

Scottish Native Honey Bee Society

SCIO SC047105



Dear Member

A wee hello from your shiny new secretary.

The last few weeks has no doubt seen many of us elbow-deep in swarm control and entirely covered in miffed-off bees buzzing for hives anew. For me, still a beekeeping rookie only in my second year, mid-May was the first time I'd seen an uncapped queen cell with its white queen-to-be curled safely inside. My partner and I both ooohd and ahhd, exclaiming how utterly amazing it all was before looking at each with wide eyes, 'Now what?' This is what opening the hive currently is for us, an ever-increasing awe-filled appreciation of the honey bee mixed with an anxiety inducing, constant questioning of, 'are we doing this right?'

Not dissimilar then to how I feel as the secretary of the newly established Scottish Native Honey Bee Society (SNHBS). Opening my inbox to read my beemails these days can be as anxiety inducing as opening the hive, hastily followed by the questioning, 'Am I doing this right?'. Though, of course, it is not without experiencing something akin to awe at being a part of what I consider a hugely important conservation project, one that I am passionate about and enthusiastic to be a part of, as I'm sure you all are. It is my hope that this passion and enthusiasm goes some way to compensate for my lack of expertise in the realms of beekeeping and secretarial duties alike. I readily embrace the steep learning curve that has already begun.

The launch on April 1st, I'm sure you'll agree, was an enjoyable success despite its meagre sandwich portions. I personally learned a great deal from the guest speakers and enjoyed meeting many of you. It's clear that while we all come from different areas, with a wide range of beekeeping experience, holding such a colourful spectrum of opinions on the subject, we each have a common interest to help preserve and strengthen our native honey bee. I signed up to the society simply as an inquisitive wee bean wanting to find out more, with a hope of doing something for the black bees where I live in the Borders. Now here I am • welcoming you all to SNHBS and its first newsletter! I look forward to getting to know you better. If you'd like to contact me with questions about what SNHBS is up to, or if you have suggestions, or news updates on black bees in your area or if you have questions relating to Amm then please do email me at secretary@snhbs.scot. I will reply • and like a very good secretary I will pass all difficult enquiries and technical questions on to the relevant departments.

Yours Secretarily,
Em

Aims of the society

The Scottish Native Honey Bee Society aims to conserve, protect and reintroduce the dark native honey bee, also called the black bee. The native honey bee was kept here prior to the ever-increasing introductions of non-native stock through international trade. It is the belief of your committee that non-native types are often poorly adapted to conditions in Scotland, that hybrids between sub-species of honey bee tend to produce aggressive offspring making beekeeping more difficult for all of us and that importation is guaranteed to keep bringing new pathogens and even new forms of existing pathogens here, to the detriment of all beekeepers. The society aims to explicitly promote *Apis mellifera mellifera* of Scottish provenance. Our aims were laid out for the membership at the meeting in 1 April:

- To encourage beekeeping using Scottish native honey bees and promote their recovery in Scotland
- To share skills in assessment, breeding and propagation of native and local honey bees
- To promote the qualities of native honey bees to beekeepers
- To promote the conservation of native honey bees to the public and work towards positive actions for conservation
- To encourage scientific research that clarifies the conservation, improvement and health of native honey bees.

Coming up

What have we been planning since 1 April? Here is a round-up of what we hope to be offering SNHBS members over the coming year.

Summer Queen Rearing Workshop

The Ochils Breeding Group have agreed to run a practical one-day workshop near Perth in August. Two dates are available, Saturday 5th and Saturday 19th August. The aim is to provide hands-on and classroom sessions to show people how to raise, mate and introduce queens from selected breeder queens. We have 48 places available with a priority booking period planned for SNHBS members. Everyone will have an opportunity to graft to produce queens and, if the weather cooperates, they will be able to take home their own Scottish dark native honey bee queen ready to emerge a day or two after the workshop (one we prepared earlier!). We will issue an email soon with booking details.

Winter Workshop on Selecting and Breeding Scottish Native Honey Bees

We will be offering a one-day course during the winter demonstrating and teaching the various techniques required to run a breeding programme.

Selecting stocks for trueness to type using both morphological traits and wing morphometry, selecting for desirable traits, mating site design, bee genetics and pitfalls in selection systems.

