

Scottish Beekeepers' Association

Education and Examination Committee



GUIDELINES FOR HONEY JUDGES AND SHOW COMMITTEES

Issue 2014

THE SCOTTISH BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION HONEY JUDGE PANEL
GUIDELINES FOR JUDGES AND SHOW COMMITTEES

The aim of this publication is to achieve a fair degree of standardisation of honey judging throughout Scotland. This should be of benefit to judges and exhibitors and should enhance the ethos of honey shows generally.

These guidelines constitute the consensus of opinion which evolved from a symposium of SBA Honey Judges in September 1993 and their subsequent comments on the draft guidelines.

It must be emphasised that these are only recommendations which each Judge is free to accept or reject just as each Show Committee is free to withhold a second invitation to a Honey Judge. They could however prove to be a useful reference should any dispute arise.

William A. MacKenzie
Secretary
Honey Judge Panel
April 1994

Updates:

Option of using disposable plastic coffee stirrers in place of glass tasting rods, recommended reading list added, plus other detail additions -2014

See also the Honey Judge Examination Syllabus (2014) for those wishing to gain the SBA Honey Judge Certificate.

Checklist and General Advice to Judges

The following is a list of recommended items which the Honey Judge should have or ensure are available:—

- the show schedule;
- a white warehouse/laboratory coat and white hat;
- a silk cloth for handling beeswax;
- a set of British Standard grading glasses;
- a magnifying glass;
- an electric torch (plus spare battery and bulb);
- at least six honey tasting glass rods and three tumblers (honey jars) for hot and cold water and
A cloth to dry the rods OR disposable coffee stirrers and containers for clean & used stirrers;
- a thermos flask of hot water;
- a tape measure;
- a note book, pencil and ball pen;
- a penknife;
- three glasses (or disposable glasses) for sampling mead (one if entry small);
- a bread knife for cutting cakes;
- a box of matches or small lighter (for lighting candles);
- a damp cloth in a plastic bag for wiping sticky hands;
- an apple to refresh the palate;
- tissues;
- a set of scales.

Before beginning the judging check that:—

- any questions regarding the Schedule have been clarified by the Show Secretary;
- the Show Secretary has agreed to change any entry in the wrong class
- otherwise reject the entry;
- the tumblers of water are in place if needed;

- the Steward has a supply of place cards;
- if multiple entries are permitted but only one award per exhibitor per class then make sure that the Steward has been given a list of these entries by the show secretary;
- the Steward is quite clear about his duties.

As judging must proceed methodically it is useful in the classes which have a large entry such as Liquid Honey and Set Honey to identify those jars which have been rejected by simply turning the pair of jars so that the number is no longer seen. For those which are downgraded turn just one jar. Only those with numbers still showing need be considered further.

Flavour — When taking a sample do not mutilate the exhibit. The exhibitor may wish to enter it in another show. Therefore with set honey take a sample from around the edge of the surface and for comb honey take it from one or two cells at the edge. Ignore evidence of previous similar careful sampling. Use a glass rod or disposable stirrer and not a finger to transfer the honey to the mouth. Clean the rod with water/dispose of the stirrer.

Be prepared to be available to answer exhibitors' questions and/or to write comments if requested. This is particularly important at the smaller shows where an educative element might be welcomed by the exhibitors. Consideration might be given to making use of the following FAULT SLIP. (See end of document for duplicates)

Scottish Beekeepers' Association	
Class.....	Exhibit No.
Faults	X = a fault
Cleanliness	
Viscosity	
Granulation	
Wax on surface	
Aroma/Flavour	
Fermentation	
Jar/Lid quality	
Other	
Indicated above are the principal faults which I have found in this exhibit. This information is given in the hope that they will be avoided in the future	
..... Honey Judge	

STEWARDS

Stewards are there to assist the Judge but must only do that which the Judge requests; therefore the Steward should:—

- wear a white warehouse/lab coat and white hat;
- not smoke while attending the Judge;
- not make any comments unless requested to by the Judge;
- only at the Judge's request loosen lids and not remove;
- ensure that clean dry glass rods are always available;
- change the hot and cold water as required.

General Comment — An exhibit should be rejected if it does not conform with the schedule; also as the honey should be fit for human consumption it should be rejected if it is not clean. It is recommended that a comparative system of judging should be used except for composite classes where a points system might be fairer and easier to apply.

Liquid Blossom honey

With lid on consider both jars for:—

Colour — If in doubt check that the exhibit is in the right class. Use grading glasses and a sheet of white paper behind the jar. If it is a small show then agree with the Show Convener/Steward to change any in the wrong class — otherwise reject.

