

# May – 15 Percent?

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To be honest I'm not sure where to start with this month, so much has happened in a short space of time that it has been a bit overwhelming and I'm guessing it has been just as busy for other beekeepers too. So I'm keeping this bee blog as simple as I can, let's start on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May.

Clearly I can't count, in my last bee blog I mentioned that on the 21<sup>st</sup> April we put another brood box on the hive, had some lovely feedback on that it was very interesting to see what other beekeepers would have done or had done.

Anyway I said that I was "four" frames short, so I made up the missing frames and as the weather was calm and the temperatures' where just touching 19c popped down the hive and went to put them in. This might sound a bit melodramatic but it was only two frames short, a large part of beekeeping is to be observant and trying to stay just ahead of the bees, so it might be a minor thing, maybe not even a thing but it did reminded me that you do have to be on your best form. The bees on the other hand where definitely on their best form and were making use of this new space.

Skipping to the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 23c in the full sun but a touch cooler at the hive. Today was going to be a full hive inspection, I was feeling a bit apprehensive about this as not only was this now a double brood box hive but I was going it alone. My Bee Mentor was away, also it didn't help my nevus that I was also three days late already for this inspection.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> brood box was filling up with nectar and pollen with perhaps signs of worker brood, I decided to leave this box and not interfere with them starting to move up. The 1<sup>st</sup> brood box it seemed was where all the action was. Hind sight is a wonderful thing especially as I write this as maybe I should have done a full frame inspection then and not just a quick look at a few of the frames but that was the call I made at the time. With the hive open and the bees exposed you have to make those decisions and not start second guessing yourself?

The 1<sup>st</sup> brood box was still booming, everything you expect to see was there, freshly capped worker brood with nectar, pollen and even capped honey round them. A few empty open play cups but nothing big or even close to capped. Open cells with the little white "C" shaped larva inside and the worker bees where busy cleaning out the recently vacated cells getting them ready for the next batch. There was now more drone brood round the edges of the frames and I did wonder if there was a too much drone brood. With my Bee Mentor away I couldn't really ask him if this was the case. I could have reached out to other beekeepers in the Association and I know they could advise, but I felt it was really something you have to see and explaining in an email or over the phone wasn't going to really help ease my mind. The drone brood wasn't like the pepper pot pattern and the books talk of a healthy hive having around 15 to 20 percent. Percentages are something that is quite hard for me to visualize and I apparently count even count to 2 without making 4.

Close to the end of the inspection the bees where now getting a bit grumpy, the tone (sound of their humming) of the bees had raised up a octave, a bit of bee head butting had started and couple of stings to my gloves, it was certainly time to close up and leave them be. I was hot and glad that I had

just one hive to do. However I was happy with how it went, the drone brood was something I knew I had to keep an eye on even if it was just a matter of understanding how this hive worked and what to look out for in the future. I should say and I do think it's important to mention that I do write up my findings and use WhatsApp to share my notes with my Bee Mentor so he knows what's going on as I see it.

Okay are you ready for this last bit, it gets a bit more interesting. The 18<sup>th</sup> May, 26c in the sun but thankfully at the hive it is a bit cooler. The Sycamore and Broom are in full bloom and the bees are not missing a thing. When beekeepers talk about the nectar flow I now know just what they mean, the bees are like water flowing in and out of the hive, it is amazing to see! I had decided to only check the top brood box this time and to be honest I think I found enough. The 2<sup>nd</sup> brood box was very busy and very full, the bees where on turbo from last week to this week they had filled most of the box, there was only one or two frames that didn't have anything on them but they were drawing them out. Pulling out the frames you could see the newly capped worker brood; open cells with larva; nectar; different colours of pollen and even capped honey round the brood. There was of course drone brood and now flying drones. Oh wait, there on the centre frame was two charged queen cells one on each side. They were small in size but no mistaking what they were.

The second brood box was busy, even more so than the first box before we put this other box on, a lack of space had become an issue again in my mind, but this time I decided to put on a honey super with a queen excluder. If the bees were going to swarm then taking down the queen cells would only buy me a bit of extra time, however the extra space "might" make them think twice. I already had a honey super ready and I also had two "wet" honey frames from last year to sweeten the deal. But I knew this wouldn't be enough, there was more to do.

Using the Thorne's slide computer dial thingy with my inspection dates and notes I had a bit of time, the queen cells had only just been capped in the last few days and the weather was also about to turn a bit wet and cold for a few days so the bees "shouldn't" be going anywhere far.

Time was short, but I have enough to get things ready for my next steps and just in case my maths were wrong, (maths again!) I put out two nuke bait boxes, one 10m from the hive and the other about 20m each with a bit of fresh sweet grass poked into the sides. I informed My Bee Mentor of what I had seen and was doing, luckily he would be back in a few days, but he was happy with what I had done so far.

This month of May is very quickly coming to an end and June is almost upon us, there is now some real beekeeping work that I have to do, but let it be said, not on my own but with the help of my Bee Mentor and the good people in our Association. Of course the bees will always do what they want to do!

Take care now and above all Bee Safe.

Chris