

Report on Beekeeping at Down Farm allotment site

2021

After the protective fencing had been erected it was getting late in the Beekeeping year but in June two small, quiet and gentle colonies of bees were selected and transferred into hives on the new site. It soon became apparent that there was very little forage for bees in the area, one colony was developing well but the other became queen less and died out by the autumn. To provide winter stores for the surviving colony I took it to the "New Forest" in early August and it stayed there until late September. I returned it to the Down Farm site packed full of Heather Honey and it overwintered very well.

(One colony into winter)

2022

The colony was very strong in March and the spring weather was calm settled and warm, spring came early, the yellow rape fields had turned green by the end of April. Because the colony was so strong I split it into three to replace the stock lost last year. All three colonies seemed to be doing well and had young queens. The weather then turned cold and wet preventing reliable queen mating. Two of the colonies appeared to have well mated queens the third colony survived until September when the new queen became a drone layer and the remaining bees were united with one of the other colonies.

(Two colonies into winter)

2023

This year spring was late, winter hung on with cold weather during March. The bees were using the last of their winter stores. They were able to fly for cleansing flights on some nice sunny spring days. There needs to be more spring pollen producing trees near the hives, so I have planted some Hazel saplings within the bee enclosure to aid early colony development. During the early spring the bees do not fly far from the hive as they will become chilled and lost. The yellow rape flowers lasted until the end of May this year, almost a full month later than last year. The colonies began to expand rapidly in April but not as quickly as in most years. Both colonies started to replace their queens in mid May causing colony development to slow down. This problem was probably due to the poor weather the previous year when the queens were mated. The new queens started to lay eggs by the end of June, by this time the spring flowers had finished and summer flowers were beginning to dry up due to lack of rain. The site is on free draining chalk and without frequent rain the wild flowers will not produce any nectar and the trees will wait, saving their energy for a better year. When the rain came in July all the flowers had finished. I took off two supers of honey in early July but since then very little additional honey has been produced by the bees so I will be returning it to them for their winter food stores. When bees are moved to a new site they take a few generations to adapt to the new conditions. As the years go by the trees planted in previous years around the Down Meadow site should become more mature and provide better forage for pollinating insects. At present there is not a lot of bee forage within flying distance and the two colonies are just surviving. However the two colonies with their new queens go into winter with plenty of stores that they collected earlier in the year and we look forward to better more suitable weather for the bee's and everyone with horticultural interests in the coming year.

(Two colonies into winter)