

February. A new/old Enemy

I had only read about this “enemy” of the hive in books and occasionally online in the many many bee blogs out there. I had never really considered these winged yellow waist coated foe as a threat before, that was until I saw one in action a few days ago and I was shocked and to think I even feed them peanuts.

The Great Tit is of course one of our beloved wild birds and graces nearly every bird table in our gardens. However their name does appear in the list of “wild animals” that like to take advantage of bees in a hive. Honestly I didn’t think much of this, “what Great Tits no, they are a bit cheeky yes, but not something Beekeepers need to be wary of, surely not?”

It was a warmish February day; the temperature was hovering between 8 and 9c. On my daily walk down to the hive I could see there was a bit of activity, one or two bees were bravely taking to the skies. It was then that I spotted a small bird flittering about the bottom of the hive, picking up bits and pieces and the odd dead bee that had been pushed out the entrance. Nothing new there, I had seen the Wren doing this on a number of occasions. The little bird then flew up into a nearby tree and proceeded to clean its beak. Then suddenly this winged viper darted down to the hive entrance, picked a bee just emerging from a hole in the mouse guard and flew back into its perch to eat that poor bee!

I was quite literally horrified and amazed at the same time. How dare this bird, that I know and love, pick off one of “my” bees, balanced with just how intelligent and resourceful this Great Tit was. After all it had been me who had put the hive there, in the bird’s domain. Truthfully I hold no ill will against the Great Tit; they are one of nature’s great survivors, making use of any opportunity of the scarce food source they might find at this time of year.

Also there is very little I can do, chopping down all the trees so there is no perches for the birds is neither practical and wouldn’t stop a bird from hopping down to the entrance. Changing the hive entrance so that the bees have more protection as the land or take off would be a possibility, after all the Asian Hornet hunts bees in a similar way but thankfully something we only need to be aware of and not something we have to take action on....yet!

Bee’s lives are full of many dangers from predators (and beekeepers) and there is only so much we humans can do to protect the bees that we care for, the rest is up to the bees and Mother Nature.

Talking of taking care of the bees, the 18th of February was a warm day, a whole 11c, so I took the opportunity to check on the 1kg of fondant that I had put in the hive on the 13th January. The plastic take away container was empty, so rather than giving them more fondant I had a spare super frame full of capped honey instead. The bees didn’t like me removing the empty take away container and a few of them made their displeasure known, however once the honey frame was placed flat over the hole on the crown board, they soon forgot about the empty plastic box. I won’t be leaving the next check of food as long, weather and temperature dependant, and there will be another full super frame waiting for the bees next feeding time.

So with that March is quickly marching towards us and so my new beekeeping journey is also about to heat up along with the weather, just not too quickly I hope.

Take care and of course bee safe.

Chris.