



Swansea and District Beekeepers

Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch

Newsletter/ Cylchlythyr

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Introduction

Hello and welcome to my first newsletter as editor.

Before I introduce myself properly, I'd like to thank David Salkild who has compiled this essential source of bee keeping advice, information and inspiration for 24 years.

We would all like to pass on our thanks and gratitude to David for his dedication. Twenty-four years is a long time - when David first took the reins Tony Blair was Prime Minister and the varroa mite was a newly established problem in England and Wales.

Thank you, David, for your service to the Society.

My name is Mandy Williams. I was interested in bees for many years before becoming hooked. I decided to start volunteering at the National Botanic Garden in 2016 following my retirement from the NHS, initially in horticulture, but I found out about the bee garden and its mysterious occupants and got reeled in!

Richard is my better half, and we had a hive at the bottom of our garden for about 18 months, but limited time due to family commitments meant we had to find the colony new owners. We miss them foraging among the flower beds and drinking from the pond, but we miss their delicious, light floral bramble honey even more!

I maintain my involvement with bee keeping by volunteering at the Botanic Gardens every Thursday for bee inspections.

And now we look forward to keeping you updated and passing on your thoughts and advice to other members. After reading the newsletters since becoming a member of this Society, David is a tough act to follow.

Best wishes,

Mandy and Richard.



Just to re-iterate Mandy's comments above, David has been a stalwart of the Society for a very long time and I along with the other Committee members, would like to thank him for the assistance, dedication and friendship he has provided during that time. He hasn't gone anywhere, so I am sure we will see him around from time to time, but now being of a certain age (21 plus VAT and postage & packing) he has taken the opportunity to step back and let others carry on where he has left off. It is also a pleasure to welcome Mandy as our new Editor and I look forward to seeing her publish the articles and snippets of information she receives from us during her tenure.

Cheers

Martin

APIARY NEWS

Apiary move - Friday, May 27th, 2022

The Society Apiary has been sited in a field at the RSPCA Llys Nini Animal Centre for over ten years, a mostly harmonious arrangement. However, the increased footfall and extra activities at the site have meant that the visitors have encroached more and more on the bee space.



The original apiary was in a field next to a track used by dog walkers, but due to an increasing number of complaints, we moved the hives into the centre of the field away from the track to give a buffer zone. This worked for a while but given that the new site was overshadowed by trees and the ground quite damp, it was less than ideal. Grumpy bees!! When the market garden moved in next to us, it became clear we were going to have to move again to give the bees some peace and carry out regular inspections without recriminations.

The decision was made to re-site. A new area was negotiated, preparations begun, the grass was cut, and some hives moved. The easy bit done, a date was arranged to move the sheds and equipment, come rain or shine, we just needed enough willing volunteers.



Mike Grinter and some of the apiary team

Friday May 27th, 2022, came and up stepped Chris, Jonathan, Eddy, Steve, Paul, Ian and Ade with his trailer. A plan had been formulated - we would put the sheds on a raft of plastic pallets. This would keep it off the ground reducing the potential for damp and do away with the need to level out a base on the reed compacted ground. If it worked it was Apiary Manager Mike's idea, if it didn't it was Stephen Davies who thought it up!

So, to the physical bit, "we'll have to take them apart"- sounds a pain - "let's get the workmen on site to load them with their lo shovel" - a great idea. However, when we went to find them, they'd gone for a two-hour breakfast, back to the drawing board.

Taking some inspiration from the Egyptians we rigged up a couple of levers, Ade expertly moved the trailer in alongside and we levered the shed to 30-degree angle (precise planning or what). Now we had it tilted, what next?



Base at new apiary site for shed



We pushed up the levers onto the trailer of course, easy peasy. Well not quite it took a fair bit of shoving and a little bit of blind faith the levers would do the job. However, they worked perfectly and with a little fettling and fine tuning the shed was on the trailer. "Straight to my house?" Ade's never one to miss an opportunity.

