

## Beekeeping in Scotland - No 1 - Climate

The climate in Scotland is oceanic - we are, after all, an island! At a latitude of between about 55 - 62 degrees north, you might expect temperatures equivalent to those found at a similar latitude in Canada. However the influence of the warm Gulf Stream current means that instead of temperatures similar to those of Labrador and Newfoundland, the average January temperature throughout most of Scotland is between one and ten degrees Celsius, and the average for July between ten and twenty Celsius.

Think of it yet another way. The Shetland Islands, which lie to the North of the Scottish mainland, are further North than the Southern tip of Greenland, but enjoy a much milder climate.

Prevailing winds are from the west or south west, and annual rainfall ranges from over 60 inches in the west to less than 20 inches in the east. The winter months are usually the wettest but sometimes there is also heavy rainfall in late summer.

Winters are not particularly cold but usually quite wet. Snow does fall, increasingly so away from the coast and on high ground. Northeast winds in particular can bring prolonged low temperatures, and the record low temperature for Scotland is about minus 28 degrees Celsius.

Do remember that there is much local variation due to altitude and distance from the coast.

Honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) are certainly indigenous to the British Isles, including Scotland. However it is likely that the Northern limit of their natural range is reached somewhere in the Northern half of the country, being determined by a subtle blend of factors such as rainfall, temperature and wind exposure. Feral colonies seem able to survive without human intervention certainly as far north as the coastal parts of Sutherland, but not much further. The Scottish Island groups - The Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland - are somewhat exposed and windy, but bees can be kept on all of them successfully, albeit with considerable help from the beekeeper. Queen rearing is rather more difficult in these areas.

A Shetland Beekeeper has supplied this description of some aspects of Shetland beekeeping...

"...the most isolated of the British Isles, namely Shetland, where bees have been kept within living memory, but probably not much beyond that...."

...Having started with one hive, I have slowly built up to nine. This year [1998] saw no increase because of poor mating, with the bad weather being the main cause. However, the existing colonies maintained themselves in good health and gave a modest return [of honey]...."