

# **Dunblane & Stirling Beekeepers' Association (SCIO)**

## **Report from the Chair 2019-2020**

When we concluded our AGM in November 2019, I doubt if any of us could have foreseen what the 2019-20 year would bring and how our lives would change due to the coronavirus pandemic. It is a total understatement to say that this has been a challenging time for all of us. I have missed the educational and social side of our usual meetings, but I hope that you are all coping with your own personal circumstances and that you are well.

DSBA managed to hold its December, February and March members' meetings, but no others. Our New Beekeepers' classes were also halted in March, meaning that our 2020 intake of new beekeepers was unable to finish the full course. Continued restrictions on gatherings meant that it was impossible to have our beginners attend the Association apiary and as a result we have been unable to offer hands-on beekeeping to the group. As it became apparent that lockdown measures and social distancing would be ongoing in some form or other, the Board made the decision to abandon any attempts to organise members' meetings for the remainder of 2020. Trustees were in early talks with a community group and also a local school regarding collaborative projects to allow them to keep bees. Sadly, these had to be postponed as well.

However, the Board has still been active and determined to do the best it can for the Association and its members. We have held regular Board meetings via Zoom and have found it to be an extremely useful tool.

It became apparent to the Board that we would need to provide some form of help and guidance for the membership because our usual routes were somewhat restricted. The pilot for our mentoring scheme for the 2019 new beekeepers had only just been launched in March, but the decision was taken to roll this out to the whole membership in an attempt to provide a support platform for everyone. Uptake is steady and we feel this has been both useful and helpful to those accessing it. The Board also compiled an information email with Government guidance documents and links for help, and this was sent to the membership in April.

At the start of Winter the Associations' bees were removed from the apiary at the University to allow for improvements to the layout and storage. The apiary committee volunteered weekend after weekend to carry out work to upgrade the facilities, but this was halted due to the coronavirus and has still to be completed. The bees were returned in early Spring. One of our major considerations was how to look after the colonies during lockdown. It was impossible for the apiary committee to work and socially distance, so the apiary manager and assistant manager undertook this task between the two of them. They have attended every week to carry out the necessary work with our bees and have also ensured that bee feed and supplies distribution was uninterrupted.

Prior to our 2019 AGM, the Board had identified a need for a simpler website for the Association, and the decision was taken to build a new one completely. Thankfully this was something which we could continue to make progress with. A small sub-group of Trustees and volunteers worked extremely hard to produce our lovely new website which was launched in August. It is more informative and user-friendly and makes communicating with the Association much easier than before.

Now we must look forward from this point to our 2020-21 year. Meeting halls are not taking bookings yet and so we cannot plan for face to face meetings. Neither can we book rooms for our intake of new beekeepers. The Board is looking into ways in which we can hold virtual meetings. We have a full complement of lecturers to deliver the New Beekeepers' course and we have limited the numbers to 25 this year as opposed to 30. This is to allow for those from the 2019 class, and who wish to do so, to finish the course and attend hands-on beekeeping during the Summer of 2021. It is our intention to endeavour to resume the projects with the community group and school. We have since had an enquiry from a second local school regarding the possibility of helping a group of their students sit the SBA Junior Beekeeper exam and we are keen to become involved.

I would like to extend a huge personal thank you to my fellow Trustees, to the apiary committee and to all those who volunteer and undertake tasks to help with the activities of the Association to the benefit of its members and the public. Thank you to you, our members, for continuing to support your Association and Board.

It is unlikely that we will all be able to meet up in person any time soon, but I am looking forward to when we can resume with some sense of normality. Until that point, take care and look after yourselves.

Christine Craig Chair DSBA SC048615