Looking a little like an American house move, albeit on a much smaller scale, we set off for the new site some 500m away through the lane and car park. Relying heavily on the skills of our driver it was decided we'd drive the shed as close as possible then slide it off the trailer onto the pallets. A great plan until we realised it would entail the shed self-suspending over the pallets whilst the trailer was removed.



After a bit more head scratching and some, frankly bonkers suggestions (mostly Mike) it came down to Chris to come up with a working plan. We'd build a stack of pallets, slide the shed onto them, move the trailer away then lever the shed from side to side removing the pallets until it was sat on a single layer. Still sound bonkers?



It worked! Surprised us too, but the shed had landed! "It's not level" someone shouted, where upon several methods to remedy this were discussed. We settled on the "laissez faire" method of shed levelling - "it's flat it'll be fine it's a shed not a kitchen cabinet". off we went to get the smaller shed, essentially more of the same on a slightly smaller scale.

After refilling the sheds and sweeping up it was job done and it only took 5 hours.

A very big thank you to the volunteers that gave up most of what turned out to be a lovely sunny day.

Mike Grinter

Note from Mike – Many thanks to Eddy Fisher for taking the photographs to record the Apiary relocation.



Bee heaven - the new apiary site at Llys Nini

The Gower Show is Back 2022

The Gower Show has run for over a hundred years - only being cancelled during war time, animal disease epidemics and now Covid. But Sunday 31st July 2022 marks its return so make sure you have this date in your diary.



Gower Show Honey tent 2017

The Society is at the forefront of organizing the Honey Tent at the show with our own Gill Lyons as the Show Secretary responsible for getting everything needed for the Honey Section of the show.

She is backed by a group of SDBKS members who do the 101 tasks in preparation for the event and for volunteering on the day.

It is not too late to volunteer for the day as we need members to man the tent and perform a myriad of tasks including:

- Meeting & greeting - and if needed, drumming up visitors to the tent
- Helping with candle rolling
- Standing by the observation hive to explain the various parts of the colony
- Manning the children's quiz
- Taking bookings for the Bee Experience
- Helping members of the public dress up in bee suits
- Showing the hive in the Bee Experience tent
- Standing by exhibits to answer questions from the public
- Selling honey and other produce
- Making tea and coffee for volunteers

Volunteers will get a free entry to the show.

Blue Ribbon

Gill Lyons' most satisfying achievement has been in gaining Blue Ribbon status for the honey show. She says "The *National Honey Show's* Blue Ribbon is the premier award at honey shows around the country and it is a great honour for our show to be a Blue Ribbon show. But we can't sit on our laurels - to keep the designation we must have over one hundred exhibits at each show".

This is where you come in! If every member of SDBKS made one entry there would be more than enough to maintain the Blue Ribbon status. You do not need to be an experienced beekeeper or indeed a beekeeper to enter. There are 29 classes including three for novices who have never won a prize in a honey show in the same category (see rule 16 in the Honey Show programme).

Gill encourages all members to have a go. "If you are new to beekeeping and haven't yet extracted any honey, there are plenty of classes that you can enter. From *Honey Snickerdoodle Biscuits* to a photograph to illustrate an aspect of beekeeping".

If you have any questions about volunteering or exhibiting at the show, please contact the Secretary at: sdbks.secretary@gmail.com

The Gower Show is Back 2022 (cont'd)

We will be having a Society event on preparing for the show on **Tuesday 19th July at 7.00pm** at New Lodge, Gorseinon. Gill will be joined by many experienced exhibitors who will be there to provide advice on preparing exhibits and to answer any questions. There will be 1lb "squat" glass honey jars on sale.



And so, what is so special about having Blue Ribbon status? Sue Carter and Bill Fisher, our Show Judges are National Honey Show approved judges. This means that they carry a supply of Blue Ribbons and Novice awards. If they consider that an entry is exceptional and up to National Honey Show standards, then they can make an award at the show. The Novice Prize winner will be given a gift admission ticket to the National Honey Show which this year is being held at Sandown Park Racecourse in Surrey.

