

February Blog....Of Mice and Men

Saturday February 8. France vs England Rugby. Cold....really cold. 5C but feels more like minus 5 in the easterly wind. Not a day for the bees, but before kick-off there's just time to check HN1 (Hive Number One) up at the farm. Took the roof off, removed the insulation and gently tapped the hive with my ear to the feeder hole in the crown board. There it was, that ever so gentle hum from inside the heart of the hive. Good, the bees are still alive and not looking hungry, so let's see what, if anything, they're eating. This hive has an open mesh floor with a varroa insert. The insert can tell you a story. In this case it told me that the bees had eaten the food which had been stored the longest. They were now beginning to tackle the food from the autumn feed. You can tell this by the colour of the cappings on the insert. Those fine cappings in the middle are very dark and therefore the oldest, those at the edges should be white, therefore recent.

So all good. But next to HN1 sits a spare hive filled with drawn combs. This, I thought, had been securely sealed up for the winter. But today I noticed that the gales a fortnight ago had shifted the block in the hive entrance. There was a tiny space roughly a centimetre wide. Oh no! A quick check of the hive's varroa insert revealed fine fragments of comb scattered all over the floor. MICE!!!

I opened up the hive, and although the mouse had fled the damage was done. Some combs were nibbled down to the foundation. The bees will rebuild these. But on three frames roughly a third of the comb had disappeared altogether. I removed these, brought them home where they will need to be cleaned out and fitted with new foundation. And I'm told that bees do not like the smell of mouse pee, so these frames will also need a good airing! By the way, England won by one point.

More Mouse News. February 14 (Valentine's Day). Still very cold. Time to check out some bits and pieces in the Bee Drawer in preparation for the next Association Meeting. The drawer is one of five in a chest in my workshop. It contains all sorts of oddments including zinc mesh, hive nails, frame spacers and porter escapes. But when I opened the drawer none of this was visible. Instead the drawer seemed to be full of shredded newspapers and granulated foam. And right in the centre was a beautifully rounded ball of paper pieces in the shape of a mouse's nest. The mice had discovered the sheets of newspaper I stored there for use when uniting two hives. Luckily none of the bee kit was damaged and the nest was vacant. I had obviously caught it just in time. But there was a sting in the tail.. for the mice. In the bottom drawer I

overwinter my own seed potatoes and I protect these with mouse traps. Guess what, I checked and found I had caught both the rogue rodents. Hopefully that's the end of this Mickey Mouse story.

Saturday Feb 22. Rugby: Scotland V England. Temperature 13C, warmest day of the year so far. BEES ARE FLYING!! Now to make sure they survive the next 6 weeks. Although they're flying, they're not foraging. It's mainly cleansing flights for the older bees, and orientation flights for the young ones. But the signs are good. The first frogspawn in the garden pond has turned into hundreds of tadpoles so Spring must be just round the corner. Oh, and Scotland lost by one point.