

# January, Brrrr far too cold for Bees?

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Hello there, hopefully you will be reading a few more bee blogs from me as the year progresses. But I think a quick introduction is in order.

Hello my name is Chris, I am a novice beekeeper and this year, 2024, is my 2<sup>nd</sup> year to actually have bees. Which I hope to bring you along as the year unfolds. However my journey with bees began a long time ago. My Mum loved insects from butterflies to wasps and of course honey bees. This love of entomology was passed onto me as I grew up.

When I finally settled here in the South West of Scotland, it was my Mum who brought me my first beekeeping book, the bible of beekeeping for all novices (in her humble opinion) Ted Hooper, Guide to Bees and Honey. A somewhat un-subtle hint that I should maybe start keeping bees?

With that I contacted the local bee association and made enquires. It did however take a good few years to finally decide to take the WGBA basic Beekeeping course and rather tragically in those years my Mum passed away. It does make me feel sad that my Mum never got to see me in a bee suite opening a hive and watching the bees going about their fascinating lives as I know she would have been ever so excited. The first time I did open a hive under the watchful guidance of my Bee Mentor I just knew this was the right thing for me, the smell, the sound was truly magical. The bees had cast their spell and I was hooked and I knew my Mum approved.

After spending a Bee year working alongside my Bee Mentor, there are a few tall tales to be told about that, added to that visiting other beekeepers apiary's with the association where you can learn so much just be seeing how other beekeeper's work their bees. I am now over wintering my own bees that said my Bee Mentor is still guiding me along in the art of Beekeeping with the occasional pointed question "what do you think we should do" and the rather telling question "are you sure you want to do that!"

So to this January, the winter so far had been very mild and I had seen the bees flying right up past Christmas. The brood box was full of honey stores at the last full hive inspection way back in late September, but with them being so active it was suggested by my Bee Mentor to give them some fondant, just to be on the safe side. On January the 13<sup>th</sup> the weather temperatures was just touching 10c. Armed with a clear plastic take away contain with a hole cut into to lid stuffed with 1kg of bee fondant I made my way down to the National hive at the edge of our small wood.

The hive was already set up with an eke, as I had been feeding back empty wet super frames from extracting the honey, upon opening the hive I could see the bees clustered just below the lower crown board hole. I would like to think that they were waving hello and wishing me a happy new year but honestly it was probably more like "put the roof back on your letting the warm air out!"

Quickly placing the fondant over the lower crown board hole, I then closed up the hive and tightened the ratchet straps. With one last check of the hive entrance and that the mouse guard was still in place.

The 1<sup>st</sup> of February and the temperatures here were once again 10c, the Met Office are predicting a very cold spell sometime this month so I thought it prudent to check the state of the fondant. This was going to be a very quick look, replace the fondant if required and quickly close up, I didn't want the bees waving at me again. Once the roof and top crown board were off it was easy to see the clear plastic take away container and how much fondant the bees had taken down into the hive. The bees were busy working away at the fondant but there was still roughly over half a kilogram left. No changes required and I quickly closed up, the bees had been doing a bit of their own housework as the entrance was clear of any dead bees and of course the mouse guard was still in place.

I hope you enjoyed this little insight of my bee routine and now it's just a matter of what the weather does for the rest of February, but isn't that the case at any time of the year after all I'm a novice beekeeper now and trust me I'm always looking at the weather and wondering what the bees are doing.

Take care now and bee safe. (Groan if you want to!)

Chris.