

## My Bees are acting AGGRESSIVE?- Don't worry it's the JUNE GAP

I am being contacted by a number of concerned beekeepers that they are finding it hard to work with their bees. They tell me that their bees have become more aggressive, seem to swarm around a lot more, and after opening the beehive all their other hives near by seem to become active?

**Don't worry- it's the JUNE GAP.** What is the June Gap I hear you ask. Well it's traditionally the time of year when the majority of plant sources supplying pollen and nectar in the UK dry up. Flowers that have been pollinated now stop producing their abundance of nectar. Your bees up to this time have been over feeding the queen so she will lay eggs, producing thousands of bees in preparation of gathering this never ending honey flow. Little do your bees know but shortly this will all dry up.

Many people say to me, 'But hang on I see flowers everywhere, surely the bees have food'? Plants produce the nectar and pollen not as a goodwill gesture for insect, but to entice them to the plant in the hope of cross pollination. Once they have completed this task they have no further use for insects and in many cases stop producing their treats. So the flowers look great, but nothing for your poor bees any longer. Other flowers are self pollinating and either do not produce nectar, pollen or both. In any case, as a result, the nectar flow will be greatly reduced and impact on the mood and attitude of your bees. Once this happens your bees feel frustrated as their long hard journeys in search of food are coming up empty. Other insects are experiencing the same lack of food so this can promote 'robbing'. Bees, wasps, hornets are desperate to find a food source so they rob hives and over protect their own.

How does this affect your beekeeping? Well before the June Gap your bees were happy to allow you into their home as this was a time of plenty. Now with so many mouths to feed and so little food coming in, it's not surprising that they might resent your weekly inspection and display a tad more mistrust. Once a beehive is opened the smell of the honey, as you lift a frame out to inspect it, wafts into the air and other bees are attracted. Your own bees become excited too and this creates a hysterical event. A new comer to beekeeping might confuse all these signs as a long term change in their beehives attitude and decide to requeen in an attempt to change the overall mood of their beehive.

Another wrong conclusion that a new comer might make is during this time is not seeing eggs and what this could mean. During your inspection no eggs are seen and a gap in the brood development would suggest your beehive is queenless. However it could be that your bees have now realised that there is a nectar gap, no food coming in, so in order to regulate the population of the colony they have stopped feeding the queen. The queen in turn will reduce egg production and worker bees will remove eggs from the hive. They know that with little food coming in it makes perfect sense not to have new mouths to feed. So before buying a new queen have a slow, calm good look for your queen. She might just still be there.

Generally the June gap only lasts around two weeks and you will find in most cases your bees will be back to normal within that time. We do not remove honey during this time if we can help it as it excites the bees. We suggest buying extra honey supers so you can give them extra room while leaving the full honey supers on. We do this because if the June Gap goes on longer than expected, your bees have plenty of food during that time.

Any questions feel free to email us and we will do our best to post a reply.

Happy Beekeeping.

The Hive Beekeepers

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