Future distribution of breeding material

Can we use simple means to distribute germplasm for breeding, allowing everyone to raise their own Scottish dark native honey bee queens? A group within your committee are testing out the feasibility this summer. If we can develop successful methods to deliver eggs or young larvae to remote beekeepers which can then be used to generate queens then we will extend this to the full membership in 2018. This could be a useful means of converting the genetics of discrete areas in the future: the first round replaces queens that mate with local drones, the second round provide virgins to mate with the drones coming from the first generation introductions.

Survey

A priority for the quiet season is a properly planned search for local populations of Scottish native honey bees. Although the influence of imported types of honey bee is widespread we believe that there are additional examples of native honey bees to be found out there. We are looking to partner with researchers in a position to verify samples initially identified using morphology with the use of DNA methods. This survey will be launched next year but you can start now by looking out for beekeepers with the right kind of bee in your area! Do let us know what you find.

Helping Hands: What can you do?

A very big thank you to all the volunteers who helped us on the day of the launch. You were essential to the smooth running of the event and your contribution was hugely appreciated. Thanks also to those of you who have kindly offered your support going forward. Remember you are the society, without the help of beekeepers across Scotland working alongside and communicating with one another, the aims and aspirations of the project would be an impossible thing to achieve. It is not only annual conferences or workshops we will need a helping hand with. There are many things you can start doing now, wherever you're based.

Spread the word: perhaps the simplest thing we can all do is start talking. One of SNHBS primary aims is to promote the Scottish native honey bee to the public. Begin by letting your friends and family know that you are part of a conservation project that is setting out to help our native bee. Tell them that without our intervention *Apis mellifera mellifera* will die out, and we may lose this uniquely adapted special pollinator to hybridisation with non-native types in much the same way as we have almost lost the Scottish wildcat.

Online Social Media: perhaps this is even easier than talking face to face? Post articles, updates, opinion pieces, photographs, use your Facebook page,

Twitter account or other social media to get this message viral. Send links or pics to [our Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) page. Tell us about what you're doing for Scottish native honey bees in your area, share with us your ideas, suggestions, aspirations. We need to keep connected.

Get fellow beekeepers on board: Promote Scottish native honey bees to beekeepers old and new in your area, (brace yourself for some lively debate). Let beginners know that there is such a thing as the native bee. Raise awareness of the pitfalls and problems that importing bees from abroad can cause. We cannot dictate what our fellow beekeepers ultimately choose, but it is important to promote that there is a choice. Let them know that native bees:

- are known for their hardiness and thriftiness
- have the ability to survive long winters and cool wet summers
- can forage and mate in wind and low temperatures
- high drive to store pollen
- tendency towards supersedure rather than swarming
- have long-lived queens.

Bee Improvement Groups: the more you talk about it, the more likely you'll find like-minded enthusiasts. Starting a local group is a good way of keeping focused and discussing ways in which to improve and propagate the native honey bees in your area. SNHBS encourage the formation of local native bee groups and would love to hear regular updates from you.

Scout about: SNHBS are keen to identify potential Conservation Areas and sites for mating stations around Scotland. Why not get your OS map out, dust off your walking boots and go exploring? Familiarise yourself with the visual native honey bee characteristics and look out for pockets where wild native bees may still exist if you are in an area still without *Varroa*. Get in touch with what you find.

Get writing: we are looking for the wordsmiths that might contribute to future newsletters and articles for the website. If you have a story with a black bee angle then please put pen to paper or fingers to keypads and get writing. We are keen to hear from you.

Artistic flair? It would be good to know if there are any artists or graphic designers amongst our members that might be interested in creating, first and foremost, our logo – but also future promotions, posters or flyers either online or in hard copy. You would be amongst those first in line for SNHBS to contact whenever an artistic opportunity arises. Let us know if you're interested in joining our bank of writers and artists.

Organise local events and workshops: one of our aims at SNHBS is to get beekeepers skill-sharing. If you have the confidence and experience to run queen rearing workshops in your local area or if your association would like to organise a day event promoting the native bee or bee improvement skills, then SNHBS would be happy to support and advise in any way we can.

Thanks again to those of you who have already given your name to volunteer for SNHBS. You will be hearing more from us very soon. If you haven't had your name added to our SNHBS volunteer list and would like to become more involved, please let us know by contacting Em at secretary@snhbs.scot.

Calling all creatives

We need help designing the SNHBS logo.
It needs to be contemporary, simple and eye-catching.
Does this sound like your sort of challenge?
Please submit your ideas by post or email to:
secretary@snhbs.scot.



