

Special – 1st Full Inspection 2024

Today is the 21st of April, the sun has now been shining for a few good days now and the temperatures are on the rise. The time that I think every beekeeper looks forward to the first full bee inspection of the bee year is about to happen. I am certainly excited and a bit nervous to what we, My Bee Mentor (MBM) and I, might find when we lift the lid and look at the frames and see just how the bees have fared over the winter.

The only fly in the ointment is that all week the Met Office has said what a lovely sunny day this Sunday is going to be, only to change it the day before to a bit breezy and a spot of rain. No matter the temperatures are still above 10c, the hive does have a bit of shelter and I'm crossing all my fingers that lady weather luck is on our side.

Like a good little beekeeper, I have been cleaning kit and getting frames and supers ready for anything. MBM arrives and we have a quick chat about the weather of course and my hive observations' but soon enough we have donned our bee suits with our bee bags in hand and head down to the hive.

The blue bells are flowering in the wood and the bees are flying in and out of the hive with plenty of pollen on their back legs and some are even dusted in so much pale yellow pollen that when they land on the landing board they give themselves a quick wipe before going in.

Anyways, we don't say much as I undo the ratchet strap and lift off the roof, remove the eke; the top crown board and the empty take way container. Now for the crown board that is actually over the frames which has been bee welded on over the winter and signs of brace comb round the crown board hole. A quick run round the edges with my trusty hive tool then carefully freeing it with a few gentle twists, I take a deep breath and lift away, Oh my!

The hive is packed full of bees, like it was midsummer packed. Even MBM is surprised and says "your Queen has been very busy and the feeding certainly has helped!" Out of the 12 frames that this National Hive easily holds, 8 frames are thickly covered in bees, spotting last year's marked Queen was going to be tricky but she was definitely in there somewhere. There was capped brood; uncapped cells with the familiar "C" shaped larvae inside; capped honey at the edges and the open pollen cells all in nice rugby ball shape pattern.

I found it all quite over whelming, but absolutely brilliant to see. We used a pillow case to cover over the frames in the hive as we pulled them out and inspected them. Towards the south facing side of the hive there were a few drone cells. The bees were not aggressive and for the most part fairly relaxed but towards the end of the inspection they where beginning to get a bit lively.

With the inspection finished and the brood box covered over with our pillow case to keep the bees calm. MBM said that we will have to give them space to expand now! I said there is a box ready to go, a super. MBM first said yes then no not a super the Queen needs to get up into the new space and continue laying. A super with a queen excluder wouldn't solve the space issue, another brood box is required, you do have another brood box ready yes?

Err no, well almost. Seems I wasn't quite prepared as I thought. Thankfully my workshop is near the hive but it's not what you might call tidy, it was even less tidy when I pulled stuff out of the way to get the brood boxes out and dig out some clean frames with foundation in. Eight good brood frames was all I had, MBM saw the look on my face and calmly said that would be fine as long as we place them centrally, the bees wouldn't fill the frames up "that" quick so I still had plenty of time to put in the rest when I had made them up.

Afterwards with our bee suits put away, we both sat and chatted about what we had just seen in the hive and the action we had taken. MBM did stress that we now have to leave the bees to it for a bit so they could adjust to their new extension, but importantly we might have given them more room but it didn't mean they wouldn't swarm, it just reduces the risk. So I still have to remain vigilant and continue the checks! Maybe this was going to be a good year for the bees, but only time will tell?

I never imagined there would be a double brood box hive sitting on the edge of our blue bell wood which the bees seem quite happy with, but it will take double the time to inspect now, but at least it is only one.....for now!

As always take care now and bee safe.

Chris.