

2015

15 July 2015, Wednesday

Today there was a large *Lasius niger* mating flight near where I work and so I decided to do something I haven't done for a while, and that is to attempt to start a new *Lasius niger* colony starting from a single newly mated queen.

I have just place her into a test tube. At the round end of the tube is a cotton wool bung with a weak sugar solution behind it. The open end of the tube is lightly packed with cotton wool to allow air through. She is dashing about exploring at the moment. Links with pictures to follow.

Unlike my usual methods I will, this time, keep her in the test tube until she has had at least one generation of workers produced.

6 August 2015, Thursday

Well, this newly mated queen laid eggs within two days of being placed in the test tube and are now three weeks old. They haven't hatched into first instar larvae yet which surprises me a little as I would have expected them to hatch by now. She has laid a few more eggs since and I am keeping an eye on her.

9 August 2015, Sunday

I am pleased to be able to tell you that not only has Queen Magenta laid a few more eggs but she now has some first instar larvae present. I was very relieved to see them. She is feeding them and cleaning them as I type.

27 August 2015, Thursday

Queen Magenta continues to do well and now she has half a dozen cocoons in amongst her brood. It will not be long before she sees her first workers. It always an exciting thing to witness.

26 September 2015, Saturday

Queen Magenta saw her first workers being “born” on 7 September, with three pale callow workers stumbling around her. 53 days after she first laid those eggs, 55 days since the mating flight during which she mated. Now she has 11 or 12 workers with her. You can see a video clip of her on the home page of my website. Mom and children are doing well >.< I have placed my other two ant colonies into the Winter Room to encourage hibernation, but Queen Magenta’s colony will remain in my room and active this year.

29 December 2015, Wednesday

Please accept my apologies for the lack of updates on this colony; I am positive I had left more than this on here with later updates. A big thank you to ScallyWag05 for letting me know of the lack of updates to this colony.

Well, the numbers of ants haven’t grown by much – in fact by only one worker. There are now 13 workers, 1 queen and a small pile of larvae. Despite the fact that I am not hibernating these ants, and that they are in my room where it is, generally speaking, warm, the brood of these ants is developing very slowly. The ants themselves are quite active.

However, one noteworthy update is that they have moved into the horizontal acrylic ant farm now. This occurred when I placed a gentle heat mat under the test tube they were living in (which was attached to the aforementioned acrylic ant farm), in order to try and boost the development rate of the brood. It quickly started to get a bit of condensation in there which didn’t seem to bother the ants at first.

Besides, the condensation provided them with a water supply. However, after a few days I checked on them and noticed that they had all moved into the new set up; workers, queen and brood, where they are now settling down. It's a bit awkward feeding them as I have to do so by removing the test tube, quickly putting some food in than then replacing it before the workers realise that there is a way out >.<

I gave them a piece of freshly killed cockroach and some banana protein jelly, which they seemed to enjoy.

More updates coming soon.

2016

24 January 2016, Sunday

Well, not much has happened in this colony over the past 4 weeks. They remain very active though their larvae still have developed no further; they've been larvae for about 3 or 4 months now. Normally I'd expect to see them as workers now, but it is quite normal for ant brood to go into a 'suspended' mode of developed during the winter.

I use the test tube attached to their horizontal ant farm as a feeding chamber which works well at the moment, due to the small number of ants in this colony. Yesterday there was some food in the tube that was going mouldy, but the ants had moved their brood into the same tube. How was I going to get them out? Well, the heat mat under the tube was off and so I turned it on. Within a few hours they had moved the brood back into the main ant farm, allowing me to remove the tube, with a few ants inside of it, and I cleaned out the mouldy food with a damp cotton bud.