The colour must be uniform throughout the exhibit.

Brightness — A dull appearance may be due to incipient granulation or fermentation and should be downgraded.

Cleanliness — Examine for foreign material such as black specks, hair and parts of bees. Reject if present.

Jars and Lids — Consider rejection:—

- if the jars and lids are not identical
- if the jar is not filled to the correct level (Generally no air space should be visible between the lower rim of the lid and the top of the honey, but depends on lid type)
- if there is rust or dents on the lid
- if the jars show signs of old labels etc.

With lid off one jar

Immediately test the **Aroma**. if this is unpleasant then downgrade and reassess when tasting.

If there is little aroma then suspect that the honey is old or overheated therefore consider downgrading.

CARE — Guard against surface contamination from the air.

Surface — Reflected light on the surface shows up surface contaminants. Examine for dust and bubbles at the edges.

Incipient (start of) granulation and contaminants are revealed by the use of a strong light (torch) under the jar.

Do not penalize if honey is on the underside of the lid.

Viscosity — test using a glass rod or stirrer, If the aroma and flavour are satisfactory then favour the more viscous exhibit as a low viscosity can indicate unripe honey. The ambient temperature also affects the viscosity. The refractometer can be used as a final test.

Flavour — **Use a glass rod/stirrer and not a finger to transfer the honey to the mouth.** clean the rod with water & dispose of the stirrer in a waste container. If the taste is not “nice and mellow” then suspect it is old reheated honey.

Repeat the procedure with the second jar of the entries which are still potential prizewinners.

Bell Heather Honey

If there is a separate class for Bell Heather Honey then it should be excluded from the dark class; however accept it in the dark class if it is not specifically excluded. Rich brightness, port wine colour, pleasant flavour and aroma are typical.

Naturally Granulated Honey

Colour — there should be uniform colour.

Cleanliness — Reject if extraneous matter such as black specks can be seen at the bottom or the sides of the jar.

Some **shrinkage, light frosting or air bubbles** on the shoulder of the jar warrants downgrading.

The **surface** should be firm and dry and the texture finely grained therefore downgrade if it is coarse and gritty.

Fermentation disqualifies the entry.

Soft Set Honey

Downgrade if there is not a firm, dry and matt or slight sheen surface. The consistency should be that of soft butter.

As naturally granulated honey can have a fine soft consistency which can be indistinguishable from soft set honey **it is recommended that for non-liquid honey, show schedules should have only one class called Set Honey.**

Chunk Honey

This class requires a high degree of skill in order to present a satisfactory exhibit.

Criteria for the liquid honey are as above — this includes the honey in the comb.

As it is very difficult to prevent air bubbles from adhering to the comb this should be treated sympathetically.

Downgrade if flakes of comb are floating on the surface.

Liquid Heather Honey (Ling)

Historically this class has been for pressed honey only. As there is an increasing tendency to extract Ling honey by the process of spinning it is recommended that at large shows there should be a class for Pressed Heather Honey and another for Spun Heather Honey. At other shows they might be combined.

Because of the gelatinous nature of ling heather honey air bubbles are held in suspension and therefore the jar must be well filled for it to contain the stipulated weight.

The **suspended bubbles** should be evenly distributed.

Colour should be light to dark amber — if it is very dark suspect over- heating or the presence of honeydew.

Aroma and Flavour are characteristic of ling honey. If it is overheated the caramelisation can be readily tasted.

Fermentation may be present because of the high moisture content and presence of air bubbles.

Consistency — There should be little or no movement when the jar is tilted.

Agitating a small area of the surface with a rod should lower the viscosity (**thixotropic**). This is also demonstrated by scoring a line once or twice across the surface and then tilting the jar. The greater the rate of flow by the agitated honey then the greater is its thixotropicity and therefore its purity and freedom from overheating.

Comb Honey

All frames, sections and cut comb should be in accordance with the show schedule. Pay particular attention to the correct presentation and to the weight specification. Reject if these do not conform to the schedule requirements.

All combs should be well filled with few (if any) empty cells round the edge. Cappings should form a level surface. Any bulging, damp cappings or weeping should be downgraded and if due to fermentation should be rejected. If blemishes such as Braula or wax moth larvae tracks are visible then reject but if the comb is for extraction then strongly down grade. Faint travel staining should be downgraded but reject heavy staining unless the comb is for extraction.

The comb should be composed of all worker or all drone cells with preference given to worker cells unless the comb is for extraction where drone cells are preferred.

Use a strong light to ensure that there is neither a mixture of light and dark honey nor any cells with granulated honey, pollen or propolis if these are present consider rejection if prevalent.