See you at the Gower Show!
David O'Carroll



Bee tent experience



Local honey for sale



Candles in competition



*First Prize Entry for Composite
(Emyr Jenkins)*



Stunning display



Fruit honey cake entries

ASIAN HORNET ARTICLE 3

In earlier articles we have discussed the impact of the Asian Hornet *Vespa Velutina* as a predator of other insects including the honeybee. The life cycle of this hornet needs to be understood as it affects the response needed by beekeepers at different times of the year.

The general approach suggested by the SDBKS Asian Hornet Action Team is primarily a monitoring role whilst there are few instances of finding Asian Hornet nests in Wales, let alone the UK mainland. The aim of monitoring is to quickly identify Asian Hornet activity and alert the National Bee Unit so that they can decide whether an Asian Hornet has been discovered and then to initiate a professional hunt to find the location of the hornet nest and to destroy it.

The purpose of action by beekeepers is two-fold. First to halt or at least slow the progress of the invasion of the UK by a non-native species - the Asian Hornet. Secondly to safeguard our own honeybee colonies from predation by Asian Hornets.

Asian Hornet activity in the summer

The Asian Hornet Queen, having mated in the autumn, hibernates over winter. In the Spring she will build a small 'primary nest' usually no bigger than a tennis ball. It has a papery texture and looks similar to a wasp nest. She lays eggs in her nest and feeds the worker larvae when they first emerge. At this stage around February/March (maybe later in UK we just don't have enough evidence) she will not be preying honeybees.



European hornet v Asian Hornet

Photo courtesy of FERA Training Video

It is the next stage of the Asian Hornet life cycle which causes beekeepers most concern. From about May to July the rapidly increasing number of worker hornets will start to build a secondary nest. It may not be very far from where the primary nest was built; it is thought that this larger nest will be built higher up. The nest will not necessarily be in a tree; nests have been found in hedges, brambles and even cliff tops.

As her workforce increases, the Queen can concentrate on laying eggs as the workers build an ever-increasing nest and feed the emerging larvae with nectar and insects. It is at this stage that monitoring by beekeepers can be most effective. The earlier in the summer that a nest can be found the more limiting on the future spread of Asian Hornets will be.

Summer monitoring

For the spring monitoring we recommended a simple jar and wick which needs to be watched. For the summer we need something more effective. We need to trap hornets so that they can be positively identified as Asian Hornets. You can buy a commercially made trap or make a simple trap from plastic fizzy drink bottles. A [fact sheet](#) and [YouTube](#) video on how to make an Asian hornet monitoring trap are available from the [Asian hornet pages of BeeBase](#).

For summer monitoring there are two differences to springtime monitoring:

- You will need to check it daily and release any native insects including native hornets.
- The bait used is different.



Asian Hornets feeding on fish

During the summer predatory worker hornets seek high protein foods to feed the larvae. To make a protein bait, raw meat or fish with water can be used. The National Bee Unit use a protein bait of mashed fish e.g., prawns or trout, diluted to 25%. Be aware, if you choose to use a protein bait it will need changing after 3 days due to decay and an unpleasant aroma. You may be able to find a proprietary wasp trap bait in your local garden centre or DIY store.

The current advice from the National Bee Unit is that you only need to put up monitoring traps if:

- You suspect that you have seen an Asian Hornet.
- You have received an alert from the National Bee Unit or other organization.
- You live close to a ferry terminal or port (I'm not sure whether Swansea counts!).

SDBKS will alert members if the Society becomes aware of an Asian Hornet incursion.

The National Bee Unit says that monitoring traps are best placed in sunny areas, in trees, on hive stands, in and around affected apiaries, at the height of a person. Avoid deep shade where hornets are unlikely to forage.