The heat mat produces condensation in the test tube which provides a good supply of drinking water for the ants. I note that the worker ants like the test tube to be heated but they seem to prefer their brood not to be in there when the heat mat is on. So, what I have done is to set the heat mat on a timer so that it comes on for about 9 hours a day, and then switches off over night. I'll see how things go with that. I

also note that often the workers go into the tube leaving the poor queen on her own in the ant farm >.<

3 April 2016, Sunday

This week Queen Magenta has seen four new workers emerge from their pupae. *Pupae?* I hear you say. *I thought Lasius niger larvae encase themselves in cocoons ion the latter stages of their development!* Well, you are, in fact, quite correct. However, in order for the larvae to spin themselves a cocoon they need an irritant. Normally this is done by the workers placing a few particles of sand or soil onto the larvae, which irritates them and they spin themselves a cocoon. Quite why this happens I do not know, after all the larvae generally lay on the soil/sand anyway, but it doesn't seem to irritate them. But I have seen workers placing one or two particles on third -stage larvae and shortly afterwards they make cocoons. If the larvae do not get this irritant they develop into 'naked pupae', in the same way that Myrmicine ants do. The good thing about pupae is you can see when they are ready to 'wake up' into adult workers as they go from looking like white, folded up, waxy ants to a darkening colour. They then unfold and stand still for a while. These 'callows', as they are known, are soft and pale, but after a few hours their exoskeleton hardens and they become the same colour as their older sisters.

So now Queen Magenta has 15 workers and a small pile of brood. A few are pupae, the rest are larvae. Hopefully she will lay more eggs soon.

They still tend to spend much of their time in the test tube attached to their set up, but that's probably because it's warmer and gets condensation. *Lasius niger* prefer damper nests.

26 June 2016, Sunday

Oops, sorry, didn't even realise I had not updated this, or my other journals for 2 months. I tend to update them regularly on the forum and keep forgetting to transpose those updates onto here.

This colony has grown well over the past two months with double the number of workers present now (30). Queen Magenta and her daughters are doing well and there is a small amount of brood present in the nest. Once more they have moved out of the test tube and into the horizontal acrylic nest; I think it's just too warm and wet (condensation) in the test tube. A few workers go in there but the queen and the majority prefer to stay in the acrylic nest. This is good news for me as it makes removing the test tube to put food into it a lot easier. Looking at Queen Magenta's abdomen it looks as if a lot more eggs are on the way. They do not eat vary much at the moment but I keep giving them a regular supply of protein jelly and little pieces of cockroach, which they seem to enjoy. I saw a worker eat some cockroach and then go into the nest and feed the queen.

29 September 2016, Friday

Again, apologies for the lack of updates to this journal over the past few months. Though it doesn't take that long to update the journal, it's the updating of the forum along with it that takes the time, and I just see, to have such little previous free time these days. Work is an ever-present hindrance. Anyway, this colony still continues to do well, though there has been very little in the way of colony expansion; perhaps no more than 6 new workers. I think the queen is entering her winter no-egg-laying phase. She moved full time into the main nesting box though the workers still tending to move frequently between the box and test tube, with the brood. However, the queen has now moved into the tube where it is warmer. I think she can feel the cooler weather approaching. I don't think they have found the foraging box yet, which is a shame, and makes feeding them more difficult.

12 December 2016, Monday

Wow, this colony is so lazy >.< Over the past three months there has been vary little activity in this colony. They are all currently huddled together around the queen at the far end of the test tube, which now rests in the foraging tank attached to the horizontal acrylic nesting box. I can see a small pile of larvae but this appear to have gone into a phase

of developmental stasis, meaning that they have halted their development into the next stage, which is not uncommon in ants during the winter, even if kept indoors. Don't expect much from this colony until the spring.

2017

13 June 2017, Tuesday

Welcome to the 3rd year of this *Lasius niger* colony. Please accept my apologies for the huge delay in updating this journal. So much has been going on in my life over the past 6 months, including my leaving the Armed Forces after 24 years service, renovations to my house, and various other things that have taken up my time. Currently I am taking 6 months out to relax and enjoy life before I start looking for work again, so hopefully I'll be motivated enough to keep on top of the journals this year. So, on with the journal.

KK, so these ants remained active during the winter months since they are kept indoors. They were in the spare room but that spare room has now been converted into a bedroom, which a police friend of mine now rents from me. I have had some renovations to my house which included the building of a small utility room at the rear of my house in which I keep, among other things, my ant colonies.

Not a great deal has been going on in this colony over the past six months, but now at last the workers seem to be foraging and eating more. There are still only 20 or so workers and one queen, but I can now see some very small cocoons present. The test tube that the ants live in is green with mould in places but they still refuse to move out. They have opportunity to do so as the tube is connected to a small ant farm which is further attached to a small foraging tank. The nesting box is covered and has some damp loam in it, but still they won't move out of the test tube. I am going to get some more test tubes and attach it to the foraging box and see if they will move into that.

