

# IDENTIFYING A BRITISH BLACK BEE

In a recent diary entry I said I would try and help you to distinguish a British black bee from the rest of them. (You can get a rough and ready idea on the 'Bee Races' page which is in 'Recipes and Procedures')



There are two ways of looking at this, possibly more.

Do we want to identify a perfect, hundred percent British black bee or will a bee that is seventy-five percent British black do for the time being?

Also do we think a hundred percent British black bee can be found in Pendle or do we have to get one from Wales or some other area that has been certified as hundred percent British black by someone.

Finding a hundred percent British black in Pendle would be possible but it will take some finding, but I think it could be done (**See End Notes**).

In the meantime seventy-five percent British blacks must be about in this area, and could be found if diligently looked for. With two or three years of selective breeding these could be changed to hundred percent British blacks.

In my apiary right now, out of twelve stocks, I guess there are two that could be in the sixty to seventy percent category, but at this stage I'm only guessing. Let me describe them to you.

All the characteristics I'm going to describe are relevant to only the British black, not to any other bee, so by examining them we can rule out all other bees.

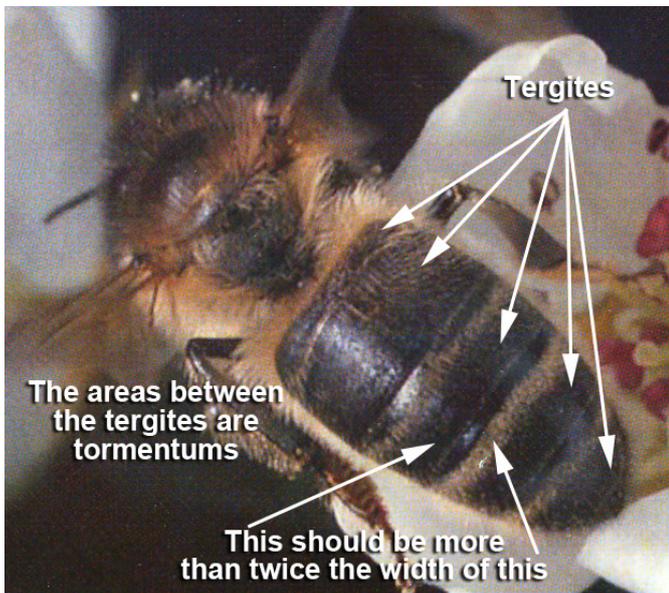
"One swallow does not a Summer make" so **ALL** the characteristics I'm going to describe need to be there and to be certain, other characteristics also need to be there (**See End Notes**). But we can make a start with just a few "Swallows".

- 1 The overall colour should be very dark brown it makes them look black, no yellow or orange showing.
- 2 Hair on the last tergite\* should be longer than 0.5mm, this is very obvious on drones as they look to have hairy bums.
- 3 The width of the abdominal Tormentum\*\* to be less than half width of the tergite (As seen in the illustration)
- 4 White cappings on the honey stores, not waxy or wet looking.

- 5 Tend to put pollen under the brood.
- 6 Wax scales are straight on the back edge. (*See illustration below*)
- 7 Winters well on very little stores.
- 8 Never very large stocks, they can be accommodated in a British standard brood box.
- 9 Tends to use a lot of propolis.

\* TERGITE is the banding of the abdomen. (*See illustration below*)

\*\* TORMENTUM is the hairy part of the abdominal banding (tergite) (*See illustration below*)



To show the size of a wax scale - a match head, bee's wing, wax scales and varroa mite

### **End Notes.**

A much accurate but rather complicated way of identifying British Black Bees.

We need to take measurements of wing veins and, in the last resort, do a genetic test.

The vein measuring is probably within our capability but a bit beyond my ability to explain it in writing.

Hopefully, there will be instructions on how to make these measurements in the Offshoots website ([http://www.offshoots.org.uk/bees\\_in\\_the\\_borough.html](http://www.offshoots.org.uk/bees_in_the_borough.html)) later this year and if not, I could arrange lessons if there is sufficient interest.

Genetic testing is of course beyond us, but it can be done free of charge, if we can put up a strong enough case.

Wax scales (Which can be found lying about in the hive) are tiny. About 3 millimetres across and 0.1 millimetres thick. About 1,100 are required to make a gram of wax