

## July Bee Blog

This blog has now reached its halfway point in the year, and time to reflect briefly on the story of Hive Number One (HN1) so far.

HN1 came through the winter relatively strong, covering four frames at the first full inspection on April 2. The temperature that day was 17C. The hive had been supplied with sugar candy through the winter, but this was changed to sugar syrup. Thanks to one of the best ever springs weather-wise, the colony grew at an amazing speed, and by May 25 was showing signs of swarming. So I split it, creating an artificial swarm. Five weeks later the artificial swarm (HN1) was back to being full strength, packed with brood, thanks to the 'old' queen, while the second colony (HN2) had a new laying queen.

By my own standards, this has been a remarkably successful season so far. Many things that could have gone wrong didn't. The only disappointment has been that the bees didn't produce much spring honey. But that could change completely if I take one, or maybe both hives to the heather moor. I've already started checking the heather to assess when it might come into bloom. This seems to vary year on year, but generally it's getting earlier. Traditionally the 'Glorious Twelfth' (August 12) was when you went to the heather, but now it's at least a week earlier.

However, there's a problem with 'my' heather moor. It seems that the part of the hill where I site the hives (a private forest) has been sold. And no-one seems to know who the new owner is! Some detective work required.

Hence I find myself intruding in the somewhat murky world of Scottish Forestry! It seems that most Scottish forests which are not owned by Scottish Land and Forestry belong to somewhat secretive wealthy investors. They in turn employ agents to look after their investments. Like stocks and shares, forests change hands regularly. It took me a full half day to track down 'my' forest's new management company. But when I finally did, the manager couldn't have been more welcoming. My hives can sit on the edge of the forest, but I must provide evidence of Third Party Insurance. No problem since this comes as part of my SBA

membership. I'll explain next month why I am so anxious to retain this wonderful heather honey site.

July 8, twenty one degrees and hot weather forecast, so a quick hive inspection. There is an obvious honey flow, and HN1 is flying like a fairground. The queen is laying on 8 frames and the brood box is congested. But it's already too late in the season for swarming and there are no queen cells. The hive has two honey supers on, so plenty of space atop.

The queen in HN2, the artificial swarm, is laying on four frames with a lot of sealed brood waiting to hatch. This colony should be well strong enough to survive next winter. After going through the hive FOUR times I finally found the new queen, and marked her with white paint. Who cares what this year's colour is, I want to be able to find her quickly.

It's now the last week of July and the countdown to the heather has really begun. A couple of half pallets which will double as hive stands are already installed on the moor. HN1, which has two supers on it, needs to be reduced to a single box (like HN2) so it will fit in my estate car. Today I removed the super with about fifteen pounds of honey in it, and this weekend the other one will come off. All that remains is to ensure that both hives can be completely secured for their journey in the car. And then the heather adventure can begin. August the first is my target date, the earliest ever, but the heather is just waiting to burst into flower.

In fact, I moved hives HN1 and HN2 to the heather moor on July 28. More on this in August.

Last year I was randomly selected by the Scottish Government to provide 20 live bees for European Foulbrood analysis. DNA samples were used to find out whether my bees were susceptible to EFB, not whether they had it. The results, which were released in June, were interesting. My bees were clear, thank goodness. Only two samples from the whole of Scotland were potential EFB carriers, and they were in the Central Belt. And the highest percentage of participants in the country who volunteered for this exercise (84%) were in the South West. So well done, WGBA members.