To test the **flavour** avoid damaging the comb by carefully removing honey from a few cells on the edge and at the same time check for granulation.

Frames

The wood should be clean — accept slight propolis staining. Generally if it is for extraction the comb should have been drawn from wired foundation and should stand proud of the frame to facilitate uncapping.

If the comb is attached to the wood on all four sides then unwired foundation is acceptable unless the schedule specifically states “wired”.

Sections

The wood must be clean and the presentation conform with the schedule.

Cut Comb

The comb should be unwired and pre-drained before being placed into the container — therefore downgrade if comb is sitting in liquid honey.

There must be a **neat cut** with few broken cappings round the edges.

Remove with care from its container in order to inspect the **underside** for granulation and uncapped cells. Check the aroma and flavour and that the mid rib is thin.

Beeswax

Use a cloth (silk) to handle the wax as the warmth of the hand may remove the sheen. The weight and/or the number of pieces should be in accordance with the schedule.

Colour depends on the pollen collected and therefore will be from pale yellow to light orange unless darkened by overheating or the presence of propolis.

Aroma should be pleasant and characteristic of the honey from which it was elaborated by the bees. Aroma becomes faint as the wax ages.

Cleanliness. Inspect the bottom of the cake for dirt and grit — look under the label. Use a strong light to check for black specks and other foreign matter within the cake and to show translucence and uniformity of colour.

Mouldings should be plain and well defined. Some derogation might be allowed for the small show.

Surface should be smooth (not wavy) and may or may not be polished. No sheen indicates the wax has been overheated.

Adulteration can be detected if a small piece of wax is pared off the edge of the cake. Pure beeswax will crumble in the mouth and not stick to the teeth.

Candles

In addition to the above criteria for the quality of the wax one candle from each entry (of the two or three usually) should be lit and allowed to burn long enough (30 minutes approx) under draught-free conditions to judge if the correct size of wick has been used — there should be little or no wax running down the side of the candle (guttering) and the flame should be smoke-free. It should then readily blow out and after 15 minutes be easily relit.

Candles should NOT BE LIT unless perfectly safe and draught-free conditions are available (not possible in a crowded hall or marquee).

Observation Hives

These are judged on their educational value. The different types of cells, the different stages of brood, pollen etc should be clearly labelled but not made into a mini exhibition by extraneous material. The queen and a number of drones should be clearly marked. The bees should behave normally and therefore there must not be too many bees for the size of the hive but enough bees to cover the brood which should be at all stages — if there are two brood frames then the brood pattern should extend over both frames. There should be a queen excluder separating a honey compartment from the brood frames. The hive should be well ventilated and the bees should be able to fly (especially if the show is over more than one day). They must have access to water and candy but not to sugar syrup which might cause excitement.

Mead

The bottles, corks and type of mead (sweet or dry) should agree with the schedule. The mead must be clear and bright. There must be no foreign matter present such as dust on the surface or sediment detected when the bottle is revolved in the presence of a strong light.

Secondary fermentation is exposed if bubbles appear when the cork is removed.

Taste should be free from mustiness, flatness or vinegar (acetic acid) and with no after-taste of yeast.

Baking

The weight, size and shape of entries should be in accordance with the schedule. Recipes specially adapted for honey baking should be used in order to avoid the use of sugar wherever possible.

Cakes should be well risen, evenly browned but not burned. Cut right through the centre of the cake and look for even crumb of close soft texture with no patchiness or cavities. Any fruit should be evenly distributed. The overall taste should be pleasing with a distinct flavour and aroma of honey.

Biscuits/Shortbread should be crisp and “short” rather than hard. They should be of a reasonable thickness, pale golden in colour with an even surface and a pleasant honey aroma and flavour.

Scones should be of good volume and light in texture. The tops should be golden brown. Check the bases for burning.

Displays

The emphasis should be on the artistic display value as well as the quality of the individual exhibits which should be judged in detail according to the above criteria and against the purpose of the display as given in the schedule.

Composite Classes

It is recommended that a points system should be used to assess in turn all exhibits of the same show class. The top award should only be given to the entry with the most points if an appropriate standard has been achieved in each class

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SHOW SCHEDULES

The schedule should instruct exhibitors how they are expected to exhibit their entries in each class and should also state clearly what can be entered. The judging begins by checking that the entries conform to the schedule.

Schedules should include information such as:–

Exhibits must be the produce of the exhibitor's own bees (where appropriate).

In any one class an exhibitor may have more than one entry but cannot (or — and can) be given more than one award.

All liquid and set honey should be shown in British Standard pattern 454g (1 lb.) squat jars with commercial lacquered metal or white or gold plastic lids, with cardboard wad or flowed-in seals.

