

Swansea & District Beekeepers Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch Newsletter

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Editor: D. Salkilld

ASIAN HORNET: Spring into action by David O'Carroll

The advice for beekeepers on handling the Asian Hornet invasion is changing as we learn more and more from the experience of European beekeepers. In this article, David outlines the Spring Advice from Swansea & District Asian Hornet Action Team.

Spring is a busy time for our bees as they emerge from their winter stupor and the colony starts to rebuild its strength for the Summer. There is an extra task for the beekeeper at this time of the year and this is getting ready for the Spring monitoring for Asian Hornets.

Many may feel that there is no need for action in Wales as the main entry points to the UK are its seaports facing the Continent. It is true that the main threat is routed through these ports but don't imagine that the Asian Hornets hop off the vehicles as soon as they arrive on our shores. If they have arrived in a load of timber they are likely to remain on-board until they are disturbed when the timber is off-loaded. So, I am sorry to say that the threat in our area is as real as any other part of the country.

The other fact to remember, is that although no overwintering Asian Hornet nests have yet been reported in the UK, it only means that they have not been found. The only way to find them is to keep vigilant.

So what should beekeepers do?

In a word, Vigilance. In March the first overwintering Queens emerge. The chances of seeing, let alone capturing, a Queen at this time of year must be very remote. From April the first brood of Asian Hornets will emerge and it is from this time that their activity may become noticeable; but only if people are looking out for them. Clearly we can't camp out in our apiaries - but we can set traps with a view to monitoring for hornets.

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At this time of year we are not suggesting that monitoring traps should be set in your apiary. There is no reason to believe that hornets will be attracted to beehives - they predate on any insect or food source that they come across.

Jar & Wick

There are various types of monitoring devices that can be bought or made. Perhaps the simplest is to use a jar with a wick. This needs to be placed in a sunny place, at head height, where you can see it easily and so 'keep an eye on it'. The jar and wick is an attracting device filled with a sweet bait designed to attract Asian Hornet Queens emerging from hibernation in early Spring. The bait could be a mixture of dark beer, with sugar or fruit juice. If you see many insects being attracted, then you probably have a suitable mixture!

As this sort of device does not trap insects it needs to be monitored when it is warm and sunny. If you notice a hornet and think it unusual, then that is the time to set up a trap so that you can make a positive identification of the insects in your trap.

It is simple to make a jar & wick. Make a hole in the lid of a used honey jar the size of your thumb. Make a wick by rolling a J-cloth into a tube and push it through the hole so that it just reaches the bottom of the jar. Part-fill the jar with your sweet attractant and keep it topped up from time to time.

More detailed advice on making traps is available from the National Bee Unit.

<https://nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?sectionid=117>

“When Bees were Bees” by Tom Davies.

The theme of this article is water, I must admit that the issue of water for my bees did not concern me much, as water was close to them due to nearby streams.

I have come across an article in “Gleanings in Bee Culture” for April 1933, by Mr. Penn G. Snyder, of Dayton, Ohio, USA, who remarked that the supply of water for bees was more important than was generally thought of.

Mr Snyder got interested in making sure that his bees had better access to water, because of reading a book published in England that contained items referring to some people who had a little problem when eating honey in the raw state, causing griping effect, but when taking a little water with it, gave no problems.

Mr. Snyder reasoned that possibly the failure of some colonies to rapidly build up in Spring was due to the shortage of water. To make use of honey stored in combs from last season requires water in good quantities, taking up the time of foraging bees, that would normally be on the job of collecting nectar and pollen.

The knock-on effect of a colony that failed to build up properly could be a reduced take of honey in that season, and I will resume the subject in the next issue. Till next time, Tom.

