

April Blog

What a contrast to last year! In 2024 throughout March and April we had almost continuous wind and rain, including Storm Kathleen on April 6/7. This year things could hardly be different! Weeks of continuous sunshine, temperatures high enough for the bees to fly, and a huge array of flowers undamaged by wind. Surely the best possible start to the beekeeping year.

On March 24 I gave HN1 (Hive Number One) a litre of sugar syrup and removed the uneaten fondant. By April 2 the bees had devoured the lot, but on Sunday 6th they'd hardly touched the refill. A sure sign that there was plenty of food in the hive.

By my calculation the queen started laying on March 7 which means the first bees will hatch (after 21 days) on March 29. They will then become nurse bees, busy with hive duties, for another ten days or so. They won't start foraging until about mid April. In other words the hive has been entirely dependent on old bees hatched in October 2024 to survive until now. A tall order and no wonder, as Dougie says in his Chairman's notes this month, we must still keep an eye on food reserves.

So on April 8 HN1 had two deep frames full of sealed brood. That means in ten days, when the brood hatches, there will be around 8,000 more working bees in the hive. It's not difficult to see why a colony can grow exponentially at this time of year, and reach around 40,000 occupants by mid May.

HN1 is sited on a piece of spare land in the lee of a large farm barn, and not surprisingly, left alone nature soon invades this ground. So this week I'll be up at the farm with strimmer and secateurs, attacking the briars which are currently threatening to swallow HN1. Normally I would use a petrol strimmer for a job like this. But bees hate this kind of machinery and can get very stroppy when it's used near to them. So it'll be the battery strimmer this time.

April 24. Just 16 days since my last inspection the number of frames filled with brood has doubled to four. That's a lot of young bees on the way, but still rather less than I hoped for, in the light of such good weather and pollen supply. On the other hand, that means the risk of an early swarm has been delayed.

Last August I was summoned by the elders of our local Village Hall to investigate a swarm of bees that had allegedly entered the floor vents of the Hall and set up home. 'Can't possibly be bees' I said, 'They would never settle so close to the ground'. I was, of course, quite wrong! The village elders fenced off the entrance, I watched the bees come and go into the Autumn, but now they are no more. They arrived too late in the season and it was so cold and miserable that they had no time to collect enough food to survive the winter. They will have died of starvation. Sad.