Sections and cut comb should be in appropriate cartons or cases which allow easy access for the judge.

Adhesive labels should be used to identify exhibits. Labels should be placed on the jar with the lower edge of the label 13mm (0.5") above the bottom of the jar. For frames a label should be used on the case as well as the frame and for cut comb a label should be on both container and lid.

Multiple Entries

If an exhibitor cannot gain more than one prize in a class but is not restricted to only one entry in that class then these multiple entries should be brought to the attention of the judge so that only the best entry in each case can be selected for further consideration.

Set Honey

As naturally granulated honey can have a fine soft consistency which can be indistinguishable from soft set honey it is recommended that for non-liquid honey there should be only one class called Set Honey.

Liquid Heather Honey (Ling)

This class has been for pressed honey only. As the present-day trend is for Ling Heather honey to be extracted from the comb by a process which includes spinning it is recommended that both spun and pressed heather honey should be accepted for this class. At large shows where there is a sufficient number of entries separate classes might be considered.

Bell heather

The Heather Honey Class is for Ling Heather honey only; therefore if there is not a separate Bell Heather class accept it for the dark liquid honey class. When there is a separate Bell Heather class then it should be specifically excluded from the dark class.

Comb Honey

There should be separate classes for Blossom and Heather Honey. The type of container (if any) required for each class should be clearly stated. It should be made clear that a cut comb entry may be removed from its container in the course of the judging.

Beeswax

The maximum or minimum weight of the cake of wax and for a display of moulded wax the maximum or minimum number of pieces should be stated.

It is preferred that the exhibits should be in clear plastic bags which keep them dust-free and may prevent the wax acquiring the aroma of its wooden container.

Candles

The number of candles per entry should be stated (usually two or three) and whether dipped, rolled, poured or moulded. They should be on plain, safe candle holders. Only if a draught-free and safe area is available should it be also stated that one candle will be lit by the judge.

Observation Hives

If possible the bees should be able to fly (especially if the show is over more than one day). Exhibitors are to ensure that there is an ample supply of water and stores.

Mead

The type and capacity of the bottle should be clearly stated (usually clear, punted, 750ml) and also that the cork should be flanged for easy removal by the judge.

Baking

Recipes should either be part of the schedule or be available on request and should be selected to avoid the use of sugar in the Cake Classes. Both metric and imperial units should be given.

The size and shape of the tins and cutters should be stated. Entries should be displayed on plain plates (paper) which could be supplied.

RECOMMENDED READING - BOOK & REGULATIONS LIST

PRESCRIBED TEXTS

Guidelines for Honey Judges and Show Committees - SBA
Current Food Hygiene Regulations (Food Standards Agency Scotland)
Current Honey (Scotland) Regulation (2003 EC Dir 2001/110/EC)
Food Labelling Regulations (1996)
Weights & Measures Act (1984)

SUGGESTED TEXTS

UK National Honey Show Leaflets:

- Preparation of Liquid Honey
- Judging Honey in the Jar
- Granulated or Crystallised Honey
- Comb Honey for Show
- Management, Production and Exhibiting of Heather Honey
- Showing Honey Products
- Wax for Show
- Beeswax Candles for Show
- Producing Mead for Showing & Drinking

A book of Honey- Crane
Beeswax- Brown
Mead-Making, Exhibiting & Judging – Harry Riches
Honey Marketing – Harry Riches
The Observation Hive - Showler
Making Beeswax Candles – Clara Furness
Plants & Honey Bees – Aston & Bucknall
Plants and Beekeeping - Howes
The Hive and the Honeybee- Dadant
Illustrated Encyclopedia of Beekeeping Hooper & Morse
Producing, Preparing, Exhibiting and
Judging Bee Produce - Herrod-Hempsall
Honey Identification – Rex Sawyer

FAULT SLIPS FOR JUDGES COMMENTARY, WHERE PREFERRED

Scottish Beekeepers' Association		Scottish Beekeepers' Association	
Class.....	Exhibit No.	Class.....	Exhibit No.
Faults	X = a fault	Faults	X = a fault
Cleanliness		Cleanliness	
Viscosity		Viscosity	
Granulation		Granulation	
Wax on surface		Wax on surface	
Aroma/Flavour		Aroma/Flavour	
Fermentation		Fermentation	
Jar/Lid quality		Jar/Lid quality	
Other		Other	
Indicated above are the principal faults which I have found in this exhibit. This information is given in the hope that they will be avoided in the future		Indicated above are the principal faults which I have found in this exhibit. This information is given in the hope that they will be avoided in the future	
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