

## May Bee Blog

May 6. And so four becomes five. A week ago, before I went on a short holiday, I checked Hive Number One (HN1) to ensure there were no signs of swarming. There were none. The queen was now laying on four frames. Seven days on, that number has risen to five. Doesn't sound a lot, but two full sides of a National brood frame is space for the queen to lay around 4,000 eggs. If that happens again next week, I'll need to be very disciplined with my weekly checks. Today there were the first signs that the swarming season is upon us; a couple of 'play' queen cells, both empty but a sure sign that the swarming instinct is stirring. That and quite a number of young drones hopping around the hive and taking their first flights.

As I remarked in April, this year has been in stark contrast to 2024 in terms of weather. We are now into our sixth amazing week of dry, sunny and relatively warm weather. The garden is already in a state of semi drought. Luckily my water supply comes from a borehole, so along with my rainwater butts, I have unlimited free water. Which, of course, is what the bees need too. I notice that they are visiting the water trays put out for the birds. And there is a wee burn not far from HN1 so the bees should be OK.

The garden reflects the weather just as the bees do. Here near Carsluith we are at least a week ahead. The tatties, the peas and the garlic plants are thriving but need regular watering. The polytunnel gets up to 40C during the day, which the vine and the tomatoes love. But I can't help feeling there is something a little bit abnormal about all this. It's definitely not usual to see newly fledged blackbirds and thrushes in the garden before the end of April. Who said we are too far north and too cold for the dreaded Yellow Legged Asian Hornet not to put in an appearance?

By mid May it's **WildFlower Central** - hedgerows ablaze with hawthorn, rowan, red campion, and broom. Feast time for the bees, but without wanting to sound too repetitive, rarely has the weather been so benevolent. I can't ever remember high pressure with associated good weather being blocked for week after week after week in spring in Scotland. And that's well over half a century of beekeeping. I'm going to predict a manic swarming season coming up in June.

I've reorganised HN1 slightly to give the queen more room by a) moving empty frames on the outside of the brood box into the middle of the nest, and b) by adding a second super. The super that was already on was pretty heavy, but I suspect it was full of stored sugar syrup. So the second super has gone UNDER that one, to keep good and possibly inferior honey, apart.

There are now signs of a drought. The wee burn in my garden has all but dried up and the bees are showing an unhealthy interest in the outflow of our septic tank (sorry, wastewater treatment plant). The swallows and martins are having difficulty finding liquid mud to build their nests.

Friday, May 23. Judith Ralston on BBC Scotland says the weather will finally break tonight. She was right. Rain at last! It's now seven days since my last hive inspection. So on with the veil and be prepared to take anti-swarming action. I was not wrong. HN1 was bubbling over with bees, the queen was laying on eight frames and there were uncapped queen cells with eggs. Half an hour later and the colony had become TWO colonies, one with a laying queen in a new hive on the original stand, the other five yards away with open queen cells. I will not go near this latter colony again for at least four weeks, by which time a new queen SHOULD be hatched, mated and laying. We'll see. "*The best laid plans of mice and men*" (and women).

It's now a week since I split colony HN1 and a quick check reveals that all is more than well with the 'parent' hive containing the old queen. She is laying on three frames and has a good retinue of workers to support her. So I'll leave her alone for a while. Likewise, the 'daughter' colony is covering at least three frames, but I will leave it completely alone for another three weeks. And I notice that elder flower blossom is everywhere.....delicious fragrant honey if the weather holds.