

January Bee Blog: Hive Number One

So in a moment of arrogant madness I accepted Linda's invitation to become the Association's new bee blogger for 2025. I am very conscious of how difficult it will be to match Chris's entertaining and informative 2024 diary.

What I am hoping to do this year is record the progress of one specific colony, hereinafter referred to as 'Hive Number One', or HN1. This is a colony with a 2024 queen, is pretty strong, and has overwintered on a deep brood box and a single super. It took around 40 lbs of sugar syrup feed last autumn and was treated with Apiguard for varroa in September. HN1 lives on a sheltered farm site about a mile from my home, a hundred meters above sea level. The rental is paid in jars of honey and peeks inside the hive for members of the farmer's family. This includes his eight year old daughter and his octogenarian mother!

Linda suggested I start this blog once I had opened up the hive for its first Spring check. But for two reasons I am starting now. The first reason is all to do with how many of us feel about our bees. I'm not going to pretend that they are '*part of the family*' like a pet dog or cat but for many of us we are very close to our bees. I feel intensively responsible for mine. A colony of bees is a living entity which, over the centuries, we have tried to 'civilise' (without success). But we remain responsible for them. When they suffer or die we feel real guilt.

Which is why I can't leave my bees alone over the winter. I have to keep checking them, not by opening them up, but by reassuring myself that they are still alive. There is something quite magical about lifting the lid and the crown board during a hard frost, giving the hive a gentle tap, and hearing that quiet murmur from the bees in the depths of the hive. And there is nothing more gut wrenching than NOT hearing that contented buzz.

So already this year I checked HN1 on January 14. It buzzed to me, it didn't need additional feed and I gave it an additional sheet of polystyrene insulation, 'just in case.' I patted it on the back.

Then came Storm Eowyn on Friday, January 24. I've had hives blown over in the past, so this time I was at the bees the day before the storm struck. HN1 was re-strapped to the hive stand which in turn is fixed in

the ground. The next I knew was the following Saturday, when the farmer texted me to say the bees were OK. Because my mobile was flat (we had a 3 day power cut) I went up to the farm to thank Iain for his text. The bees were indeed OK, unlike Iain's farm house and buildings which sadly were quite badly damaged.

So it seems that the first major beekeeping hurdle of the year for me has been successfully overcome. But I've already heard of fellow beekeepers who finished up with their bees scattered to the winds. It's still a long way till that first Spring inspection, but I'll be checking HN1 at least once a fortnight till the end of March. Meanwhile the mahonia, the snowdrops and the hellebores are all in flower, and the first frog spawn appeared in my pond on January 27. Spring **IS** coming.