

Bee Blog 4

Hello,

We have kept bees for 3 years now with varying success. We have never felt our bees had enough honey to share with us. But this year is so different. In the last few weeks they have filled the supers and now much of the honey is capped. What a difference. I have enjoyed keeping bees even when things didn't go as well as they might, however it is so nice to see them having an abundance of honey. On reflection I do not think we have done anything significantly differently this year. Except for the fence I added early this year to help protect them from the wind. I think the weather is a big factor to a hives success but sometimes hives are not strong and don't thrive. We have tried to work with having one or two hives but I am now thinking this leaves one vulnerable to things going wrong. Having three hives gives a much better insurance and the resources for one hive to help another out. It also allowed me to be more relaxed about the bees wanting to do things that may result in a swarm because there are still other hives left. The downside is you need a lot more kit to cope when things go well.

We started the Year with one hive. We made two splits and caught a swarm so now we have 4 hives. This has given us the problem of not enough equipment but I guess it's a good problem to have. We made the splits because our bees kept producing queen cells. We interpreted this as preparation to swarm and only having one hive we didn't want this to happen. However, I now believe they were wanting to supersede the Queen. Which they eventually did, despite me getting in the way. The new queen is laying many more eggs in a much more regular pattern. So as usual the bees know best.

Our weakest split is still in a poly nuc box as we don't have enough full hives. We gave them more space by adding a second brood box and later a super. During one of our inspections we noticed a lack of eggs in the nuc. During the following inspection we checked very carefully, still no eggs. They are still active and storing lots of honey. We have moved a frame with new eggs from one of the other hives, hopefully they will produce an emergency queen and she will have time to get mated and start laying.

On reflection it seems to be a bit of a waste to kill so many queen cells during the swarming season. So we bought some queen rearing boxes to experiment with. They arrived too late to use this season however we hope to work out how to use them ready for next season.

We are always looking for plants that the bees like that will tolerate the salt and wind that we have. One of the best this year is the phormiums, they have been in flower for several weeks now and still have lots of bees around them. The flowers don't look much, big sticks with tiny flowers, but they seem to hold lots of nectar.

With the weather so warm and dry this year we don't seem to have had a June or July gap. I see the Rosebay willowherb is out now so hopefully that will keep them going for a while.

I hope you are all having a good year with your bees.

Tony