

## Mathew's Lasius Niger Ant Farm

### **Day 1 - 30-03-05**

The ant farm was completed and allowed to settle, with the minimum of human contact with the contents of the ant farm so as to seem as natural as possible to the incoming queen.

The queen ant (Queen Victoria as named by Mathew, I think it was the only queens' name he knew?) arrived by first class recorded delivery from ant-web, she was well packaged and was nice and lively (well done Ant-web). When Mathew arrived we carefully transferred her into her new home, which she spent the rest of the day exploring thoroughly, she did eat and drink some of the honey and water that we left in her feeding station, duly noting from the advice on web sites the need for a varied diet for good egg laying and being aware of dehydration if honey is given without water.

I thought from reading she would quickly go to ground and hide, not so yet, she decided to settle over night in the access tube to the feeding station, all well so far.

### **Day 2**

On finding her still motionless in the access tube I feared the worst, but lo and behold whilst typing this she popped her head out and is starting to look around again, she seems to be looking around a lot again but always resting/hiding in the access tube to the feeding station.

At around about lunchtime I noticed her carrying something, a close look revealed what I guess from pictures is an egg ( Hooray ) she carried this about for ages, I cannot see it any more and I guess she may have eaten it ?. Despite creating what I considered a palace fit for a queen she seems to have settled for the night in the feeding station.

On fetching the milk in from the doorstep this morning I spotted loads of new ant spoil heaps near the front door, a closer look and I believe they are a colony of meadow ants, curiosity aroused a close look and a few pictures later, I also realised there were a large percentage of small ones as well, even a few black Lasius Niger ambled past without any bloodshed?. I guess I have found my next colony, I will stick a small pot with soil in it at this position and see what happens, having done this when I was not interested in ants I have on a couple of occasions ended up with nests in the pots.

### **Day 3**

Well the queen has decided that she likes life best in the feeding station. Could this be I wonder if she thinks it's a nest chamber (silly ant)

I have now noticed what appears to be more eggs 2 or 3 tucked into the corner of the feeding station and it looks like she is carrying a couple. She seems happy enough at the moment, so I will leave her alone for now.

#### **Day 4**

Fed up with waiting for her to make a nest and fearing she might lay more eggs in the feeding station, I lifted the centre stone and with a piece of wood tamped her out a small chamber and access tunnel, I then replaced the stone being as careful as possible not to leave my scent on anything, I was soon rewarded by her finding the hidey hole and transferring some eggs inside, as I made the hidey hole up against the Perspex I can easily remove the light covers and have a quick look while she's out.

So on the whole day 4 seems good she's now happily ensconced in her new hidey hole, she still seems very active, which has been interesting to watch, lets hope she now settles and gets on with the first batch of workers.

#### **Day 5**

Queeny now seems nicely settled in her little hidey hole, she has made several journeys out to the feeding chamber; although I have not observed her actually feeding at least 2 eggs are visible in the burrow.

#### **Day 6**

Much the same as day 5, I am trying not to disturb her if I want to look in the burrow, I wait until she out and about before removing the light covers

#### **Day 7**

Queen Victoria's now one week old and I have left her alone, just as I was writing this I noticed her come out of her burrow with a bunch of a least 5-6 eggs in her jaw and then return to the burrow, she then came back out for a good feed on sugar water.

#### **Day 8**

Left her alone haven't seen her yet this evening, ahh the things one does for ones queen, I've just been and coshed a gnat over the head, and offered him up for Queeny, it was its own fault for flying in the back door.

#### **Day 11**

I have left Victoria alone just ensuring she has food and water, having not seen her for 3 days I decided to remove the light cover only to discover she has almost completely blocked the viewing hole with soil (well I suppose a queen does deserve her privacy). later today she popped out had a little look round and disappeared again so at least I know she looks lively and well, I will just have to wait and see now when the first brood hatches.

#### **Day 16**

Queen Victoria is still running around on occasions, once she came out with a couple of eggs in her mouth looked around and then took them back into the burrow. She gave me a fright one day as she appeared to be collapsed on a twig even her antennae were down and still, she remained this way for about 5 minutes, then all of a sudden she burst back

into life and scurried off, I know from Myrm's diary's the ants rest but there was no movement at all under a magnifying glass, so now I play the waiting game until I see a worker.

### **Day 30**

I have not seen queen Victoria for several days now, whether she has gone to ground or has become nocturnal, I am not sure, I did get one snap of her with my web cam rigged up as a motion detector, but even leaving it running all day there has been no sight, I hope she's ok, I know from Myrm's diaries that they can disappear for a long time, so I have to play the waiting game.

Next update when I see her.....

### **Day 33**

Being a born pessimist and fearing the worst having not seen Queeny for 10 days , I was considering my options ,when out she came at around 8 pm , she was lively and looked in good condition then after a couple or minutes nosing around she went back to her burrow. I am not calling it a nest yet as there are no signs that she has improved on what I made for her.

There seems to be some differing ideas on how long from egg to hatching, so it will be interesting to see the first worker as I know for sure Queeny had at least 2 eggs on day 2 of the ant farm. In the meantime I will ask Myrm.

I have been feeding the *Lasius niger* and *flavus* in the front garden under a small garden slab or a short while, hoping that the next time I lift it that I may catch a queen, or grab a few more advanced cocoons for Queeny.

I shall be building another formicarium over the bank holiday as my dear grandson Mathew will not let me get away with holding onto his for much longer, I have also been allowing him to look after Queeny so as to be sure he is capable of keeping her in a style to which she has become accustomed, as I am now a little attached to her (I must be losing it!!!!).

### **Day 40**

I have not seen Queeny since day 33, I guess she has gone to ground in her burrow, but I am prepared to leave her alone now. I e-mailed Myrm and he tells me that 8 weeks is about the time for *Lasius Niger* to mature from egg to worker, bearing in mind temperature and conditions, so with luck I may see the first workers around about day 55.

I found a large group of *Lasius niger* in the front garden ,while I was making the second and third formicaries , Mathew and I watched them for about an hour, at first I thought they might be raiding or moving but none of them were carrying anything visible so I am not sure .

Next update will be when the Babies arrive (I am so looking forward to this!)

### Day 60

I have not seen Queeny since 33, she should by now have had young ants or cocoons at the very least, my curiosity and inpatients overcome I carefully lifted the stone she was under, To my disappointment there sat a very healthy looking Queeny with a small bunch of eggs in her mouth, I was devastated and had to tell Mathew that his Queeny must be very lazy. I can only surmise a couple of options and will have to consult with Myrm: - (from Myrm; it is not uncommon for new queens to eat their first batch of eggs; particularly if she is not happy with the way they are developing. She may also eat them to nourish herself.)

1, Queeny has been eating her brood (although she was eating regularly until day 33)

2, Queeny is infertile

3, Queeny ate the first brood and has only just started laying again

Not to be discouraged, I lifted a slab on the patio where there is a very large colony of *Lasius niger* and pinched 3 cocoons which are now in her burrow, as I do not know how long until they hatch, yet again I have to play the waiting game which is a bit frustrating for Mathew and I,

### Day 62

I had a very quick peek at Queeny as when I lifted the stone the other day I cleared the opening to the glass that she had blocked, I now ensure the light covers fit tightly so she will hopefully not block it up again, she was looking great and immediately started to move her adopted cocoons away from me, so I guess she has accepted them, I then quickly put the light cover back on and hope for 3 new ants soon.