



Brook Road Bees

April 2010

As you will see on allotment 76 our bees are starting to work well.

Under the top cover of the working hive is a storage box for honey called a super. The bees use this area to store honey for feeding and later use through the winter.

The bee population of the hive is now increasing dramatically and you may notice on warm days, that the entrance to the hive gets very crowded with bees coming and going, guard bees turning back intruders, and some bees fanning air into the hive to keep the inside of the hive cool.

Whilst the actual sweet load (nectar), brought back by a bee is held in the stomach of the bee, to be deposited in the combs and fed to young, where required, what you can sometimes notice is that some bees return with what appears to be coloured boots on their legs, this is the pollen from the plants which the bee has visited and of course the bees also bring back a multitude of fluids and 'powders' which all go to make up the complicated hive structure.

The actual bee colony in the hive has upwards of 50,000 bees. The colony consist of a queen (female), several hundred drones (male) and the rest are worker bees (female).

The queen is the mother of almost all the other bees in a normal hive and is physically the largest insect in the hive and may have a lifespan of up to 5 years , normally however, in cultivated hives, after her second or third year she will be replaced because her laying ability declines.

The life cycle of a worker bee in summer is very short from hatching to its death , in total about 6 weeks, so the queen is increasing the strength of the hive, not only replacing spent bees but producing enough new bees to add the to the total population.

The main requirement of a drone bee is to mate once with a new queen, she only mates once in her life, after that the drones appear to be surplus to the requirements of the hive, since they carry out no apparent functionality in the hive, but strangely, removing all the drones from a hive produces a bad tempered and listless mood to the remainder of the hive.

Bees have no previous knowledge of what to collect or how to construct the comb or store food so it is even more amazing that these small insects, without being taught how to live in harmony take on individual responsibilities and change tasks as their short life progresses, all for the good of the hive.

We are now entering the 'swarming' season, it is possible that our hive and many other wild swarms and cultivated hives will produce a swarm during May June or July. I will carry out checks on our hive to reduce the possibility of our hive producing a swarm, but if it does occur and I am not at the allotments, do not be alarmed, these are not killer bees of horror films!!! In a swarm the bees are usually very docile and full up with honey. They are looking for a home, not looking for the nearest human to antagonise.

However if you do come across a swarm, move slowly away from the bees and then watch as they start to cluster somewhere near. Call me 01202 572722 and I'll come and collect it

Best wishes

Brian
Plot 76