

Bee Blog 5

Hello,

We have had a very pleasant summer this year. The flowers have been good and the bees have been busy. We are looking to have our first crop of honey. A much better year than we have had before with bees.

We have had an issue with losing queens.

The first was in Nuc 1. This was from a split. It was weak to start but I thought it better to give the queen cells a chance rather than just destroying them. We had the beginnings of a hive with eggs and grubs however a week or so later we had no new eggs. There were a reasonable number of bees and they were bringing in plenty of food so we thought it reasonable to give them a frame with some new eggs (still standing up at the bottom of the cell) from one of the other hives. We left it alone for the bees to make an emergency queen.

The timings are as follows:-

Day 1 Egg laid, as the egg is laid it is standing in the cell by day 3 it is lying at the bottom of the cell

Day 3 egg hatches

Day 8 queen cell is sealed

Day 16 queen emerges

Before she can start laying eggs she needs to have her maiden flight and mate with several drones. This is weather dependent the quickest this can happen is 4 days and 3-4 days after mating she should start to lay eggs.

Therefore the very soonest you could see new eggs is 24 days. If there are no new eggs by day 38 then it is reasonable to assume the queen is not viable and action should be taken by way of a test frame.

As Nuc1 was weak to start with we thought it not unreasonable that Nuc 1 queen failed. The new queen is now laying eggs and all looks well.

During an inspection on (15th August) we found Hive 1 had no eggs or grubs. The bees were still bringing in nectar and pollen. Again we added a frame with new eggs from one of the other hives hoping they would make an emergency queen.

The next inspection (25th August) we did not go in Hive 1 as they should be part way through making an emergency queen. However we found Hive 3 had no eggs or grubs. Again the bees were still bringing in nectar and pollen. We repeated the process of adding a frame with new eggs from one of the other hives.

I am wondering if this is "normal"? We effectively have 4 hives. Nuc 1 has a double brood box and a super so it can be considered a hive. We have "lost" 2 queens in August. I am not really including the loss of the queen in Nuc 1 earlier in the year as it was a week split. We are encouraged to look for eggs when we inspect so is that indicative that queen loss is normal? If it is not normal then I need to look at what is going wrong. I wonder how much it is the bee keeper causing problems. I try to be very gentle when I am in a hive hoping to not damage any bees, however there are always a few casualties. I now think that I was misreading the bees early in the year when I was finding and removing queen cells from Hive 1, I now think they were trying to supersede rather than swarm. They eventually managed to

do it and the new queen was laying much better. Early in the year we had a talk from Matthew Richardson the President of Scottish Beekeepers Association, one of his themes was do we need to inspect so much. Maybe less intervention would be better for the bees. However without inspecting I would not have known the last two hives had lost their queens and I would not have been able to give them a second chance. As without a queen or eggs the hive is doomed. As many things are with bee keeping I do not believe there is one simple answer. But I think I am moving more towards believing the bees know better than me and letting them make more of the decisions is a good idea. As we are often reminded "think like a bee"

One of the other experiences I have had with my bees in August is getting stung. I have occasionally had the odd sting over the time I have had bees and found it to be not much of an issue. One or two stings are irritating but the effect is short lived and I guess inevitable when handling bees. I made the mistake of not preparing correctly when going to inspect the bees. They are quiet bees and rarely cause any problems. The weather was good so I had my half bee suit on and I didn't change into my boots. I was wearing thin socks and crocks. As I was working I received a sting to the ankle through my sock. I carried on with what I was doing for a short time however I started getting several stings to the same ankle. I retreated from the hives and brushed off the many bees that were now around my feet. Once one stings the others are attracted to the pheromone and sting in the same place. This is the first time I have received several stings at the same time. My first thoughts were, do I need medical help? No swelling to the throat or tongue, good, I am not on my own, so I think I can wait and see what happens. Over the next few hours my foot and leg became quite swollen as you would expect. I think I received more than 10 stings to my ankle. The next concern was the swelling bad enough to stop the flow of blood to my foot. So I kept a check to see that my toes were warm and pink. All good. By the evening I felt like I had flu, a temperature and shaking. A quick check on google, yes that's normal with bee stings. I went to bed and slept until late the next day. The temperature and shaking had gone. I was left with a thick head and a very swollen leg. Over the next couple of days I return to normal. The reason I have included this in the blog is to encourage you not to take chances. It's so easy to become complacent. I for one would rather not repeat this experience.

The bees are still working hard and making more honey but it is time to start thinking about preparation for winter. The rain has stopped and a pod of dolphins has just passed my window. Isn't nature wonderful?

Tony