

## March Blog

First, a dirty story. For years I've depended on my solar extractor to recover wax from old combs. But last summer there was only one day in the area where I live when it was hot enough to melt wax. So a change of plan. I bought a Slow Cooker from the community shop in Wigtown for a fiver (what a bargain!). That, I thought, should simplify things. I assembled a collection of old and damaged brood combs, removed the foundation wire and popped the combs into a couple of pints of near boiling water in the cooker. On went the lid and I expected that in a couple of hours I would be able to pour the whole lot into moulds and finish up with pristine wax. What I actually got was a filthy mess, mainly comprising thousands of brood cells, which promptly melted the moulds as I poured the witches' brew into them. When it cooled (and I had scraped up the wax that had made a run for it), there was hardly any wax left, but lots of 'dross'. I'm told this makes very good compost. That apart, I think I will revert to the solar extractor and hope for sunny weather this summer.

Saturday March 8th. Six Nations Rugby, Scotland vs Wales KO 4.45. 17.6C warmest day of the year so far, ample time to give HN1 (Hive Number One) its first check of the season. This hive has been overwintered on 2 boxes, a deep brood box and a shallow super, with no queen excluder between the two. The colony took around 15 kgs of sugar syrup feed last autumn and for added security it got a 2.5kg bag of fondant in February.

When I arrived at the farm the bees were flying and pollen was pouring into the hive. A sure sign there is a queen, probably laying. I'd already decided to make the check as brief as possible, so no smoke just gently straight into the brood box. The bees were covering about five frames, there were at least ten pounds of food stores still available and no sign of nosema or varroa. The queen was there, looking good, **but, but, but** there was no sign of any brood. No eggs, no larvae, no sealed brood. It may be that until this weekend it's been too cold for the queen to come into lay. This is a situation I will need to keep a close check on.

Scotland won by 6 points.

The next day, Sunday, was even warmer (19.2C) here near Creetown. I bet every beekeeper in the Association was poking around his/her hives; I looked at mine again, just checking hive entrance activity, and saw pollen still rolling in. That evening it was so warm that our resident bats came out of hibernation. And I had to give the grass in our little orchard the first cut of the year. Spring has sprung.

March 20, 16C. What a difference eleven days can make! Last time I looked at HN1 there was (rather worryingly) no sign of the queen laying. Today there is brood on three frames. Some of it is sealed. Worker brood is usually capped after nine days. So the queen must have started laying straight after I last looked in the hive.

Anyway it's good news, it's a bit of a relief, and this means the roller coaster of life in the hive is underway for another year. Catkin pollen is abundant, so all looks good.

However, on March 24 I removed the bag of fondant on top of the hive and replaced it with a contact feeder of sugar syrup. This should stimulate the queen to lay more.