



Brook Road Bees

March 2010

March and April are the start of the bee year

The Bees have come thro the dreary, cold winter months. They have kept themselves warm, managed to get rid of dead bees from the hive and lived on the stores I exchanged with them last August. Various energy sapping items may have beset them in the winter, hibernating mice, wax moth larvae and Bee diseases.

You have probably heard of the loss of bee colonies during winter months, often due to poor husbandry or bee diseases or parasites, so like vegetable growing you have bad years and good years.

In the winter the bees cluster but as the new year progresses thro spring and toward summer the cluster gets larger as the queen lays more eggs and the bees bring in more food.

Spring flowers are late this year but the bees tend to be aware of the flowering times, whether late or early, probably because they forage as soon as the air is warm enough,

.....But It's a new year, Because the weathers has been so cold and unfriendly (and the bee screen plants need more time to mature), I have yet to put a second hive on the allotment. When I do in April it will be a colony of second year bees, with new queen last June.

I have already inspected the colony and they look healthy and clean, the queen is already laying eggs, and the bees are bringing in food from crocus and other early flowering blossom and flowers, expanding their stores as they go.

On top of the main brood box I will put a honey storage box called a 'super' this is shallower than the brood box and contains layers of wax on which the bees will build their comb and deposit and cap honey stores.

Between the brood box and the honey super is a wire grid called a '**queen excluder**' which will stop the queen entering the super and laying eggs (the queen is larger than the workers so whilst the workers can move thro the grid to deposit honey and wax the queen cannot) The queen is therefore restrained to the brood box to lay eggs and produce new

bees. The super will not contain eggs or larvae. If it is a good year we can collect the honey (from the supers) during June thro to August.

You may wish to know that the bees not only collect from flowers and blossom but also from buds and (pine) wood itself collecting capping material and a substance called **propolis** (bee glue) the clever insects use this material to stick together part of the hive to make them weather and draft proof (and other and insect and mould proof). This bee glue has found a number of human uses through the years before the advent of Bostick and Superglue etc. Indeed in former years it was collected and sold by the ounce for about 1 shilling and 6 pence (7.5p) for medicinal and therapeutic uses and no doubt a bit of quackery.

Propolis often causes the apiarist problems in investigating the hive and colony because all parts of the inner hive become 'stuck' together by this bee glue and they have to be released (unstuck). The apiarist uses a specially shaped hive tool to carry out these operations and to scrape off excess propolis.

In the distant past some people used beehives around their land to discourage robbers etc. because bees where treated with awe and reverence. Regretfully this ploy did not deter some swine from stealing from my garden shed recently. The perpetrator passed right by my hives to steal my garden and other engineering tools so be warned!!!!

Best wishes

Brian
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