



### Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - February 2009

As the days slowly lengthen, the bees' activities within the hive increase. The queen is laying more eggs than she did last month. Comb emptied of stores are cleaned and polished in readiness for these increasing areas of brood.

On mild days pollen will be gathered eagerly to feed the ever increasing numbers of larva. The adult bees are still reducing in numbers though old age, as they were produced in August/September last year. It is vitally important that these new generations make it to maturity before too many of the old winter bees die. The recent very cold and very wet weather we had in January will not have helped this replacement process.

Light hives will require feeding. Fondant is probably best applied during the early part of February. Stimulative light syrup (1lb sugar to 1 pint of water, 454g sugar in 570ml water) can be used in mild spells towards the end of the month. This stimulative syrup feeding is best applied little and often and certainly not more than ½ gallon (2 litres) at a time. This will stimulate the queen to lay more eggs and should only be done when pollen is readily available, i.e. reasonable weather and early spring flowers are out.

If you have given top ventilation to your hives to prevent mouldy combs/damp in your hive, (by putting match sticks around the edge under the crown board, as recommended by many older bee books) now is a good time to close them down. This will help the bees maintain the higher 35c temperatures. Some beekeepers put extra insulation under the roofs to help conserve the heat within the hive.

Water is also required by the colony and if February should by any chance be dry, ensure there is a good supply of water near to the apiary. Bees need water to dilute stores so they can use them (even liquid honey needs to be diluted before the bees can digest it.)

Do seek out and read all that you can regarding beekeeping and new practices. Beekeeping is not a precise science and one solution does not suit all situations. Beekeeping is changing faster now than it has ever done. More research is needed; more funding for this is also needed. That is why the BBKA called upon the Government to increase funding last November; this has now come forward, and the Co-op has also offered £150,000 for research into why honeybee numbers are falling. However the Co-op has so far been unable to find any UK Science institution, willing to accept this money, for research into the possible impact of pesticides on our bees, presumably because of a conflict of interest. It is a shame that the BBKA do not also see a conflict of interest and continues to accept money from those same companies that produce these insecticides. Who ever would have thought that beekeeping would have become so political.

As I'm writing at the beginning of the month the first flakes of snow have started to fall and a very brave bumble bee (which should be hibernating) is frantically working flowers in my front garden. February is a strange month as it can be both winter and spring. Some years I can do a very quick spring inspection of my hives in a mild spell towards the end of the month, when the bees are flying well. Other years the bees remain snuggled up warm in a tight winter cluster for most of the month and the cold biting wind prevents me from looking inside any hive.

Varroa counts can be done in almost any weather, so long as it's not pouring with rain or blowing a gale (this tends to give a reduced mite count) by checking this month you will see how successful any treatments were, that you may have used in December/January. If varroa levels are still high you will need to be prepared to do a shook swarm if the colony is strong enough next month or to use a Thymol based treatment such as Apigaurd when daytime temperatures are high enough (above 15c) but not if there is a honey flow on, which hopefully this spring will happen.

In line with the CSL guidelines the Varroa count for February

Level and Control Required	Average Mite Drop per Day	Proportion of Infested Drone Pupae
Low No Action	2 or less	
Medium Plan Action	Between 2 and 7	
High Take Action	More than 7	

The plants in flower this month that our bees will work if the weather permits (temp above 6c) are the same as last month with the additions of:

- Species crocus – pollen only
- Early willow
- Early prunus (e.g. Cherry plum, early Almond, and early laurel)

Next month (March) is the most important month of the year, what happens to your hive then will influence you're bees for the rest of the year. So make sure you get all your other winter prep jobs done by then so that you can devote more time to your own bees, when they may need all the help they can get.