A photo from SNHBS start-up meeting on the steps of the Lovat Hotel.

Launch Day Summary

by Ewan Campbell

“We have reached a crucial juncture for the survival of our own Scottish honey bees”

This statement by our new chair Gavin Ramsay encapsulates so much of what we, as a society, are about. From discussions started nearly three years ago, a

small group of similarly minded beekeepers and enthusiasts began to draw on the rich heritage of native bee breeding and research in Scotland in order to try and conserve these bees through education, identification and propagation of stocks.

The launch meeting on April 1st represented a culmination of a lot of work from the founding committee but is only the beginning for the fledgling society. It was great to see so many likeminded beekeepers attending and the enthusiasm in the room throughout the day was palpable.

The day was kicked off with an opening address from Gavin who gave a bit of background on the SNHBS and read out letters of support from BIBBA and our sister organisation NIHBS. He also gave the great news that membership had past the 100 mark within only a few months of applications. The conference was well attended with over 70 present on the day.

The day was split into main presentations, short quick-fire talks, group discussions and a larger membership discussion. I won't go into detail in this newsletter but I believe the presentations or short summaries will be on the website at some point. I will discuss two of them however, one from a native bee breeder and one from a panda bear breeder!

The presentations were kicked off with a tour de force from native bee breeder Andrew Abrahams titled simply "Conserving black bees in Scotland". Andrew spoke of the reasons we should aim to conserve native bees, the past and current distribution of *Apis mellifera* races across Europe, including some holiday pictures of dark bees in Spain!

We were then treated to a history of the major landmarks in black bee history in the UK up to the current synthesis that locally adapted bees are more disease resistant and prepared for our climate.

Andrew then took us through a whirlwind history of his beekeeping exploits on Colonsay from summer 1978 up to the present date and the island's protected status as a native bee reserve under Scottish law. He touched on black bees globally, the genetics of native bees and, more soberly, some of the issues we will face with propagation in poor weather, genetic inbreeding and costs. Andrew's direction for the society chimes with many of us; identify stocks, breed in isolation but with co-operation. Mark Barnett from the world famous Roslin Institute then gave a great talk on a recent DNA sequencing project on bees across the UK and gave some insights into the techniques and analysis that can be done to look at stocks and identify our best examples of native bees. The talk gave us encouragement that there are still good native honey bee stocks in parts of Scotland including the Borders.

Iain Valentine gave an inspiring and thoughtful seminar on conservation. He spoke about his experience with conserving Giant Pandas but more generally on the pitfalls, obstacles but also high points of trying to protect some of our most endangered wildlife. He drew parallels between what we as a society are trying to do with the black bee and what many conservation groups attempt. His

message was hopeful and pretty rousing. I know that a lot of members chalked this up as a high point of the launch day! Iain also suggested that as a conservation group we should be able to tap into funding streams to carry out large scale screening of stocks, promoting queen rearing and related activities.

The quick-fire sessions before lunch saw great examples of current breeding projects in the Ochils, Ardnamurchan and Loch Ewe as well as how to identify native honey bees and the history of native bees in Scotland. These breeding projects have all been established prior to the establishment of SNHBS but are great examples of what we should be aiming to support. Hopefully, in a few years there will be similar projects springing up across Scotland from Aberdeen to the borders.

The afternoon saw the start of membership participation. Usually when 70 beekeepers get together in a room there are hundreds of varied and conflicting arguments but it has to be said that it was remarkably sanguine! The format was to break into geographical discussion groups and a short list of topics to discuss with a facilitator then a larger plenary discussion with the whole body membership – and it seemed to work well.

The topics that each group discussed were as given below. The discussions from each region will be made available, but the major points are summarised under each topic along with the consensus (or lack of!):

1. Should SNHBS cover pure native stock only, include near-native stocks, or simply support local bees whatever their genetics?

Within the region discussions there was general consensus that the gold standard should be pure *Apis mellifera mellifera* but due to lack of stocks or knowledge of the genetics of local stocks it would be probable that breeding would be with near native with an improvement over time. There was a strong feeling to reduce imports of bees, not just to reduce the impact on non-native types, but due to the risk of additional types of pests and diseases. There was also a question of, are we supporting all *Apis mellifera mellifera* or just the Scottish stock of this subspecies. A show of hands did not resolve this matter and it was put on hold. It must be noted that since the launch meeting the committee have discussed this at length and now agree, since we are the "Scottish Native Honey Bee Society", that Scottish *Apis mellifera mellifera* should be the aim. It remains open for discussion. What should the society do in terms of meetings, discussions and other help for the membership? Annual get-togethers? Conference? Workshops? Help and advice lines? Do we need a newsletter and if so, how often? What would members like in the way of training? What about access to native stocks, how could that be encouraged?

