, in my apiary.

However, I have been told that the heather honey crop is substantially down due to heather beetles rampaging over many of the moors in U.K. My source is Mike Hunt, from Gloucestershire, who for the last 40 years, has taken his bees to the heather, and usually averaged about 2 supers per hive of heather honey. In 2019 he only had about 1/3 of a super per hive.

We met Mike at the National Honey Show and he was telling me that moors in Devon, Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Hampshire had all been affected. Apparently those in Scotland had not been so badly affected, particularly those near the coast.

He told me that the heather beetle is always there, feeding on the new, tender heather shoots. Last year however, for some reason, the beetle multiplied unhindered by the heather beetle wasp, which lays its eggs in heather beetle larvae and thus controls the heather beetle population. It left the moors looking brown. The last time he came on this situation was about 20 to 25 years ago and is certain that it will right itself in the future.

The other day I checked with Mike just to get the facts straight and at the time he was just finishing his extraction. Despite the lack of heather honey, his 2019 crop is just short of two tons! To get this amount he must have quite a few colonies.

D. S.

“More About Bees” by Tom Davies

Coming to the end of November, dark and dreary outside, not a good day for work in the garden, but I have managed to do most of the tidying up and dug just about the lot.

Reading about the “Llanedi Job”, by Martin Davies in the last issue – that must have been quite a marathon job, a story in every jar of honey as it were; I would have set the honey aside for special occasions like Christmas time etc.

Claire’s comments about the first New Lodge show took me back to a show held at Ty John Penry, opposite the Y.M.C.A. building, St. Helen’s Road, Swansea, in the 1980’s a West Glamorgan Show.

I had laid out most of the classes and most of the entries were in situ, waiting for the Judge, I turned away to check on something and when I looked back I found a bloke turning the jars over to watch the bubbles inside the jars!! He wondered why I was so annoyed and told him where to go!

Getting a show up and running ready for the Judge takes quite a lot of work, help is most appreciated. I also found that taking some spare good lids, new corks, even some spare labels with me helped out to improve some not-so-good looking exhibits if wanted.

More next time Tom.

Rhododendron honey by David Salkilld

On holiday in France recently, Jean chanced upon some rhododendron honey in a market and bought me a jar. Years ago we had seen some in a Swiss market, didn’t buy it, and have regretted it ever since. So, now we have some. We were aware that rhododendron honey is said to be toxic but have been trying it in small doses to see what it is like, and so far, we haven’t had any of the narcotic effects!

History enthusiasts among you will recall the story of how the army of the Persian King, Mithridates, defeated his Roman enemies by littering the road with enticing rhododendron honey honeycombs. According to

this millennia-old story, the invading troops ate the honey and were easily defeated while under the influence of its intoxicating effects.

Well, that’s the story but these myths have a way of being based on truth. So, out of interest, I looked up rhododendron honey on the internet and found quite a lot of information, which comes down to rhododendron plants containing chemicals called grayanotoxins. These neurotoxic compounds exist in

varying concentrations and varieties, depending on the particular rhododendron species, location and the time of year. These chemicals are present in both the pollen and nectar that the bees forage on.

On Wikipedia, with mainly an American input, rhododendron honey is often referred to as 'mad' honey. Eating rhododendron honey is said to cause hallucinations and 'get you stoned', even in small amounts. Now the source they are talking about is mountain honey that comes from regions of Nepal and Turkey and is a red coloured honey. The jar Jean bought in France is a normal mid honey colour and I fear (regret) is not quite as powerful, otherwise I'll be on a psychoactive 'trip' and, who knows what would happen.

D. S.

Forthcoming Events

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 and a talk about the new swarming app.

March

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

April

Tuesday 14th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. "Queen rearing" by Ricky Wilson.

May

Tuesday 12th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. Talk on "Swarming" by Stephen Davies.

June

Tuesday 9th Talk at The New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon, 7.00 p.m. "Preparation for the Gower Show " and Buffet.

July

Tuesday 14th Programme to be advised.

Tuesday 28th Pre-Gower Show meeting.

