

Next Meeting

Thursday the 27th February Rhu Church Hall **7.15pm**. “More than honey” film. This fabulous film will start promptly so please try to get there for 7:15pm. The film is 1 hour 40 minutes long so the meeting will also finish a bit later than usual. We will provide popcorn. Bring your own bottles of pop!



The Presidents Tips And Tricks for the month of March

There are many ways to keep your bees. Each month I intend to give some tips and tricks to help you keep your bees thriving.

Is the winter over or are we being lulled into a false sense of security?

Of course, there is no way of knowing – we may have the ideal gentle transition from winter to summer with a pleasant spring, or it could turn cold with snow, or wet and windy for goodness knows how long. The last two seasons demonstrated that it does not matter what the calendar says, we must take the appropriate action for the current conditions.

Although we are all keen to see how our bees have survived this appalling winter, first inspections should wait until the weather is warm enough to be comfortable in short sleeves. A good principle for all inspections is to ask yourself why you think it necessary to open the hive and what you will be able to do that will leave the hive and the bees in a better condition than if you had left it alone. That does not mean that let-alone beekeeping is a good thing, but rather that inspections are done for some valid reason after thinking through the situation. Having a clear idea of what you might find inside and what you will then need to do will also enable you to work more quickly and efficiently.

So much can be deduced just by watching the entrance, with the most important indicator being the number of bees flying when the weather is warm and the sun shining and, crucially, the amount of pollen being brought in. If the colony is queenright and in good health there will be plenty of pollen, whereas a queenless or sick colony will have little.

Colonies with no activity when others are flying are probably dead so check them and try to determine the cause. Provided that there is no evidence of disease, you may wish to sterilise the

combs with acetic acid (the method is in virtually all the books) if they are in good condition. The hive can be cleaned up inside with a blowtorch.

What should you do about weak colonies? The answer is that it depends why they are weak - but generally I prefer to do nothing other than check for disease. It is often advised that you should unite weak colonies to strong ones, but if they are weak from disease that will just spread it to your good colony – why take the risk? It is also worth remembering that small colonies in the spring are usually composed of old bees that are very near the end of their life and are really worth very little.

Do continue to check for food – they will be using it much faster now.

Floors can be cleaned without disturbing colonies much if you wish

Get equipment assembled ready for the swarming season – perhaps 6-8 weeks away (or not!).

More colonies die in March and April than at any other time of the year.



Intermediate beekeeping and Bee Breeding Course - Jim McCulloch

They came from the North; they came from the South, the East and the West. They even came over the water from Ireland to attend Andrew Abrahams Intermediate Beekeeping and Bee Breeding Course on the Island of Colonsay held on the 22nd/23rd June.

Andrew has been beekeeping for nearly 40 years with approx 50 colonies on the island of Colonsay and is fortunate that all his colonies are Varroa free and of the native black bee strain.

To get to Colonsay involved a two and half hour ferry journey from Oban on the Cal Mac ferry on the Friday night before the course started



On arriving at Colonsay we were met by Andrew who assisted us to find our accommodation and was also kind enough to provide us with the use of a car to get around the island.

As the weather forecast for the weekend was not that good it was decided to meet at the strand between Oronsay and Colonsay at 9.00am the next morning.

The Island of Colonsay only has two roads that basically go in a circle but we still managed to get lost although we did get to see some of the island.

After getting to the meeting place late we arranged transport to drive over to Oronsay. I opted for the back of the van when I saw what we were going to cross over.



The drive over was interesting as the tide was out!



Eventually we got over to Andrews house where the first beekeeping session took place.



It was just as well the first session was indoors as the rain came in squalls and was hitting off the windows. Andrew explained a bit about the history of the native dark bee and about its introduction to the islands. There was also a lively discussion about bee breeding methods and looking at the equipment Andrew uses.

After a welcome cup of tea and some home baking the weather improved enough for us to visit a few of Andrews's apiary sites. I was particularly interested in finding out how Andrew overwinters his mated queens. The first site we visited had a number of Apideas and Andrew explained his winter methods to the group.



Although the weather was not ideal Andrew did open up a number of hives and some of his mating nucs to check the progress of his queens



For my Saturday night meal Andrew recommended the Colonsay cafe where I had a fish supper washed down with a few pints of the local Colonsay ale.



I found Andrews course fascinating, even though I have been keeping and breeding bees for a number of years I still learnt something.

Andrew never kills off a queen. If it is a poor mated queen or not performing well she is placed into a nuc box and any brood or foundation drawn is used to supplement stronger colonies.

He prefers to keep his breeder queens for a number of years and tries to use all swarm queen cells if possible.

For late mated queens he has a system for over wintering his queens in apidea mini nucs.

It is great to see how he handles his bees which is very gentle with little smoke but his native dark bees are also very gentle to start with



If you want to see a real professional beekeeper at work then I would recommend Andrews bee-keeping courses. You will not be disappointed.