If you suspect that you have caught an Asian Hornet, then you should put the entire trap in a sealed plastic bag and place it in a freezer for at least 12 hours. In the meantime, you should report 'the sighting'. Alert the relevant authorities of your suspect sighting as soon as possible using the 'Asian Hornet Watch' [iPhone](#) or [Android](#) app or by filling out an [online report form](#). It is helpful to send a photograph of the specimen and please alert the Swansea Asian Hornet Action Team - david.ocarroll@yahoo.co.uk

Finally

The National Bee Unit has asked all beekeepers to use the Asian hornet trap recording feature on Bee Base. Information on how to use this can be found on page 9 of this [Asian Hornet Trap Tick Box FAQ](#)

Skep Beekeeping ~ by David Salkilld.

Wooden beehives have been in use for hundreds of years, but early ones were few and far between, presumably because of the cost of materials. However, straw, willow canes and mud were easily available to town and country folk alike, so in Great Britain and Europe, these became the common hive building materials of old.

A quick note regarding wooden hives. Christopher Wren (1632-1723) is known to have recorded wooden hives, and several types were known in those days but were relatively rare. These were often hexagonal or octagonal in shape, imitating the shape of a natural hole in a tree. Later ones, like the Stewarton Hive (octagonal, c1820) could be expanded by adding extra boxes. However, in general, people still made their own skep hives with the commonly available materials.



Straw skeps are made with 'ropes' of long straw, coiled into shape and bound together, often in the past with a bramble binding, but today, they are more likely to be with bound with split cane. They vary in size and shape dependant on who is making them. Some are made to sit on a wooden base which has an entry ramp carved into it. Others had an entry hole for the bees in the side of the skep.

Straw, of course, is liable to become waterlogged and will rot if it is left out in the rain, so skeps were usually sheltered in holes in walls, called 'bee boles'. There can still be seen today in the walls of old walled gardens up and down the country. I have even seen them built into the wall of an Elizabethan manor house, Gainsborough Old Hall. They kept the skeps dry and away from the elements.



Harvesting the honey in earlier times was done after first killing off the colony. Latterly, it was done more humanely by rehousing the colony in a fresh skep. This was achieved by turning the full skep upside-down, putting an empty skep on top and 'driving' the bees by rhythmically tapping the lower skep so that the bees were driven up into the empty one by the drumming. I have never seen this done and I missed the opportunity at one of the Midland and South-Western Counties Convention where it was the subject of a workshop. I was at a different workshop that day, but people who saw it said that it took about half an hour to drive the bees and, at the end of that time, the poor beekeeper who was demonstrating was totally wacked.

If skeps were made with a small hole at the top, another could be put on like a super. For demonstration purposes, sometimes a glass bell jar would be put on top though this needed a cover to keep it in the dark. These bell jars were then shown at honey shows so that the public could see them filled with comb.

Straw skeps are surprisingly strong. I have made some during my beekeeping career and have stood on them! They didn't collapse under my weight. They are relatively easy to produce but time consuming. Only two tools are needed, a feeder ring and a hollow piercing needle. The most difficult thing is to find a source of long strand straw which nowadays is rare due to modern farming methods and equipment.

Feeder rings used to be made of cow horn, cut so that the hole through them was about 20 to 25 mm diameter. Nowadays, a piece of plastic plumbing tube is more common. Strands of straw are fed through it and come out as a rope. This rope is then bound on to the adjacent coil.

Straw skeps are used by some enthusiasts in this country but are banned in U.S.A. because the comb cannot be removed for disease inspection. However, there is nothing to prevent them from being used as garden ornaments, and if a swarm decides to colonise it, well, that's nature.

Willow skeps are made like a woven basket with the willow rods woven in and out to form a circular skep which is round at the bottom and narrows to a point where the rods are tied together at the top. To make the skep, the rods are first tied together at one end and then as the weaving progresses, the diameter increases until the required size and height are achieved.



They are then coated on the outside with a mud mixture, probably with animal dung mixed in, called cloom, which weatherproofs them. I have seen examples in various museums but have never had experience of making them, although classes for both straw and wicker skeps are available today.

