



## Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - May 2009

Things have really got going this year. The profusion of spring flowers combined with better than average weather in March and April has meant that hives with bees are 'going like a steam train'. The strongest in our area have made a super or two of honey and now want to swarm. The first swarm of the season was on the 14<sup>th</sup> April in our area.

The bee inspector has said that the majority of hives are bubbling over with health and vigour. The last time he had seen so many vigorous colonies was ten years ago.

There were however fairly high losses in winter due to varroa and starvation. There has also been a huge increase in people wanting to start beekeeping. This has caused a high demand for bees, which at present can not be filled. As a result of all these factors, bees at our local bee auction, in the Meon Valley, were fetching unprecedentedly high prices. One travel box (returnable) containing 10 frames of bees was auctioned for £340. Reports of hives being stolen are widely reported and the Bee Inspector said that he has heard reports nationally of 80 hives being stolen so far this year. I recommend branding your hives as this makes them less attractive to thieves, but also I have heard of the idea of putting a 'Chip' in the woodwork of the hive like the ones used in pets for identification purposes.

Speaking to other beekeepers the general consensus is that this is going to be a 'swarmy year'. So 'Keeping' our bees may be more difficult this year. For honey production you don't want to lose bees so weekly checks for queen cups with eggs or young larva are vitally important. If you find any, you then need to do swarm control by dividing the colony. There are many ways to do this but I've found doing an artificial swarm to be the most successful.

If you require a swarm contact the swarm co-ordinator on 07989 920609. Get the empty hive ready to receive a swarm, i.e. fitted with frames of foundation and a queen excluder, as we have no notice as to when a swarm will be available. Don't feed a newly housed swarm for a few days so that it uses its own honey from the old hive to draw the new wax. This reduces the chances of importing diseases. When you do feed use 1:1 weak syrup (1lb sugar to 1 pint water)

Shook swarming can still be done to control varroa and diseases. This also has the benefit of changing your entire brood comb in one go and fulfilling the swarming urge in most colonies, but not all.

Queen rearing can begin in earnest now as can making up nucleus hives. You can make up a 'Nuc' using bees from 1 or 3 or more hives, but it is not recommended to use just 2 colonies of bees, as they can fight. Ensure that each Nuc has a frame of stores, pollen, eggs or a queen cell and young bees. Feed each Nuc if necessary with a frame feeder.

Once mated and laying, this year's new queens can be marked with this year's colour which is green. Prime swarms containing a laying queen which is unmarked should be marked with last year's colour, red, as you won't know how old she actually is. Cast swarms with virgin queens who don't start to lay eggs for a week or two can be marked with this year's (green) colour once the queen has started to lay eggs.

Spring honey can be harvested once capped but you will then need to be prepared to feed if necessary during the 'June gap' which normally starts in our area in the middle of May. This gap in the honey flow may be short or even non-existent this year as the unseasonal and good weather has brought ahead many plants. Whether we get a 'June gap' or not is dependant on the weather and what is growing in your area.

Many acres of oil seed rape were ploughed in this spring and then re-sown. This later sowing could start to flower at the end of May or in June. Here in the city we are unaffected by Oilseed Rape but those with bees with access to fields of spring sown rape should be warned that the fastest I have ever had a super of foundation drawn, filled and capped was just 3 days in a hot spell in June with spring sown Rape less than a mile away.

Drone brood culling should continue unless your varroa levels are very low. A colony with low varroa levels but not having the required traits e.g. Bad tempered, following, etc. Should also have drone removed to improve the gene pool locally for virgin queens. Check your Varroa drop once a month with open mesh floors or uncap with an uncapping fork 100 drone larva (preferably at pink eye stage)

In line with the CSL recommendation the varroa Levels for May are:

Level and Control Required	Average Mite Drop per Day	Percentage of Infested Drone Pupea
Low No Action	1 or less	Less than 2% (2 in 100)
Medium Plan Action	Between 2 and 5	Between 2% and 4%
High Take Action	More than 5	More than 4% (4 in 100)

If your hive has swarmed, don't panic, all is not lost, remove all but one good, big queen cell, preferably an open one with a large larva on a thick bed of royal jelly. Once all the brood has hatched but before the new queen has started to lay, a frame of open brood from a nearby healthy colony can be introduced. Once this is capped it can be removed and destroyed. By doing this you can remove most of the varroa from your stock without using any chemicals. Equally a newly housed swarm with high levels of varroa could have the first two frames of capped brood sacrificed as this is where most of the varroa will be.

For those beekeepers who are troubled by pests on crops and don't wish to spray with chemicals, I can recommend Defenders ([www.defenders.co.uk](http://www.defenders.co.uk)) for a biological control of plant pests. I have had particular success with codling moth (maggots in apples and pears) traps and plum moth (maggots in plums) traps. Mid May is the best time to start using these traps which work using pheromone lures on a sticky fly paper. They also do one now for pea moth to reduce maggoty peas on the veg patch, I've yet to try this one. Let me know how you get on. Also Growing Success Organics Ltd ([www.growingsuccess.org.uk](http://www.growingsuccess.org.uk)) supply codling and plum moth traps.

Plants in flower this month include (see page 3);

<b>Plant</b>	<b>Pollen</b>	<b>Nectar</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Blackberries - Early	Grey	VV	Possible Honey Crop; Grey pollen
Cistus	V		
Cotoneaster	V	VV	Possible Honey Crop
Field Beans / Broadbeans	Grey	VV	Possible Honey Crop; Grey pollen
Hardy Geraniums	V	V	
Hawkweeds	V	V	
Hawthorn	Cream	VV	Requires 20°C plus for honey crop
Holly	V	VV	Possible Honey Crop
Horse Chestnut	Brick Red	V	
Hybrid berries e.g. Logan and Tay berries	V	V	
Oil Seed Rape	V	VV	Possible Honey Crop
Poppies	Black		Black pollen from field poppies
Pyracantha	V	V	
Raspberries	V	VV	Possible Honey Crop
Red Clover		V	Best after it's been cut and regrown
Robinia pseudoacacia		VV	If the weather is hot at the end of the month
Roses - Single	V		
Sycamore	V	VV	Possible Honey Crop
Veronica	V	V	
White Clover		VV	Honeycrop - Best after rain/heavy dew

Key

V: Good

VV: Very good