

How many of us saw *Who Killed the Honey Bee?* on BBC4 recently – dealing in particular with CCD in America where many professional beekeepers have lost their bees and livelihood for no known reason. This applies to many UK beekeepers too.

On average about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of UK bees die every winter. Scientists offer several reasons:-

Nosema and Nosema Cerana, Varroa and weedkillers & pesticides.

But no-one can really pinpoint why.

The bees continue to die in the meantime. By now the Government is becoming aware of the nightmare and is pumping money into research. It is to be hoped that the research will be in time and carried out centrally. There is a danger in various institutions undertaking research and work being duplicated. The funding must be centralised under one head and a team of researchers.

These sudden losses are not the only problem. The cold, wet summers of the past two years have been a factor, with so many unmated queens. But again there is the problem of young queens disappearing suddenly after mating and after a period of egg laying, giving the bees no chance to rear their own emergency queens to replace them. This again is a mystery.

One indirect benefit of all this is that the public have become more aware of the value of bees to man and animal, due mainly to the lack of honey on our shelves and its high price.

But back to this spring. There were many losses but those colonies that survived seem strong enough. Indeed we heard of some hives swarming in April, something entirely unheard of in this area. I and many others were well used to wintering nucs in boxes reasoning that this was perfectly feasible in mild winters. However, last winter, I lost two or three in such boxes – possibly too cold, and worse still, not enough bees. I was fortunate to save one young queen with only 24 bees – yes I counted them! There were several eggs and two capped cells. The eggs, however, were not developing – why? Possibly lack of heat. This raises the question, is there something other than heat required? I have noticed many times, even in mid-summer, that some eggs in a strong stock have not developed into larvae, especially if they're on the periphery. Curiosity got the better of me; I opened two sealed cells and observed two healthy bees ready to hatch out within a day or two. Confining the queen and providing a frame of bees ready to hatch out, together with the original bees plus bees from another hive had done the trick. But, importantly, I moved the nuc box to another apiary. I always advise anyone who's serious about beekeeping to keep at least three hives and have two apiaries or at least

somewhere the bees can be moved to temporarily. Bees from the three hives must be mixed for them not to fight when uniting weak stocks or when making a nuc.

As usual I went to the spring conference in Llanelwedd at the end of March – an obvious success as there was insufficient room for all to be seated in the lectures. What about personal criticism? Someone came up to me and asked “What will you complain about in your Notes this time being that you usually complain about something or other?” My principle every time is – if there’s cause to complain, then do complain. If you don’t the defence will always be – “nobody complained”.

Have we seen the end of the annual Welsh lecture? In the programme this year one speaker was billed as being bilingual but it was not his fault that the whole lecture turned out to be entirely in English. This is what one can expect when a clause in the constitution says that Welsh may be used “if this is reasonable”. It was obviously not reasonable when there was a roomful of monolingual listeners. The organisers however cannot argue that the Welsh lecture is too expensive; it is a fact that over the last four years it has cost nothing at all except for the price of a meal. This year there was no specific Welsh language lecture. However, attendance at the Welsh lecture had increased greatly over the previous few years, thanks to many who see the value of learning the language. The WBS should respect the sacrifice of these people and provide them with an opportunity to listen to a lecture in a language they have taken the trouble to learn. It is a shame if we do not respect their dedication. I wonder is there anyone listening – raise your voices, the silent Welsh.

Being that I’m on my hobby horse I have two other complaints. Well, one really, the other is my fault or my weakness. Lecture chairmen should impress on the speakers the need to adhere to their allocated time. This year again we had lecturers badly overrunning their time thereby impacting on the subsequent lecture. Lecturers should be professional enough to curtail their lecture to fit the allocated time slot. This year a chairman allowed the speaker to go way beyond the given time. As a result for many of us the choice was either missing our lunch or missing the following lecture. As I noted the other complaint involves my weakness – my hearing is not as it used to be and I therefore miss some of the lectures content. These days it would be quite simple to provide a microphone for the speaker or better still a radio microphone to enable the lecturer to move about if necessary. They are nowadays used in many chapels – perhaps a sad sign of the times with an aging congregation!

Finally I have an appeal. I am in the process of writing a book on beekeeping in Welsh – only the third in over 200 years. And the appeal? I would very much appreciate photographs involving beekeeping and beekeepers. If you have any perhaps you would be kind enough to send me a copy either via post or by e-mail. If they are published I would of course acknowledge them and pay any costs.