

Swansea & District Beekeepers Newsletter Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch

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Editor: D. Salkilld

**A Happy New Year to All Members,
Good Health and Happy Beekeeping.**



Honeybees are wonderful architects!

It's fascinating to see the different size of cells the bees produce in wild comb to store their honey and to see the way they pack so much into the available space yet give themselves room to service each and every cell. Honey cells can be any size and fit in wherever there is a gap. By comparison, the brood cells are much more regular, they have to be. Honeybees are truly wonderful creatures.

Jackie Ford

We were saddened to hear of the recent passing of Jackie Ford. She was a stalwart of the Society for many years, having been an active committee member and, among other things, a willing helper with the Bee Tent and at the Gower Show where she was on the sub-committee and helped with honey and produce sales in the marquee. Jackie was also an invaluable support when the Society ran a MSWCC beekeeping conference at the King Arthur Hotel several years ago.

Jackie had not been well for a while but soldiered on like the trooper she was. She will be sorely missed. We send our deepest sympathy to Dexter and Family.

The A. G. M. and other Meetings.

We hear from Martin that the AGM will be held somewhat later than normal in 2021, due of course to the Covid-19 virus. Late April is a probable time but will be confirmed when the Committee has considered the options.

Back when I first joined the Society in the 1980s, the AGM was always held in April to coincide with the end of the financial year. However, when the Society decided to change its financial year to run consecutively with the calendar year, the AGM date was brought forward to February.

I have a memory (I haven't looked it up lately) that the Constitution states that the AGM will be held in February, but it was written before there was any hint of a pandemic closing down the entire country, and I'm sure that whoever ratified it would not, in the circumstances, object to it being delayed. I'm sure we'll hear from the Committee when a decision has been taken.

Other meetings will be announced once the Covid-19 situation is clear. The WBKA Spring Convention is pencilled in but, as with all other events, will be subject to government guidelines. We will hear more on these events as we progress into 2021. Keep an eye open for announcements as they are posted on the Society website.

“When Bees Were Bees” by Tom Davies

To continue the story of Mr. Norwood, of Torillo, Texas, Mr. Norwood enlarged his stock with 200 colonies bought from the late Mr. Stannmann in the fall of 1928, these sited in Colorado, and were to be shipped to El Paso, Texas, by train.

On arrival, the freight car carrying the bees went astray, and by the time it was located, seventy-five of the colonies had smothered in the extreme heat, the rest needing urgent attention.

Mr. Norwood took the survivors to Torillo, and with care he managed to get them to be able to survive and be well enough to go through winter.

In the spring Mr. Norwood was able to get back to the original 200 colonies. With the help of good weather, they obtained a crop of 12,000 pounds of alfalfa and sweet clover honey.

Cotton was grown in large quantities in the area, but Mr. Norwood was of the opinion that cotton provided very little, if any, to his yields of honey. The alfalfa and sweet clover were both reliable and there was plenty of both in the area.

A very hot place to keep bees in, and in the next issue I will describe Mr. Norwood's efforts in managing the heat.

Till then – Tom.

2020 Round-up – From a Secretary's Point of View!

By Martin Davies

This year has certainly been a strange one! No meetings or social events, no shows or bee tent and very limited access to our Society Apiary. I have certainly missed the camaraderie and support from running the bee tent events and meeting all the visitors, especially at our own Gower Show, not to mention meeting you, our members, at our social evenings, shows and when helping me with the tent.

It has also been a difficult year for our new members, especially those that registered for our Beginners Class in February. They were only able to have a few classes before the effects of the pandemic curtailed our efforts and I am hoping that the lack of tuition hasn't dampened their enthusiasm and that we will be able to resume classes in the very near future.

The good start to the year was followed by a poor summer with the result that many colonies have been struggling and a lot have had to be fed, even through what would normally be a time of plenty in July and August. The poor weather didn't stop them swarming though, and, thanks to the new web application developed by Charlie Dunnill (beeswarm.uk), managing them has been a lot easier, from the Secretary's point of view, and seemingly more successful than in previous years. My thanks go to all who have contacted those who reported them and collected them, where possible. The success of the swarm App has been one of the few highlights of 2020.

This year has also been a year of transformation. With the pandemic restrictions in place there has been a huge increase in the number of “televised” events. The Webinars produced by the WBKA have been of great interest and improved in content and professionalism quickly since the first one earlier this year.

Many other of the large bodies have been producing content to keep us entertained over the summer and look like they will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

The National Honey Show may not have taken place properly this year, but the “virtual” event was a success for them, and the previous lectures have been made available online. These again are a good source of information and entertainment for these cold, dark nights.

Which leads us into winter, this is the time when our bees are quiet, but this is one of the beekeeper’s busiest times. Now is the time to be preparing for next season, getting your new frames ready and sorting out any new hives that you may need if you have any over-wintered Nucs that will need them. You may want to expand your colonies next season so make sure you have enough Nuc boxes and spare hives to cover your plans. Check your current colonies to make sure they have enough stores to see them through and sort out additional supplies of fondant or other bee feed to supplement them with. If you apply any winter treatments, such as apibioxal or similar for varroa, now is the time to get them ready.

