

Swansea & District Beekeepers Newsletter Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch



Isn't it regrettable that we can't be together again at the Gower Show this August. I, for one, will miss all the preparation and fun of meeting the people who come into the marquee. Some of them are regulars that we see year after year, often with children who make a bee-line for the Bee Tent and the candle rolling. Let's hope we can get out of this lock-down soon.

The photo is from the 2014 Gower show.

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Editor: D. Salkilld

Topical Tips

Supering. This is the time of year when I expect to see the peak of the honey flow. In past good years, I have been pleasantly surprised to find that a colony can fill a Langstroth super inside a week, amounting to over 15kg. (30 lb.) of honey. This illustrates the need to ensure that each colony has sufficient space, just in case there is a decent honey flow. Of course, it all depends on factors such as the weather, the strength of the colony and the local forage. It would be interesting to know if our bees have benefitted from the quieter time the corona virus lockdown has given other wildlife.

Then there are a few options to consider. Do you use existing drawn comb or foundation or a combination of the two. Or do you just put a starter strip of foundation in the frames and let the bees draw down the comb. Do you put the new super above or beneath the existing ones. Well, I have tried them all and find that it really doesn't matter what you decide as the bees will happily work with any combination.

However, if maximising honey production is your aim, using drawn comb gives an advantage, whilst using foundation will give you drawn comb for next years harvest. I have occasionally used starter strips of unwired comb, about 25cm (1 inch) deep, and the bees happily drew them down, built comb and filled them with honey. Surprisingly, with careful extraction, they did not break up when later harvested. These are also ideal if you produce cut comb honey.

When I use starter strips, I like to put them alternatively with foundation. Putting several starter strips side by side leaves a large void in the middle where the bees can built brace comb, as I learned the hard way!

One old beekeeper I knew from Herefordshire was not able to lift full supers, so developed a system whereby he had a single super on each hive and, on his apiary visits, would take out any fully capped frames and replace them with foundation. This worked for him as he only sold cut comb honey and could deal with the frames one at a time as they were filled.

Heavy supers. That brings me onto another subject, safety, your own safety! Lifting supers, which weigh up to 20 kg. (40 lb.), can do serious damage to anyone with a weak back, particularly if they are at an awkward height or in an awkward-to-reach position. One solution is to reduce the weight by taking half of the frames out before attempting to lift the super, but remember to take an empty super along with you if you want to use this method.

Thinking of your health again, don't twist or stretch while you are carrying a heavy super. Instead, move or turn your whole body and hold the super close to your body at waist height.

Personal Safety. The other day I was told that one of our members had been badly stung and, as a result, had spent a couple of days in hospital. I don't know the circumstances of this particular incident but it brings to mind the old saying 'familiarity breeds contempt'. When dealing with bees, or working in or near an apiary, or just watching the hive entrance, always be aware that these are not tame creatures. They may see you as a threat and decide to protect their colony.

We all do it, looking at our colonies without protective equipment on, I'm as guilty as the rest, but, think safety, at the very least, wear long sleeves and a veil to cover your face and neck.

The honey flow. As mentioned above, the main honey flow in our part of the country is from late June to the end of July. That said, I remember an instance when, several years ago, our late Secretary, Mike Cram, extracted his crop at the end of August and put the empty supers back on the hives for clean-up. The bees promptly refilled them all with honey from Himalayan Balsam, which was abundant in his area at that time. So expect the unexpected, and let's hope for a fine summer with good crops for all.

With that in mind, prepare your supers now. Have them ready to use rather than having to assemble them in a rush when more space is needed. As for timing, I usually put another super on a hive when the previous one is about $\frac{3}{4}$ full. This seems to work for me. D. S.

From the Newspapers *My thanks to all who send me these fascinating cuttings related to bees and honey. Ed.*

Asian Giant Hornets. In the Times of 9th March we find an article on the Invasion of Murder Hornets on Vancouver Island, where a beekeeper who was used to dealing with wasp and hornet nests was confronted with giant hornets, so big that they wouldn't fit in the nozzle of his vacuum. And then the hornets attacked him. He was stung in the legs four times, drawing blood. Next morning he had flu-like aches in his legs.

This encounter was among the first reported on the North American continent. The giant hornets have since been reported in Washington State and experts fear they could spread across the continent.

In their native Japan, they cause up to 50 human deaths a year. They are capable of decimating a honeybee colony in a day.

Ancient Remedies. From the Daily Telegraph, in their 'Letters to the Editor column' last December, were three letters on the medicinal properties of honey, together with a photo of bees carved into a column at the Temple of Karnak, in Luxor, Egypt.

The first, from a Mr. Bonner, of Warwickshire, said that all honey, not just Manuka, had antibacterial properties and was used as a medicine by the ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians. He went on to advise buying honey from a local beekeeper, straight from the hive. Commercial honey, he said, is a mixture of honeys from several countries some of them pasteurised and ultra filtered, with most of the goodness lost. Well, we knew that, but it's good to let the general public know about it too.

The second from a plastic surgeon, Sara H. Pape, of Northumberland, said that when she trained in the Eighties, there was always a jar of runny honey in the dressing clinic but eventually it had to go because of EU standards. Today, manufacturers produce honey-based wound-care products. She dresses all her skin grafts with honey and the wound-infection rate has plummeted. Unlike antibiotics, honey attacks bacteria in multiple ways and has a low incidence of resistance.

The third letter was from a Mr. Marriott of Surrey, who reported catching MRSA following an operation, which left a gaping hole in his leg. The pad to cover it was coated with Manuka honey, which did the trick.

Almond Pollination in California. In an article entitled 'To Bee Or Not To Bee: The Great Dilemma' in the Sunday Times of March 15th, the author, Danny Fortson, poses the question of sustainability where mass agricultural crops depend on honeybees for pollination.

