

Newsletter February 2025

Hi everybody, welcome to my newsletter for February '25. Well, the new year has certainly blown in, taking with it a corner unit of some garden furniture straight through my hive. Fortunately, the colony clustered around the queen I hope, and did not get wet, so I was able to get them all back in to the broodbox. I hope everyone else fared better during the storm, bee wise.

Membership

I am pleased to say we have had six new members since my last newsletter for last October, so can I give a very warm welcome to, Lulu, Jenny, Janet, Nick, Brian, and Mike.

Past Events

Having not done a newsletter for a couple of months just a quick gloss over what has been happening, October saw the AGM with a good turn out and after the formal business was cleared, a very good round the table discussion took place in its usual fashion, giving us humour and knowledge shared or debated.

November gave us the Honey Show, which also included a presentation to Fiona Keith for her passing the SBA Expert Beekeeper Certificate and the Apiarian (Advanced Practical). The Honey Show judge was Moira Davidson who told us that with a Show of 96 entries and 23 entrants on a pro rata basis we pulled off a bigger show than the SBA's own show. All thanks to Linda, Heather and Graham for putting the show together. Thanks to Chris for being the Show Photographer and a highly professional job he made of it too.

December, well what else but Christmas Dinner at Henrys Bay house. Great couple of hours with table chat about things in general as well as bees.

January '25 and we were back in Auchenmalg Hall for a meeting where Lorraine Johnston from the Scottish Rural College, gave a presentation on Non notifiable diseases in Honey Bees, which was followed by a lively question and answer session.

Members meetings.

Well, lots to look forward to this year. Linda has sent you an email in respect of the South of Scotland Beekeepers Association inviting us to their Bee Health Day. Anyone wish to attend contact SSBKA.

On Feb 23 the members meeting at the Auchenmalg Hall will be led by Kevin, John and Richard a sort of work shop on the construction of frames and boxes.

Beginners course. 12 members have signed up to the beginner's course to be held over two days the eight and ninth March 2025. That's us at the maximum but a reserve list will be started if anyone else is interested. The cost of the course is held at £25.

The Scottish BA are holding this year's AGM near Dumfries this year instead the Highlands and it will be on the 26th April '25. Members who would like to go or help please contact Linda or myself.

Chris's Bee Blog

Well Chris has passed the mantle to Kevin for 2025 and I thank Chris for his blog during 2024. I know that Kevin has produced his first blog which was circulated to all members a few days ago and it's clearly going to be an interesting blog year.

Things to do in February

February can be a difficult month for our bees: they are expecting the weather to improve as the day length increases and the queen will have started to increase her laying rate accordingly, but we often experience our most variable and extreme weather conditions in the shortest months of the year. As has become the norm in recent years a succession of volatile weather fronts has brought strong winds and gales, persistent and often heavy rain, frost and fog yet the winter so far has been relatively mild and my bees have been very active- nice to see but worrying, too.

So, what will February bring? With the onset of more seasonal cold weather our bees should finally form their winter cluster, but stores will be depleted and their unseasonal foraging activity may well have reduced the life expectancy of the winter bees- increased vigilance is needed now. As the brood nest expands the workers need to generate more heat and to maintain it, and this they do mostly by shivering their powerful wing muscles- a high-energy activity that requires a good level of stores to maintain it. The foraging bees will be out collecting pollen and nectar from early plants such as snowdrop, crocus, aconite, hellebore, mahonia- not forgetting those vital pollen providers hazel, willow, alder and blackthorn. These foragers are the winter bees, the workers that hatched in the previous autumn and remained in the hive conserving their strength until called on to provision and care for at least two brood cycles (at least six weeks of house bee working when the queen starts to lay and the colony begins to expand).

If these bees are not healthy, they will be unable to complete their tasks before they die and the colony will have great difficulty surviving through to spring- good varroa management and feeding are the key here. If your hives are light, then feed fondant or syrup- directly on top of the frames in an emergency. Examination of the varroa floor insert will show the rate of uncapping of stores and will also show you the position of the cluster. This is the time of year when isolation starvation becomes a risk if there is a prolonged cold spell and the cluster becomes too torpid to move to better provisions. If you suspect this has happened, then it is better to briefly open the hive and move full frames next to the cluster than to do nothing at all. In an emergency you can lightly spray the bees with warmed sugar syrup and pour more syrup into an empty comb.

February Summary

Check hives for damage from the weather, livestock, or pests.

Make sure entrances are not blocked by dead bees, snow or debris.

On mild days check if bees are flying- do they look ok? any streaks of dysentery on the woodwork? is pollen going in?

Keep on hefting to check the weight of stores and feed candy if necessary.

Seal the entrances of any dead hives until you can take them away to investigate the cause- disease can be spread through robbing.

If the weather is benign you may want to take the opportunity to remove and replace solid floors or brush clean open mesh floors- easier with help.

Keep your eyes peeled for signs of Asian hornet nests and early emerging queens.

Check stored drawn comb for wax moth damage.

Dougie

Chair