It is also a good time to be checking any over-wintered frames to make sure the lovely wax-moth isn’t having a feast at your expense and possibly treat stored frames using acetic acid to make sure they are clean and ready to use next year.

Hopefully, we will all have done enough to keep our bees happy and fed enough to survive the winter and start 2021 in a healthy position ready to make the best of what we all hope will be a better year.

With Christmas upon us it is strange not having our annual Christmas get together! Always an entertaining and enjoyable event, I hope that we will be able to continue next year. Maybe we will have to try and organise a summer BBQ instead, assuming that we can “book” the Welsh summer weekend!

Christmas could also be the time to ask Santa for new beekeeping kit, accessories or even new hives. After munching your way through a mound of mince pies and turkey sandwiches what better way to burn off some of the calories by assembling frames and supers ready for the new season.

Whatever your plans over the festive period I hope that you all keep safe and look forward to seeing you at some stage during 2021. Hopefully at an event or two or our social evenings once we can begin them again.

Cheers, Martin

Some thoughts on Beeswax

By David Salkilld

Beeswax is one of those valuable by-products we all get from our hives so my advice to any new beekeepers is to make the most of it by refining it and selling it, or trading it in for foundation, or adding value by making beeswax blocks, candles or polishes for sale to the public. These latter also make very acceptable presents.

In simple terms, wax is produced from glands on the underside of the bees abdomen, is chewed and worked by the them, then fashioned into their hexagon nest. To us beekeeper, it comes as brace comb, old foundation, scrapings from frames or from cappings, all of which can be converted into beautiful, clean beeswax. In my experience I have found that for every 100 lb. of honey, I get 1½ to 2 lb. of beeswax. Basically, it just requires melting and cleaning to remove those bits of bees knees, larval casings, pollen, propolis and dirt, which always seem to get into it. But not all of the pollen is removed, it’s what gives the wax it’s colour. Over the next couple of newsletters, I aim to put together a few notes on how to get your wax into a clean state, who knows, you might even decide to show it at the next Gower Show!

Nowadays I start the cleaning process with a steam extractor, but I didn’t always have one, and produced fine quality wax using just a couple of old saucepans on the kitchen stove. These articles will be based on just using saucepans.

SAFETY FIRST. Now at this juncture I should point out a couple of **important warnings**. NEVER heat beeswax directly in a saucepan on a stove as it is **highly inflammable**. ALWAYS use a double boiler, i.e.

an outer pan of water and an inner pan holding the wax. That way it can never reach its flashpoint temperature of 204°C. Never leave it alone on the stove. Always wear protective gloves and eye protection. Cover your working surfaces to reduce clean-up of the inevitable drops that occur, I use old newspaper and wide turkey foil (get some at this time of year).

Beeswax has a relatively low melting point of 62 - 64°C and if it is heated above 85°C it starts to discolour, so be careful whilst heating it. Slow heating helps to keep its natural colour, otherwise it will go brown.

You will need to get some equipment, I use the following:

- a) Two saucepans, one of which should fit into the other to give that double boiler effect. Where possible, all my equipment is made of stainless steel and I keep it separate from the cooking pans.
- b) Safety equipment, gloves, eye protection, an apron, etc.
- c) Wide foil to protect working surfaces. I don't use newspaper near the stove in case it accidentally catches light (it only happened once). However, it is OK to use newspaper on the floor.
- d) A filter. For many years I have used a simple home-made one. It consists of a tin with both ends removed and a filter cloth tied tightly over one end with string. The very best filter cloth I have ever used was surgical lint. (The quality of today's surgical lint is not as good as it was when I first started) Other options are fleece, J-Cloths, cheesecloth, etc, anything which will trap the dross whilst letting the beeswax through. The finer the holes the better. Some people I know use double layers of filter cloth. A tip here; I pre-heat the filter tin so that the wax doesn't solidify on the sides when it is poured through. I have several sizes of filter tin, depending on how much wax I am processing. Just be careful when pouring molten wax through a small tin, remember to use gloves to protect your hands.
- e) A container to catch the wax as it comes through the filter. I generally use 1 litre plastic ice-cream tubs because wax can easily be popped out once it has set. If you use a metal pan the wax will likely stick to it. Another note of caution here, once I used a plastic tub that was not able to deal with the temperature, it crumpled and the molten wax went all over the worktop and down the front of the kitchen cabinets! Make sure the tubs you use are able to withstand the temperature.

Let's get started. Prepare the stove by covering it with aluminium foil but first cut a hole in the foil over the heat source and cover the floor with newspaper. If you are melting cappings, wash the honey off of them first. In the next issue I will deal with really dirty, old brood comb, so put that to one side for now.

Put water in the outside pan, wax in the inner one and heat it up. I try to keep the temperature of the water below boiling point so as not to damage the wax. Also, if the water boils and splatters, drops of water get into the liquid wax, you don't want that to happen. This melting process can take some time but be patient and don't leave it unattended. Meanwhile, tie the filter cloth on to the end of the tin. At this point, I pop the tin in the oven to warm it up to somewhere round about 60° to 70° C.