He particularly highlights the Californian almond crop where 1.4 million acres (yes 1.4 million acres!) is planted with almond trees, up from 500,000 acres in the year 2000. For optimum pollination, the industry standard calls for 2.5 hives per acre. The demand for bees is so high that some farmers have to make do with only one hive per acre. Which ever number you take, that's a heck of a lot of hives and bee farmers truck them in from all over the U. S. A. for a payment of \$200 per hive for their three weeks of work. Honey, the article says, used to be the mainstay for beekeepers, now it's just a by-product.

The almond migration is only the start of the bees' annual journey. After a few weeks in California they are taken north to pollinate cherries, then on to Oregon for blueberries, Washington State for apples and Dakota for honey production over the summer. Some travel over 3,000 miles to Florida.

The problem is that bees are getting sick and dying in record numbers. One beekeeper from Idaho who manages 6,000 hives said "They're just harder to keep alive". Last year, American beekeepers lost almost 40% of colonies, the biggest drop in recent years.

What is clear, the article says, is that virtually no one in the supply chain thinks the set up is tenable. Moving bees around the country leads to significant death rates and higher operational costs.

Pollinating the crops in rotation has become big business. Mr. Fortson asks is it sustainable? Are we in the moment of biodiversity collapse? Can we use the essential role of pollinators to generate more attention to the role of insects in the functioning of the Earth's ecosystems?

“When Bees Were Bees” by Tom Davies

In the last issue of the magazine (No. 133), our editor, David Salkilld, wrote about collecting swarms, and in an issue of “Gleanings in Bee Culture” for June 1930, I found a question on swarms from a Mr. J. E. Sweet, of New York, U. S. A.

The question was, “which is better, to hive swarms on empty combs or on frames of foundation?”

Answer – in hiving swarms to make increase, or to produce extracted honey, empty combs usually work well, but when producing comb honey, the bees are inclined to store the incoming nectar in empty combs in the brood chamber at first, neglecting the supers, this bringing about a crowded condition in the brood chamber.

The answer went on to state that many comb-honey producers hived swarms on foundation, with probably one or two empty combs, this being a precaution against the bees swarming out again after being hived.

This makes sense, as the one or two empty combs have room for the queen to lay eggs, foragers in the swarm have storage room, while the wax producing bees have the foundation they can work on. One of the pleasures I got from my beekeeping days, was keeping an eye on the way a swarm transforms foundation into good comb.

Hope you all get a good crop! Tom.

Dinah Sweet & Peter Tomkins

It was sad to read in recent editions of Bee Craft magazine and Welsh Beekeeper, of the passing of two old beekeeping friends, Peter Tomkins of Hertfordshire and Dinah Sweet of Cardiff.

Both had previously been speakers at our Society meetings and had also lectured at MSWCC Conventions our Society had held in recent years.

Dinah’s speciality was in pollen analysis but she was also an accredited Welsh honey judge, judging at the National Honey Show, the Welsh National Honey Show and, for our Society, at the Gower Show.

Peter had over sixty years beekeeping experience and had worked with some of the greats of British beekeeping, Messer’s Butler, Simpson and Free, at the Rothamsted Experimental Station, Harpenden, in the middle of the twentieth century. He was one of those people I turned to whenever I needed a second opinion on a beekeeping topic.

I will miss them both. D. S.

Local Honey Wanted

The other week I had a phone call from a lady with bees in her garden, which, after a brief chat, turned out to be bumblebees inhabiting a birds nesting box. She had attended one of my bee talks back in 2012 and managed to find my phone number. After putting her mind at rest regarding the bees she asked if I still sold honey and on hearing that I didn’t, wondered if anyone in our Society did.

If anyone has honey for sale, you might like to contact Jill who lives in Gorseinon. Her phone number is 01792 540 492. D. S.

I'm Back on Track

When the two previous editions went out at about the same time, it brought to mind buses. You wait forever for one, then two come along together! Well, I'm back on schedule now so production of the newsletters should be on time in future.

The somewhat shorter edition of the newsletter, issue 132, came about because Jean and I were in the midst of moving house from Sketty to Killay on 28th February and issue 132 of the newsletter was due to be posted out at the same time. With all the kaffuffle of sorting things out, organising the move and everything else, the newsletter never quite got the attention it should have had.

As I said above, we're back on track now and hope you enjoy this edition.

Gerti.

In the past couple of days we have heard that Gerti had a nasty fall from a ladder, which dislocated her shoulder and cracked her pelvis. Our thoughts are with you, Gerti, and we wish you a speedy recovery.

"More About Bees" by Tom Davies

A damp morning (June 11th) and it looks like we have had a good amount of rain overnight. This will do a lot of good, as all that dry weather was taking all the moisture out of the soil.

Around here there are small patches of white clover, and they were beginning to burn off with all the hot weather. Hopefully the rain we've had will peak them up a bit.

On the good side though, my kitchen garden is looking good. I have dwarf French beans in flower, my runner beans are halfway up the sticks, I am enjoying some kale before the cabbage white butterfly squadrons arrive. If they cause a lot of damage I will cut off all the leaves and let them regrow by the autumn and winter.

My bee garden has been a bit slow, but is coming on now. My dahlias are beginning to flower with some agastaches and rudbeckias making progress. I've had a good show of sweet williams I sowed last year and have some nice big clumps of Michaelmas daisies that should give a nice display.

Plenty of bumblebees about, also lately there has been a good number of honeybees about, quite a few wasps as well as a few other types of wild bees, hoverflies, butterflies, altogether showing that the long damp, chilly winter we had has not caused a lot of harm to our wild life.

More next time, Tom.

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