

Swansea & District Beekeepers Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch Newsletter

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Editor: D. Salkilld



No, the photo wasn't taken at Pisa! It's a display of honey at Fortnum & Mason, London, showing some of the varieties of honey for sale.

When we are visiting London, if there is time, we like to go to F. & M. to see and buy some of their wide variety of honeys. Also, we like to get some ideas for displaying our own honeys at honey shows. We particularly liked this display, seen back in 2014, which back-lit the different jars of honey and showed their wide variety of colours to great advantage to the public. The display had four sides with different honeys on each and my photo doesn't really do it justice. D. S.

The Society A. G. M.

This year we will be holding the A.G.M. on Tuesday, 8th February, at 7.30p.m. at the New Lodge Social Club, Gorseinon. Light refreshments will be provided and Martin asks that you let him know if you will be there so that he can make the necessary arrangements.

Gower Show Change of Date

Just to alert those of you without email facilities, the date of the Gower Show has been changed from its normal first Sunday in August (7th) to the last Sunday in July (31st). According to Martin's email, this is to avoid a clash of dates, though I'm not aware what the clash was with. As Martin says, "Put it in your diary and get your entries ready".

Clean-up Time

Here I am again, preaching to the membership, but winter time really is a good time to give your beekeeping equipment a thorough clean-up. Clean your supers, frames, excluders, extractor, smoker, etc. so that they are ready for use in the new season.

You might also have a think about buying any new equipment you may need, those extra frames, foundation, candle making bits and bobs etc. Winter is a good time to assemble frames and they will be ready to use when you need them in the Spring.

On another subject, I was glad to see that the WBKA Spring Convention will be back at the Royal Welsh Showground on Saturday 26th March. Things are getting back to normal post covid!! It's something to look forward to.

Bee Behaviour

In the Daily Telegraph dated 30th October, an article appeared which quoted findings of a study by the University College of London, as reported in the journal 'Science Advances'.

The study suggested that some colonies of honeybees had developed a behaviour to prevent the spread of varroa mites, namely by foragers doing their waggle dance towards the periphery of the nest whilst the nurse bees were at the centre. By this separation, transmission of the varroa mites is likely to be reduced. In normal circumstances, the waggle dance would have been done near the centre of the nest.

The behaviour was discovered after studying colonies which were heavily affected with varroa and comparing them with colonies which were clean.

Winter Rains

In the last newsletter I talked about the effect of cold weather on honeybees. This time, I want to mention the effects of heavy rain, particularly the danger of colonies being flooded.

In their feral state, honeybees live in a hole in a tree, high above any possibility of flood water touching a colony. However, those kept in hives at ground level, in gardens or on farmland, may be vulnerable if they are sited in a dip or a hollow. Although it is rare, I have seen pictures of hives, in the U.K. floating away in flood water. It's a sad sight indeed. Recently we seem to have been getting more and more heavy rains, so make sure that your colonies are not susceptible to them.

A related problem is getting across a muddy field whilst carrying equipment to your apiary. This is particularly important at harvest time when lugging heavy supers back to your car. Even using a barrow is more difficult at times like these.

So, when you are considering a potential apiary site, make sure it has good access and is unlikely to be flooded.

D. S.

“When Bees were Bees” by Tom Davies.

For this article I have part of a report sent into “Gleanings in Bee Culture” for May 1930. The report was from a MR. C. H. Gilbert, of Laramie, Wyoming, and described the 1929 winter.

The winter was described as a very unusual one, with the temperature dropping to 41° F below zero (-40.5° C), while some days in December and February were exceptionally warm for the time of year.

September, November, January, and March were all cold months. A week in the early part of September, a cold snap, killed all flowers in most parts of the state, and stopped brood-rearing, and also caused many colonies to go into winter light in stores.

October warmed up and brood rearing started up again in many colonies, while November turned cold again, the lowest temperature recorded was 21° F below zero (-29° C).

December warmed up again and bees were flying freely, while January was next to the coldest month ever recorded in the state, the minimum temperature being 45° F below zero in many sections (-42.7° C).

While the report dealt with colonies that were overwintered in cellars, many colonies spent the winter outside, packed in insulation and this proved to be ideal as the bees could fly openly in the milder spells.

Till next time, Tom.

Low Flying (Temperatures)

Some people have said that bees don't fly when temperatures plummet and, to a certain extent, they are correct. However, I have watched my bees flying in winter times when the ambient temperatures have been down as low as 6° C. Those flights had to be cleansing flights and I did wonder at the time if the cold weather got to them before they could return to the warmth of the hive. Unlike the reporter who, during the Falklands War, counted them out and counted them back, I didn't make a note of numbers at the time.

If any of you have experience of bees flying at very low temperatures, I would like to hear about it. Of particular interest is the temperatures at which honeybees will start to forage in spring.

Inside the hive, bees cluster into a ball for warmth in wintertime. This ball, made up of workers has the queen somewhere in the middle. The drones have long since been thrown out of the colony. This cluster is spread over the combs and changes its size as the temperatures go up or down, expanding or contracting as necessary to maintain its core temperature, ideally 35°C though it can get down to about 27°C.

Things are different at the outside of the cluster. There, temperatures can get down to about 8°C, pretty chilly! Honeybees circulate into the core for warmth and out again.

During the cold weather they eat very little of their honey stores. Warmth from the cluster heats the capped honey above them and as it is consumed, the cluster moves gradually upwards. The main reduction of winter stores is usually from February onwards, when the colony starts to raise brood. Then, they need the stores to generate and maintain brood temperatures.

I have always tried to leave 20 kg of honey in the brood area for overwintering, if necessary, feeding with syrup or inverted sugar to reach that amount. However, those stores didn't always guarantee survival of the colony. Many years ago, one of my colonies died out over winter. At the spring inspection, I found the cluster dead on one side of the hive and a huge amount of stores on the other side. My assumption at the time was that the weather had been too cold for the cluster to move across the frames to reach the remaining stores.

Later on in January, if you find that your colonies are light, feed them with fondant of which there are several brands available on the market. To check the weight of each hive, heft it by hand. This entails lifting one side slightly off its stand and judging if it is OK or if it is light. Instinct will tell you if it needs feeding or not.

Before fondant became available, white sugar was widely used for spring feeding. I only used it once, many years ago. I took a bag of white sugar (never use brown), cut a small hole in it, dampened the sugar inside and put it over the crown board hole. The bees came up and ate about half the packet out. Ah well, Happy memories of the good old days. D. S.

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“More About Bees” by Tom Davies

The 30th November, and a typical November day, a cloudy, chilly, damp day. I was hoping for it to be dry enough to get out and do some more work in the garden, but it looks doubtful for the moment.

I’ve made progress on getting it back under control and it should be right for when spring turns up, although I have decided to reduce the size of it because I’m not getting any younger!

In the last issue of our newsletter, No. 142, I was not aware that dried honey was used so much in baking, although the ways science has progressed as much as it has the last few years is amazing. At least the use of honey, albeit dried, is not a factory made, artificial product.

As I see it, honey being such a unique product, there will always be a demand for it, provided that we keep on attracting young people into the craft as a hobby. It appears to me that a more fascinating hobby would be hard to find.

It appears that covid still has not given up, yet another strain to contend with, I hope that it is just a flash in the pan; if it is not, it could have an effect in 2022.

With best wishes and hopefully no lost colonies over winter,
Till next time, Tom Davies.

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

The next newsletter is due out on 1st March. 2022. Please let me have your articles / items by **15th Feb.** Many thanks.