When the wax has fully melted in the saucepan, pour it through the Filter tin into the plastic tub. Safety precautions are necessary, wear gloves and wipe all water from the sides and bottom of the saucepan so that it doesn't get into the finished wax. Don't overfill the plastic tub.

And when it cools you will have a block of clean beeswax.

Depending on the quality of the filter cloth, you may find very fine specks of dust-like inclusions on the bottom of the block. These can be scraped away leaving good quality wax for future use. These fine particles sink to the bottom as the wax is cooling. If you can keep the temperature up for a while, the vast majority of them will be at the bottom and be easily rid of. The dross left in the filter can be discarded.

If you intend trading your wax in for new foundation, the suppliers visit major shows such as the Welsh Beekeepers Spring Convention, Builth Wells to collect wax, which they weigh on the spot, and issue vouchers for foundation etc. These basic filtered wax blocks are fine for them.

When preparing beeswax for show purposes, I use the best possible filter cloth and filter it more than once to get it as pure as possible. If you are thinking of showing beeswax, a good place to start is with 28g beeswax blocks. All of the beekeeping suppliers sell plastic moulds for these blocks. Show schedules usually call for six blocks but the moulds only have five chambers so you will need two of them. The advantage of that is that if you pour 10 blocks, you can choose the best six from among them.

Well, I hope you have a go at preparing some wax this winter, it's a good time to have a go as there is less to do in the apiary. Just remember to be careful. Molten wax can give a nasty burn and, if it gets on your kitchen surfaces, it is the very devil to clean up.

In the next newsletter, I will continue the beeswax theme and go into candle making and producing a simple beeswax polish.

D. S.

Stunt Pilots.

An article in the Daily Telegraph of 24th November, reported the findings of scientists at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. Their work with bumble bees was to do with spatial awareness of the bees when flying. To do this, they set up an experiment whereby the bees, flying from their nest to forage, had to fly through a tunnel which had a variable width gap.

A high-speed camera caught the bees flying from side to 'suss' out the gap in relation to their wingspan. This process took longer as the gap got smaller. In all cases, the bees flew through, even if they had to turn sideways in order to go through the gap.

Ed. - In my years of beekeeping, I've never seen a bee turn sideways in flight, but that's understandable as they have always had open space to exit or enter the hives. Even when watching them on flowers, they have always had that horizontal flight position. Could they loop the loop, who knows, I wouldn't put it past them if they had to do it.

Neonicotinoids.

A report in the Daily Telegraph, on Saturday 12th December, alerted readers to the fact that the NFU has submitted an emergency application to Defra to allow sugar beet farmers to use Cruiser SB, a neonicotinoid dressed seed treatment, in spring 2021, "in a limited and controlled way", to combat a disease that reduces the yield and sugar content of the beet. This pesticide is banned throughout the EU but from January, the post-Brexit UK may no longer fall under EU legislation.

The article also mentioned a letter, sent by the NFU congratulating the 1200 farmers who had written to the Environment Secretary in support of using the pesticide. In that leaked letter, the NFU asked its members to "refrain from sharing this on social media ... as we believe this will have a stronger impact on the Secretary of State if kept out of the public domain".

These highly toxic pesticides have had a devastating effect on wildlife and in March 2017, Michael Gove, the then environmental secretary, welcomed the EU ban and promised that "unless scientific evidence changes, the government will maintain these increased restrictions post-Brexit". Let's hope the government keeps its word.

"More About Bees" by Tom Davies

Another wet day, I should think that a new record of rainfall for the time of year has been set.

Fortunately though, in the odd spot of dryish weather, I have cleared up both the kitchen and bee gardens, and so, I am not behind with seasonal work.

In the last issue of our magazine (No. 136) the article about tanging took my attention. This was talked about years ago, and I understand that banging together of metal objects was not so much as to make a noise, but to cause vibrations in the air, to make bees think that thunder was on the way.

While I never tried tanging, whenever I examined colonies with perhaps a rumble of thunder in the distance, the bees would certainly get a bit edgy, so handling them gently was required.

I have noticed the same thing with bumblebees in the bee garden when thunder is forecast and rapidly clouding over, they will still go on collecting but are more agitated.

Perhaps if someone with a hive near a church could have a look at them while the church bells are ringing, it could provide an answer as to bee behaviour.

On that – Best wishes for 2021! Tom.

Langstroth Equipment for Sale.

From David Salkilld

In the new year, I intend to reduce my beekeeping activities and will have some pieces of used Langstroth equipment and, perhaps, some colonies of bees for sale at reasonable prices. The equipment includes supers, brood chambers, varroa floors, excluders, frames, foundation, roofs, feeders, etc. etc.

Please contact me on 01792 205822 if you need some more information.

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Ed. My thanks to those members who send me these interesting articles and newspaper cuttings.

The next newsletter is due out on 1st March 2021. Please let me have your articles / items by **20th February**. Thanks.