The Gower Show

Just a reminder that the 2022 Gower Show will be running again on the Penrice Estate, Gower, but will be held at the **earlier date of Sunday, 31st July**. This is a week earlier than normal, apparently, due to some clash of dates. Gill Lyons tells me that the schedules are being prepared and will be with us shortly. The judges this year will be Bill Fisher and Sue Carter. It is several years since they last judged our show and we welcome them back. Both are qualified National Honey Show judges

Do have a go at entering some of your honey, wax, honey cakes mead or honey related produce. It gives a real buzz to win a prize or rosette for your entries. There are classes for everyone, particularly novices, which are open to those who have not yet won a prize at any honey show, now is your chance to do so!

Nearer to the show, Gill will be asking for volunteers to help with set up in the marquee and to steward on show day. Keep an eye out for emails asking for helpers.

Regarding the Bee Experience, I asked Martin if it will be at the Gower Show this year and he told me that it will probably be the only outing of the year. He will also be calling for volunteers at a later time.

A New Treasurer

Our Treasurer, John Gale, is stepping down after 12 years in the post and we would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his hard work over this time. He is in the process of handing over to Karen Squires and I hear that they are in touch with the bank to complete the necessary formalities.

Throughout these years John kept meticulous records of the Society accounts and was always available to help members.

We welcome Karen to the post and wish her well.



“John drilling down to the fine details of the Society’s accounts”

Photo courtesy of David O’Carroll

And a New Editor for our Newsletter.

The time has come for me to hand over the reins of editorship to the next generation and it is with some pleasure that I can announce that Mandy Williams has volunteered to take up the post. As of the next issue, Mandy, with the aid of her husband, Richard, will be issuing the newsletter

I got involved some 24 years ago simply because there was a need to spread information about our Society activities and social calendar, and the then Secretary, Howard Edmunds, agreed because I had a computer to do it on. It has been fun and quite a challenge to find something new every couple of months. I would like to take this opportunity thank all our contributors, particularly Tom Davies, for their much-valued support throughout these years.
David Salkilld

It's Swarm Time Again

It has been said that the aim of beekeepers is to get a supply of honey and beeswax from their colonies, whereas the aim of the bees is to reproduce and they do it by swarming in the spring. This urge to reproduce cannot be suppressed, it is a completely natural process and will happen no matter what we do, after all, they have been doing it successfully for millions of years.

There are many aspects to swarming that we beekeepers can use to our advantage. It can be used to increase our number of colonies, or, to give us strong young queens each year. The downside comes when you do nothing and swarms affect your neighbours, giving a bad reputation to beekeeping in general.

One option is to artificially swarm a colony. There are many ways of doing this which allow the bees to go through their natural reproductive sequence whilst controlling any unwanted consequences. These are well documented and can be used to increase your stocks whilst at the same time, giving you back-up queens in case they are needed.

Prime swarm time is in May / early June, though it can happen earlier or later. Vigilance is needed during spring inspections to watch for the start of queen cells and you need to be ready to act as soon as you see them.

For these techniques you will need to have spare equipment such as nuc boxes and frames of foundation ready at hand and, preferably, have your queens marked. If you have unmarked queens, mark them as soon as possible when the weather is fine and warm (2021 white, 2022 yellow). Though they can be elusive, it is far easier to find the queens before the colony builds to full strength.

If your interest is in catching other people's swarms, get yourself registered on admin@beeswarm.uk and you will get notification of any swarms which occur in your area.

When swarms are newly emerged they are normally docile and easy to handle. However, if they have been 'hanging around' for more than four or five days, they can be a little less friendly, so always be careful when approaching them. As above, always have your equipment ready for instant use.

Good luck, D.S.

Wasps

It's mid-April and I've seen my first queen wasp of the year! They usually show up at about this time and, contrary to some thoughts, are good for the gardens, feeding on greenfly and other pests. Honeybees are vegetarian whereas wasps (and hornets) are carnivorous.

It is in the autumn time that we need to protect our beehives from wasp attack and there are a variety of ways to do that. Wasp traps containing sugar or jam, located at a distance from a hive, attract wasps away from hives. Also, tunnel entrances to hives are said to give honeybees the ability to defend their entrances and deter wasps from entering, though I have not had the need to try them so can only comment on what I have read. D.S.