So, again my apologies for the delay in updating this journal. If you read them regularly and you see I am falling behind in the updates,

don't be afraid to email me and tell me to do some more updates. Thank you.

18 June 2017, Sunday

These ants remain in their dirty test tube despite having a small ant farm within easy reach for them. It makes it difficult to see into the tube due to the condition of it, but they seem happy enough. They are eating more frequently now, which is good news; indicates the presence of larvae, and a hungry queen.

I have to be a little more careful with escapes now; previously when I saw a black ant escapee I knew instantly it was from this colony, but now that I have a colony of *Tapinoma erraticum*, which are also black, I have to observe them closely to determine which species it is, so that I can return it to the correct set up.

22 June 2017, Thursday

Not much to report from this colony today other than those naughty ants keep getting out of their set up. I've said it before and I'm saying again. *Lasius niger* are the naughtiest of all ant species, and are masters of escape.

23 June 2017, Friday

I found out where these naughty ants are getting out of their set up, so I have taken measures to prevent this. Hopefully it will work this time. The problem with nanitic ants is that they can squeeze themselves through the tiniest of gaps, more so, even, than other ants.

19 August 2017, Saturday

Fairly quiet in this colony over the past few weeks, but still they refuse to leave their green, mouldy test tube, even though they must pass through the nice ant farm I have given them to get to the foraging box. Brood development is slow but the number of workers does not appear to be diminishing, and the queen looks healthy. No further

escapes since I made more of an effort to find and fix the small gaps these ants were getting out of.

1 September 2017, Friday

Not too much activity again in this colony. They all seem healthy enough and there are brood present, but I would have expected there to be more of a population in this colony, which is now two years old. However, it is my experience with *Lasius niger* that they can appear to be slow growers at first, but once the colony reaches a certain size then growth comes exponentially. The test tube is all green and manky inside yet they seem happy to live like this. I may try and move them into a new test tube, even though it will upset them initially. They refuse to use the glass nesting box with loam.

1 December 2017, Friday

My ants are currently hibernating. Therefore, no updates to this journal will be made until they awake in the Spring.

2018

My ants have woken up from their winter hibernation, or rather their 'semi-hibernation'. They didn't fully hibernate but rather they drastically reduced their activities, often staying within the nest and not feeding. The queen stopped laying eggs, and any present brood (larvae only) went into a stasis in which their development was 'frozen' or put on hold. This is normal behaviour.

Due to this semi-hibernation I stopped updated this journal, otherwise all you would have read, constantly, would be, not much activity today.

However, now that they are resuming their activities I am resume my activity on these journals.

15 March, Thursday

My ants have woken up from their winter hibernation, or rather their semi-hibernation and have been tucking into their first large meal, since the start of the winter, namely tasty cockroach. I had also cleaned out their foraging tank, replacing all the odd substrate. I placed in some white calcium sand without dampening it (to prevent them from nesting in it).

This is the third year of life for this colony, and they are still vary small in numbers. They eventually moved out of their test tube and into the nesting box when the winter set in, and I took that opportunity to remove the tube, as it was filthy. Now that the milder weather has come in they have moved into small piece of clear tubing situated on the opposite end to the tube that links their nesting box to their foraging box. They just don't seem to like the nesting box and its soil.

They have not emerged from the nest to feed yet, though it's possible, and probable, that they are feeding from the cockroach I have given them, when I am not looking.

13 April 2018, Friday

I saw a single worker out foraging today, and so I placed in a piece of pineapple flavoured protein jelly for them. Like my *Tapinoma erraticum* colony, this colony seems to prefer to nest in the plastic tubing rather than in the loam of the nesting box. However, I have seen evidence of the workers tunnelling into the loam, so perhaps this year they will move in properly. I still can't see the queen. I believe she is either in the metal tube port, or is in an underground chamber, as I can see a pile of soil up against the side of the ant farm, just below the tubing port.

Thank you for reading my journal. If you have any questions you can email me on myrm@antnest.co.uk

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