

All in a Day's Work

Gearoid Mac Eoin — Beekeeper

My name is Gearoid Mac Eoin and I have a beekeeping business, selling beehives and producing honey, in Creagh, between Skibbereen and Baltimore, Co Cork.

www.maceoinhoney.com



Gearoid Mac Eoin

Images courtesy of Gearoid MacEoin



How did I start beekeeping?

I have been beekeeping for nearly 50 years. My father moved to Skibbereen in 1959 and soon after moving to West Cork, he took up the hobby of beekeeping. We had a large garden in Skibbereen town and he had about 20 beehives in the orchard at the bottom of the garden. All of the Mac Eoin children would have to help with the beekeeping and honey harvest. My father retired from the Garda in 1975 and increased the number of beehives over the next few years to about 100. After school and in the school holidays I would be working with him. After finishing secondary school I decided not to go to college and became a full time beekeeper, in partnership with my father. Over the next few years we gradually increased the number of beehives, reaching a maximum of 700. We also started to sell the beekeeping equipment to other beekeepers around this time. The beekeeping equipment shop is now my main job and I also have about 50 beehives producing honey.

What do I do each day?

My work each day can be very different. My busiest times are during the spring and summer. I usually spend the mornings in the shop, packing up parcels containing beehives, beesuits, bee smokers, wax sheets, etc., and the carrier van calls around

*Right: Wood waiting to be turned into beehives.
Far Right: Gearoid checking one of his hives.*

three o'clock to collect them and deliver them to beekeepers all over Ireland. After this I get in my van and go out to mind my bees.

How I look after my bees

The beehives are in six or seven different places around West Cork. The name for a place where the bees are kept is an Apiary, and each apiary contains about eight beehives. From May to August I have to open up and examine each beehive once a week. I smoke the beehive gently before opening it to calm the bees and I examine each of the frames for swarm cells, diseases, healthy eggs and brood and honey. The Queen bee should be busy as she lays 2000 eggs every day. If I spot her (she is a bit longer than the worker bee), I will put a spot of paint on her back and clip one of her wings. The spot of paint on the Queen bee's back helps me to find her again in the middle of the other 60,000 worker bees and drones in each beehive. If the bees have been busy gathering nectar and pollen from the flowers I put extra new boxes on each beehive for the bees to store their honey.



In the Autumn I harvest the honey boxes from the bees and make sure that the bees have enough food for the winter and treat them for any diseases or mites that they might have. I bring the honey boxes back to my extracting room at Creagh. I put each frame of honeycomb in a honey extractor that spins it until all the honey comes out. Then I strain the honey through a very fine cloth to remove any specks of dust and put it in jars for sale.

In the winter time I repair any damaged beehives and manufacture new beehives in my workshop and assemble all the frames that go inside them.

What is the best thing about my job?

There are lots of good things about my job. I get to work outdoors, helping nature by keeping bees and helping to pollinate the countryside, while the bees are struggling to survive all over the world, due to habitat loss, diseases and pests. Probably the nicest thing, is to visit an apiary late in the evening, during a honey flow. There is a wonderful scent of nectar and you can hear a loud humming from the bees as they fan their wings to blow dry air through the beehives. They do this each night in order to evaporate water from the freshly gathered nectar and thicken it into the lovely honey.

What is the worst thing about my job?

The worst thing about my job is

probably the backache I get from beekeeping. It is part of the job to be bent over a beehive in the same position for a long time each day, and this is bad for the lower back.

Where did I train?

I didn't have any formal training for my job. I learned beekeeping from my father, looking over his shoulder as he worked and we both learned woodwork from another beekeeper who was a carpenter. Looking back I would probably advise any young person thinking of starting a business to finish their college education first and then make a decision of what to do for the rest of their life.

What would I do if I wasn't doing what I do?

If I hadn't become a beekeeper, I would most likely have gone to UCC and I would have become an accountant. I would have earned more money as an accountant but I would probably live in a city somewhere instead of beautiful West Cork.

The best advice I've got

As a carpenter, making beehives, the best bit of advice I got was to measure twice, cut once. Whenever I fail to heed this great advice I usually end up with a mess.



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