The Society Apiary By David O'Carroll

The Society's apiary has been located in the grounds surrounding the RSPCA's Animal Centre at Llys Nini for quite a few years now and due to the hard work of the Apiary Team a surrounding fence was been constructed to make it safe for visitors to the centre to view beekeeping activity from a safe distance. At least that was the theory.

After a member of the centre staff was stung, we moved the hives to the bottom of the field, far away from the footpath people use to take their new dogs for their first walk. This activity has increased over time and a member of the public was stung - the finger was pointed at one of our bees.

The centre has developed its Woodland Trail and the first event for the Easter Woodland Trail was an egg hunt for The Golden Egg.

Mike drew on the deepest reserves of diplomacy, which he didn't realise he had, to get agreement for the apiary to be re-sited in a field above the RSPCA centre. On a cold day in February, whilst the bees were snugly tucked up in their colonies, the move started, colony by colony. Five so far have been relocated but the Apiary Team will need some help in moving the shed and other equipment. Volunteers needed! The date has yet to be announced so keep a lookout for Society emails. Please contact Mike Grinter via WhatsApp on 07872 960088.

Interesting research

An article in the Daily Telegraph on 9th March, written by their Environment Correspondent, Olivia Rudgard, highlighted the benefits to pollinating insects of weeds, as compared to planted "wild flowers".

She was quoting from a paper written by scientists from the University of Sussex who had been observing the foraging habits of many insects including bees and wasps.

They observed wildflower sites planted by councils and sites containing weeds such as common ragwort and creeping thistle and noted that bees preferred these weeds to nearby red clover and wild marjoram. In fact, they noted that twice as many bees visited the weeds.

Under freedom of information requests, the researchers found that councils, Highways England and Natural England, the national nature advisor, spent £10 million each year controlling the weeds.

Dr. Nicholas Balfour, a researcher at the university is quoted as saying "There exists a substantial body of evidence which shows that weeds are a vitally important resource for pollinators, the species studied produced, on average, four times more nectar sugar than Defra-recommended plant species".

D.S.

The June Gap

At this time of year, dandelions are at their best, and along with daisies and other wildflowers, they provide a great source of nectar and pollen for our colonies. This is a vital time for colonies to build up their strength in readiness to overcome the June gap. You might even be lucky enough to have sufficient stores on your colonies to enable a spring crop to be taken, but be cautious, if you harvest too much honey, they might run out of stores in June when there is very little forage available for them.

In this part of the country, the main summer honeyflow is from late July through early August, though it can vary with the weather. The important things are to maximise colony strength to take advantage of it and to have your supers ready for use. P.S. Dandelion pollen gives beeswax a lovely yellow colour.

D.S.

Contact Numbers

Chairman:	Paul Lyons	sd_bks@btinternet.com
Secretary:	Martin Davies	sdbks.secretary@gmail.com
Treasurer:	Karen Squires	treasurer.sdbks@gmail.com
Editor	Mandy Williams	sdbks.editor@gmail.com

“More About Bees” by Tom Davies

The weather has dragged on and on, and the covid pandemic seems to be ruining things again. I have just had a further vaccination against it because of my age.

Things in the garden are slow coming on due to late frosts, and the cold winds are sort of baking the soil. A nice gentle sort of warm weather would be nice about now.

I have got things coming along in the greenhouse, tomato plants, tagetes, dahlia tubers shooting nicely, although I have to shade them when the sun comes up to avoid them drying up quickly.

Quite a few bumblebees about at the moment, there is quite a lot of flowering plants plus weeds to help them on their way, no honeybees seen yet though, perhaps they don't like to wake up too early around here.

The grass in this area seems to be growing more quickly this time of year, I have had to mow the lawn twice already, unusual for me. If this is pretty general, out apiaries could do with a bit of looking after at this time.

Hope all your bees have survived the winter, and are looking good for the new season.

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 July 2022. Please let Mandy have your articles / items by **15th Jun**. Many thanks.