



Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - April 2009

The recent unseasonally warm and dry weather at the end of March and the beginning of April has not only brought on the spring flowers but our colonies of bees too. On the 4th April most of my colonies are now filling the brood box and the strongest are in the first supers as well. These colonies now have 5-8 frames of brood and eggs.

The queens' laying has increased explosively and whole frames are now being filled with eggs at a time. Pollen is pouring into the hives and some have even started making a surplus of honey although it's way off being ready to harvest. Drone brood is now being produced and once capped should be removed/culled to control varroa. If your varroa daily mite drop is very low allow these drones to hatch.

These strong hives can now be shook swarmed, if you wish to control varroa and replace old brood comb at the same time. Don't be in too much of a hurry to do this. Later is better, than too soon. Allow the colony to build up and at least fill the brood box (National hives) with bees. If bees are also filling the first super, so much the better.

Plastic end spacers remove from old brood frames are easily cleaned/sterilised by placing in a plastic bowl with some washing soda and adding a kettle or two of boiling water. If you use marigold gloves to do your beekeeping, as I do, these can be washed at the same time by being worn (making sure there are no holes) and washing in this hot solution as well. This process can be repeated if necessary for heavily propolised spacers. Once clean they only need rinsing and drying before you can re-use them.

Keep an eye on your out-apiaries. Not only are our hives of bees more valuable than ever, but I have found Easter a favourite time for vandals. The days are longer but the hives are not up to full strength to defend themselves.

Regular weekly inspections will need to start now as queen cups are being produced in a few colonies, indicating that swarming may only be a few weeks away. The first swarms in our area last year were on St George's Day (23rd April) The occasional hive is showing signs of spring supercedure - so don't panic if you find just one or two queen cells.

Don't allow your hives to become choked/congested. Give the bees plenty of room with supers full of frames and some new foundation to keep some of the wax making bees busy. You should also allow plenty of room for the queen to lay i.e. drawn comb not full of stores or pollen. (A shook swarm fulfils all of these criteria) If you don't supply all of these then you risk losing an early swarm of bees and your chances of a good honey crop this year will also go with it.

April is a good month to find and mark unmarked queens, before there becomes too many bees. The queen will be quite large as she is well fed for egg laying. These old queens should be marked with last years colour (Red). Any early swarms collected will be prime swarms, headed by the old queen. These should also be marked with last years colour. Only new queens made and mated this year should be marked with Green, the colour for 2009.

Don't miss out on some of the bargains to be found at Stoneleigh this month. There are also extra speakers and workshops this year too. For those that wish to see some of my photography and hear me speak, I will be giving 3 talks in the Arthur Rank Building (2 on Friday, 1 on Saturday)

Render down wax and get it ready to exchange for foundation if you haven't already done this. I normally get 1½ lb of wax from a national brood box having done a shook swarm. I have found Thornes steam easy very quick and efficient at recovering this wax. The solar wax extractor can be put to good use in warm sunny weather from now on (mine has already been working). Don't waste any wax/hive cleanings it can all be put to good use. By being really fugal and having a plastic bag or container to hand for all the hive scrapings and culled drone brood and changing my brood comb and rendering that down I usually get more than 3lb wax per hive per year.

There are lots of flowers this month for our bees to work, some of the important ones can give us a surplus of honey if the weather is good. Others have some distinctly coloured pollens making identification much easier.

Flowers worked by our bees in April include:

<u>Plants</u>	<u>Pollen</u>	<u>Nectar</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Acers and Maples	✓	✓	
Sycamore	✓	✓✓✓	Possible honey crop
Oil Seed Rape		✓✓✓	Possible honey crop
Plum and Cherry	✓	✓✓	
Pear	✓	✓	
Apple	✓	✓✓	
Horse Chestnut	Brick Red	✓	End of the month
Holly	✓	✓	End of the Month
Spanish Bluebell	Pale Blue/ Pale Green	✓	
Butterbur	White/Cream	✓	Early in month
Tulip	Black	✓	
Dandelion	Orange	✓✓	Pollen on undersides of bees
Berberis	✓	✓	
Early Broadbeans / fieldbeans	Grey	✓✓	
Late Willow	Yellow	✓	Pollen all over the bees
Wallflowers	✓	✓	
Cherry Laurel	✓	✓	
Gorse	✓	✓	
Gooseberries	✓	✓	
Red and White Currants	✓	✓	
Forget-Me-Not	✓	✓	
Ceanothus	✓	✓	
Blackthorn	✓	✓	
Hawthorn	Cream	✓✓	Requires 20°C plus for honey crop

You need to put into action your chosen varroa control as part of your integrated pest management, the varroa counts for April are:

Level and Control Required	Average Mite Drop per Day	Percentage of Infested Drone Pupae
Low No Action	1 or less	Less than 2% (1 in 50)
Medium	Between 1 and 7	Between 2% and 50%
High	More than 7	More than 50% (25 in 50)

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