Friday 31st At the Gower Show Ground ~ set up Marquee.

August

Saturday 1st Stage show entries for judging which commences at 13.30 p.m.

Sunday 2nd Gower Show Day, Penrice Castle Grounds, Gower.

September

Tuesday 8th Programme to be advised.

October

Tuesday 13th Programme to be advised.

November

Tuesday 10th Society Honey Show and buffet.

December

Saturday 5th Christmas Dinner, details to be advised.

Thank you Gerti for arranging the year's activities for the Society.

A Christmas Card Warning!

I received a Christmas card from an old friend who had been beekeeping for 33 years. In it he wrote about his unhappy experience of being stung eight times on the neck when he visited his out-apiary on a farm during November. He had fainted several times but luckily was found by the farmer who called an ambulance, which took him to Morrision Hospital. After being injected 'lots of times' (his words) the doctor told him that after the age of 50 we become allergic to stings, though this doesn't apply to all of us. They let him go home after 4 hours.

Familiarity breeds contempt!!

We must always remember that a colony will protect itself against perceived attack / disturbance / robbing, particularly when there is no honey flow and because of that fact we must always don full protective kit before attempting to look at or do any work with our bees. This is particularly so for those of us 'longer term' beekeepers who think they know their bees, as my old friend found out.

As one of your winter checks, have a look at your bee suit to make sure there are no holes in the veil or worn parts or loose elastic where bees could get through.

My old friend has now given up the hobby and tells me that, in future, he will be buying his honey from the local supermarket. D. S.

Sniffer Bees

In the last edition I ran out of room so am now putting this somewhat belated feature in. On 1st October, the Sunday Times printed an article about bees being used to sniff out drugs and explosives. The article concerned work being done by a team at the University of St. Andrews, headed by Dr. Ross Gillanders, a Senior Researcher. The team is training bees, by feeding sugar syrup to them, to associate the smell of a chosen substance with receiving food. Explosives, drugs, pesticides and radioactive metals were all mentioned in the article.

Using a Pavlovian association between the scent of the substance and sugar syrup, the bees are 'tricked' into thinking the scent belongs to the substance. The article said that bees could detect odours from up to a kilometre away!

Once the bees are released they fly to the source of the scent expecting a feed. They are kept under observation so the location of the substances can be spotted. At the present time, the team has proved that they can detect landmines from about 100 metres away. However, issues arise when the bees find an explosive and are not rewarded. After a couple of days they realise that they have been hoodwinked and need to be retrained. Hopefully, as the article said, by then they will have found the explosives.

The article indicated that in field tests, the bees have been somewhat unpredictable, and some members of the team have been stung.

My thanks to several members for sending me this intriguing cutting. Please keep them coming.
D. S.

Another use for Propolis

In the Good Health section of the Daily Mail on Tuesday 10th Dec. an article appeared on research by a team at the University of Plymouth suggesting that use of a propolis based mouthwash can help in lowering blood pressure. It went on to say that numerous studies have shown that poor oral health can have an adverse effect on an individual's blood pressure.

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“When Bees Were Bees” by Tom Davies

Following on from my last article written on January 30th 1965, by Mr. Beowulf A. Cooper B.Sc. A.R.C.S., the Director of the Village Bee Breeders Association.

The three queens removed from the touchy stocks were put into nuclei, these turned touchy, and some time later two of these queens were given to docile stocks whose queens had been removed for propagation purposes. These stocks now became touchy.

Mr. Cooper questioned the possibility that some pheromone in queen substance could result in touchiness, but would take quite a lot of special research to provide answers and he hoped that as time went on, some light could be shed on the problem of what he termed ‘Natural Touchy Behaviour’, as opposed to induced touchiness by rough handling etc.

There is no pleasure in handling a touchy stock. If one is found, it is better to either change the queen as soon as possible, or kill the queen and let the stock raise another one, because a small touchy stock will grow into a larger one, giving no end of trouble in time.

I was lucky with my shift-work as it gave me plenty of time to examine my bees in the middle of the day, even with just a veil on.

Best wishes for 2020, Tom.

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