

Newsletter March 2026

Welcome to my March newsletter and this is the month the beekeeping year starts, hope everybody is ready for it and as usual I am not

Membership

I am pleased to say we have enquiries and our membership is in rather healthy mid-forties. Welcome to our new member Gavin who will be attending the beginners course.

Past Events

Well, what a February that was. On Wednesday the 18th Feb several of us went to a joint meeting in Castle Douglas with the South of Scotland BA to listen to a visiting speaker by the name of Bob Binnie, who is an American who lives in the Blue Ridge Mountains, part of the Appalachian Mountain range. Bob told us that his ancestors were originally from Scotland, Aberdeen, and emigrated Appalachia about two hundred years ago. Apparently, a great number of Scots settled in this region as it reminded them of the Highlands of Scotland. This is not surprising as between 600million to 450million years ago the Appalachian Mountains included the Highlands of Scotland in the same land mass and if you wanted to walk the range you would start in the Carolinas and end in Inverness. Bob used a slide show to illustrate his talk and told us about his business. When we think about taking honey from our hives we talk in buckets of honey. Bob was talking drums on pallets, and moving hives with fork lifts and moving hives on articulated lorries. However, he still went to point out at the end of the day we all had the same ups and downs and swarming, mites, AFB, and sudden nectar flows made no difference to the size of your apiaries. I found Bob's talk very interesting and found him to be a softly spoken unassuming individual and a joy to listen to. On Sunday 22nd at our February meeting we were joined by Matthew Richardson, the SBA president who delivered an illustrated talk on profit in beekeeping. When I first heard the subject of the talk, I thought we were in for a lecture on how to build a beekeeping business enterprise, however I was wrong and the profit was more on making the very best use of our time, resources, and personal finances. Again, a highly interesting talk although when he remarked and explained how we could at a push get away with five hive inspections a year there was a few raised eyebrows from some very experienced keepers. As I said it was a great meeting with a very good turnout for which I do thank you all

Beginners Course

This is to be held in March and Linda has enough participants to go ahead but if anyone thinks that there could be some benefit in going on the course please contact Linda.

Mead making/Honey Show

At the beginning of the week, I was in the Community reuse shop in Stranraer and saw that they had for sale at £5 each five clear glass one-gallon Demijohns. As these retail new for about £40 each, I bought them all as in time I may well use them, however I am happy to let them go for the price I paid if anyone wishes to buy one to make mead you will of course need to source your own honey, airlocks if you intend to use one and yeasts. Regarding yeast proper bread makers yeast is just as good as dried mead yeasts. If you are entering the Mead class this year the association has bought a case of the correct bottle to present your mead in and please let me know if you would like one. These bottles are free of charge, one per entrant.

Meetings

Our final winter meeting will be Sunday 29th March. Meetings will then move to members' apiaries from end April – these meetings will be open to WGBA members only. If you would like to host an apiary visit, please let me know so that the committee can work on the summer events calendar.

A date for your diary – Wednesday 20th May. The lead Bee Inspector for Scotland will give a talk on the Yellow Legged Hornet - members and interested members of the public will be invited. YLH is not just a new threat to beekeepers but to the environment in general, and it has made its way as far north as Belfast!

Things to do in March

Traditionally March is the month in which the apiary comes to life and the active season begins. On warmer days we will see bees flying and taking in pollen from early spring plants such as snowdrop, aconite, mahonia, grape hyacinth, hellebore, and from hazel, alder and willow catkins. Our queens will have been laying for some time and that laying rate will increase further if the weather is typically spring-like. Increased activity inside and outside the hive means a higher consumption of stores and if there is very little forage around, there is danger of starvation. More colonies starve in March than at any other time of year. Therefore, continue to check stores by hefting – a colony should have at least 12lbs (6kg) of stores at any time of year – and feed if necessary. If the weather is cold and bees are not flying freely, feed candy or fondant: cut away the plastic on the bottom of the packet and place the pack over the feed holes in the crown board – you may need to use a nuke or empty super to make space under the roof but you can use some insulating material to fill the extra space. If you think your bees are starving you can place the block directly on top of the frames above the bees – use an eke or empty super to create space under the crown board.

If the weather is warm and the bees are active and flying freely, feed 1:1 syrup in a contact feeder: you can also feed an invert sugar syrup like Ambrosia. Do not be too quick to feed syrup: the weather must be warm enough for the bees to make cleansing flights and there is also the risk of syrup being stored in the brood frames, reducing space for the queen to lay. Take care not to spill syrup in your apiary – take a bucket to invert the feeder over to catch the drips until the vacuum has been formed above the syrup.

Once you start feeding you must keep it up until there is sufficient forage to sustain the colony – bees can starve in a surprisingly short period of time. If the bees are confined to the hive in a sustained spell of bad weather, you may also want to feed some pollen substitute. The point of feeding is not only to keep your bees alive but also to help the colony build up ahead of the nectar flow: eggs laid mid-March will become May's foragers.

March Summary

Check stores and feed if necessary.

Change floors if you haven't already done so: move the hive to one side, replace the old floor with a clean one and lift the hive back in position. With your nice clean floor insert you can now begin varroa monitoring again.

Possibly remove mouse guards and woodpecker protection.

Carry out your first inspection if the weather is warm enough, minimum 14C the appearance of blossom on flowering currant is the traditional sign that the weather is warm enough but use a cover cloth to avoid chilling the bees. No need to go through every frame – as soon as you've seen a regular brood pattern, some stores and that the bees seem happy, close up. Prepare clean brood frames/make up new brood frames – you will need these to hand to replace dirty and damaged comb when you make your full inspections in the warmer weather.

Prepare supers & queen excluders.

Complete all your equipment repairs & cleaning.

Check spare hives, frames & foundation – the active season's about to start! Take advantage of events and auctions to stock up at affordable prices.

Think about providing a water source close to your hives, e.g. pond, gravel tray.

If you have not already done so, start your new season record sheets.

Put out Asian Hornet monitoring traps and check them regularly: register on BeeBase

Cheers Dougie.