D.S.



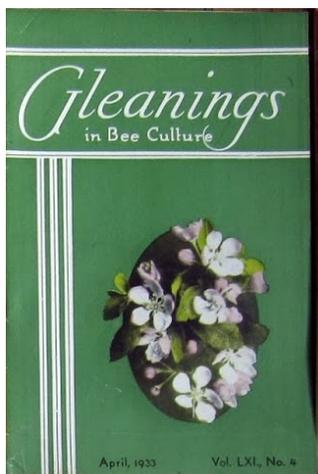
Bee skeps in 'Bee Boles' at St. Fagan's Museum of History, Cardiff.



Bees on comb in traditional skep

“When bees were bees” by Tom Davies

‘In the last issue of our newsletter (No 145), the subject of water needed by the bees to make use of the hardened combs left on in the previous season, and the lack of it would perhaps hinder the development of the colony.



The need for water had been brought up by a Mr. Penn G. Snyder of Dayton, Ohio, who had described the need for water in an article sent in to “Gleanings in Bee Culture” for April 1933, in which it was stated that old honeycomb could be used more efficiently with the use of water.

In years gone by, when I had bees here, I used to raise plants in the peat compost and while I would be watering them, I would have bees taking a drink from the compost trays, showing that bees do prefer warm water when it is on hand.

In any area that colonies have been slow to build up for the new season, it could a good idea to provide a source of water, even an experiment on a trial basis, well worth the effort, and could make a good contribution to understanding the needs of our bees in the early part of the season.

I hope there are no losses, and all your bees are in good shape. A good honey year would be very nice’.

“More about bees” – Tom Davies

‘Not at my best just now, unable to get into the garden to check up on things but am very slowly improving.

I had planted up my bee garden earlier in the year, so it should be just about coming good by now. I hope to look on it in a few days’ time, maybe a spot of weeding.

Glad to hear the Gower Show is going to be held. Albeit a little earlier than usual. I feel the show reflects the efforts shown by our members and keeps our Society’s good standing with the show committee.

My veg garden is not looking good at the moment, was not able to do a lot, so I will miss some crops this year, I did manage to get some kale planted for next winter, steamed kale is one of my favourites, while in the following spring some of the flowering tops taste very special.

I leave some flowers on and usually attract many bees and hoverflies, so I don’t discard them until absolutely necessary.

On that, if you manage to get a prize card at the Gower Show, WELL DONE!!!’

Tom Davies.

With many thanks to Mr. Davies for taking the time to send me the article, and hope you feel better soon.

Diary dates - Social evenings 2nd Tuesday of month at New Lodge Club, Gorseinon.

July

- Royal Welsh Show
Monday 18th July – Thursday 21st July 2022 Showground, Builth Wells
- Committee Meeting
Tuesday 12th July 2022
- Social evening/talk
Tuesday 19th July 2022 New Lodge Club, Gorseinon, SA4 4PR
- Gower Show with Bee Tent Experience
Sunday 31st July 2022 Penrice Castle, Gower

August

- Vale of Glamorgan Show with Bee Tent Experience – to be confirmed
Wednesday August 10th, 2022, Penllyn, Cowbridge

September

- Heart of the Valley Show with Bee Tent Experience – to be confirmed
Saturday September 3rd, 2022, Pontardawe Community Sports and Recreation Ground

Webinars available on WBKA website - free and accessible to all via

<https://wbka.com/wbka-webinars>

Bee Inspectors

Regional bee Inspector - Margaret Gill margaret.gill@apha.gov.uk Mobile No: 07979 119373

Local Bee Inspector - George Tonge george.tonge@apha.gov.uk Mobile No: 07769 643138

Our next newsletter is due 1st September 2022

Could you please forward any items for inclusion by August 15th, 2022, to sdbks.editor@gmail.com

Thank you/ Diolch yn fawr.

With many thanks to all who have contributed to this newsletter, please keep sending me any news, info, articles or pictures and I will try to include them.