

# Swansea & District Beekeepers Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch Newsletter

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## Harvest Time

This is the time of year where we look forward to the results of our colonies' labours, to see what the bees have done over the past few months. In my experience, results vary from colony to colony, perhaps dependant on how well the scout bees were in finding good forage, but mainly on the strength of the colony. With good husbandry, all your colonies should be up to strength but in the real world, that doesn't always happen.

The best honey crop that I ever had was from a double brooded Langstroth hive which yielded 180 lb. of honey but for me, it only happened the once. That year the adjacent colonies yielded their normal average of about 45 lb each. So, a strong colony has it's benefits.

In some years the bees hadn't capped all the cells so I just extracted from those frames which were fully capped, leaving the partially capped ones till later, usually late September by which time they were normally capped over. Uncapped cells hold nectar which has a much higher percentage of water. If extracted with the honey, nectar can increase the overall water percentage and sometimes cause the honey to ferment. Even shaking the loose nectar out doesn't always work.

One question that I have never been able to answer is why some capped honey can have a water content of 15% or 16% whilst other capped honey can be over 20%. This latter will ferment!

One of the most useful tools is a refractometer to check water content. Nowadays they are relatively inexpensive and I would recommend all beginners to get one. It will give you an instant reading on the percentage of water in your honey.

Coming back to the practical side of getting the honey from the hive, full supers can weigh upwards of 20kg. Nowadays I can't lift heavy weights so when I am taking the crop, I tend to take the frames out one at a time, brush the bees off, check to see if they are fully capped and put them in an empty super. Once I'm down to about five frames, the supers are more handleable. Any partially capped frames are returned to the hive. Some people will extract if the frames are 90% capped and shake all the nectar out but I prefer them fully capped.

If you are going to take full supers it is necessary first to clear the bees. There are several methods which involve clearing boards, all of which work, rhombus, Porter, etc. but remember to ensure that the escapes are clean and there is space under them so that the bees have a pathway through to the brood chamber. Though I have never done it, professionals will blow the bees out with a leaf blower type of tool. This method clears them quickly without double handling of supers.

I usually wait till there is a fine, warm day when the fliers will be away from the hive and are in a less protective mood. This helps, particularly when I am taking the frames out one by one. If you take them individually, make sure that after transferring frames to an empty super, you cover them, otherwise the bees will get back on to them.

We learn from experience. Once I loaded my wheelbarrow with three full supers, roughly 45 kilos (90 lb), to take them up to my house for extraction. On the way, the wheel hit a stone and the barrow collapsed! Just work within your own capabilities, be cautious and don't overload things.

After extracting the honey some people store the supers wet for next season whilst others put them back on the hive for clean-up by the bees. Both systems work. Personally, I have always put mine back on for clean-up and stored the supers dry, however, there is the risk of wax moth getting in and the chemicals we used to use to deal with the moths have been withdrawn from sale. One way around this is to freeze the frames to kill any moth larvae or eggs. An advantage of wet storage is that wax moth are reluctant to attack the wet frames.

Another question people ask is what to do with wet cappings. These have a lot of honey in them so I put them in a strainer for a couple of days during which time much of the honey will drain down. Then the semi dry cappings are put back on the hive for a couple of days so that the bees can take the remaining honey. Don't leave them too long though otherwise the bees can work the wax into a light-brown moon-scape, not the nice clean flakes that you would normally hope for.

Good luck with your extraction, remember there are many ways of tackling this task, so use one which suits you best.

D. S.

### **“When Bees were Bees”** by Tom Davies.

Some time before January 1930, the editor of the magazine “Gleanings in Bee Culture” received a sample of honey labelled “Narbonne Honey”, and the taste of it was described by the editor as the finest he had ever tasted. It was very white and had a scent rosemary.

Apparently in the middle ages a lot of honey was produced in the Narbonne area by monks and the local farmers. The planting of vines took over, proving more profitable, honey production dropped and declined into oblivion.

Onto the scene comes a Mr. Henry Freud, who had sent the sample to the magazine editor. Mr. Freud and some others had heard of the downfall of this honey and paid a visit to the Narbonne area, with a view of creating an apiary there.

They succeeded with the apiary and founded the “Societe Apicole de Narbonne”. Mr. Freud visited the U.S.A. to see how American beekeeping methods worked.

The hills and valleys around Narbonne are composed mainly of chalk, ideally suited for the rosemary shrubs, which resulted in many thousands of acres being available for nectar foraging, blooming from around January 25<sup>th</sup> until April 20<sup>th</sup>, weather sometimes causing some problems.

Till next time, Tom.

### **The National Botanic Garden**

Two things were mentioned about the National Botanic Garden recently. First that it was the destination of the team time trial of the 2021 Tour of Britain Bike Race and secondly, on 4<sup>th</sup> September it's beekeeping featured in the Daily Telegraph with a quarter page photograph of Lynda Christie leading volunteer beekeepers inspecting hives. There was no article, just the photo and a couple of lines explaining it.

I didn't recognise the setting in the photo which had some rusty corrugated iron sheets in the background. It seems to me that there must be a second apiary somewhere the Garden.

Recently, my brother came down for a few days and we visited a couple of local gardens including the National Botanic Garden and Aberglasney. At both gardens we were pleasantly surprised to see the number of honeybees foraging on the various plants. There were countless other pollinators there, many of which I couldn't name, and several varieties of bumblebee.

One white flowered bush at Aberglasney was covered with honeybees. I couldn't identify it and there was no one around to ask, so I took the attached photo and if you know what it is, please let me know.

One of our neighbours has an APP on his smart phone which identifies plants when you take a photo of them. It's one of the wonders of modern technology. There are several APPs available, some free and some with an annual subscription. One is described as "a botanist in your pocket". I just wish I had one of them with me at the time.

D. S.

### **"More About Bees" by Tom Davies**

It looks like some beekeepers will get a sort of a skimpy harvest, while others get a very good crop as there seems to be masses of blackberry flower about, plus quite a lot of clover still about in this area.

My bee garden is being visited well just now; my dahlias are flowering well, also the agastaches, and French marigolds as well, while the Michaelmas daisies are just about to start flowering. The buddleia I was given last year is flowering well at the moment attracting lots of butterflies.

All in all, this has been a very changeable year. The beans and other veg, together with the plants for the bee garden all flowered about three weeks later than normal but both the quality and quantity are exceptionally good!

It appears the Covid pandemic is finally giving way. I'm hoping that is the case, so that this could mean honey shows and other events could take place again.

Not a very nice day today, overcast and feeling quite damp outside. I'm hoping it gets better later on as the lawn could do with a good trim, as well as giving me some exercise!

Hope you get a nice crop of honey! Tom Davies.

The next newsletter is due out on 1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 2021. Please let me have your articles / items by **20<sup>th</sup> Oct.** Many thanks.

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