Many questions but some broad consensus across the membership. It was agreed to hold an annual members meeting, to publish a newsletter and to organise workshops on queen rearing, selection and breeding. One of the biggest and most important tasks that needs to be carried out is a survey of what stocks of *Apis mellifera mellifera* exist and survive in Scotland. The

committee is working on how to implement this as soon as possible but we will need a lot of help from members!

2. Communication outside SNHBS. How much effort should we put into getting our story into the media? How much effort should we put into representation in governmental discussions? What should our messages be?

It was agreed to retain a media liaison officer and to make an effort to approach government, non-government agencies and press when needed and when a coherent strategy on, for example, mating stations, emerges. We may need to approach government and other sources for funding.

3. SNHBS structure. Is the Constitution appropriate for now? Is the list of roles in a committee appropriate? Are there any volunteers at this stage (and please continue to think about this)? Any thoughts on a logo?

The membership agreed on fees at £20 for 2018 (using Gift Aid where possible). It was suggested we allow under 16s a membership option but no resolution was made.

Although some groups thought a small committee and board was best it was generally agreed that we might need a larger board in order to spread the load, especially in a fledgling society.

It was suggested by a few groups that we need a fundraiser position and development officer.

The matter of a logo is continuing and we thank those who have offered their suggestions to date. Please see the advert in the newsletter!

4. Taking into account the preceding discussion, is the list of Aims and the Strategy appropriate? What changes would you suggest?

The aims and strategy as written are fine but it was agreed to review in a year's time in the light of our experience.

5. Anything else people would like to raise?

A technical point which came up a few times was making up mini-nucs for queen rearing! Abrahams explained his method.

The final point of business for the day was to appoint committee members and discuss various roles and titles. Details of your new committee will be put up on the SNHBS website very soon.

It was great to be involved in such an energised and inspiring event. Having helped in a small way to organise the day it was brilliant to see so many motivated members get involved in discussions. The knowledge and insight in

the room was remarkable. It was said on the day and it bears repeating as often and as loudly as possible – *you, the members, are the SNHBS*. The committee will help steer the society and try their best to implement strategy but we need direction and volunteers from the membership to set up breeding groups, carry out queen rearing workshops and start sampling. If you want to have a workshop in your area, get a group of members together and let us know! We can spread the word and help organise but we are a small and geographically distant group and need our members to implement strategy at ground level across the regions. The launch day was a great start but the real work begins NOW!

Ardnamurchan Project – a cautionary tale

A short presentation was given by Kate Atchley, secretary of SAMMBA beekeepers in western Lochaber and lead beekeeper for the Ardnamurchan project.



She described the area and the project which began in 2014, stocked with bees from Colonsay.

The area suffered two notoriously poor Summers in 2015 and 2016 so queen rearing success was disappointing.

In late Summer 2016 the colonies had dwindled noticeably and by March 2017, most of the colonies were found to have died.

No diseases were found or signs seen and all the colonies had spare sugar/honey stores.

With hindsight, Kate and her colleagues have concluded that Glenborrodale simply lacks enough forage – pollen in particular – to support honey bees in any number. This was exacerbated by the poor Summers of 2015 and 2016.

Before establishing the project in Glenborrodale, they had failed to assess the forage potential carefully enough.

Yet they hope that these losses will serve as a valuable caution for others inclined to site hives in marginal areas.



SNHBS members may be interested in an ADBKA Conference titled

'Better Bees'

ADBKA Conference 2017
Saturday, 17 June 9.30am –
4pm

Kinellar Community Hall, Blackburn AB21 0JQ

Introduction by Gavin Ramsay
Speakers:

Eoghan Mac Giolla Coda – Irish Native Honeybee Society:

and

Margaret Murdin – Chair of BBKA:
See the ADBKA website for more details.

Attached: Two articles from the SNHBS website (SNHBS.scot)



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You are receiving the SNHBS Newsletter because you signed up as a member.

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