



Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - July 2009

If you've been lucky and everything has gone to plan, now is the time to reap the rewards. The main honey flow started in the middle of June and by the last week in June nectar was flowing into my hives so fast it took my breath away.

The strongest 2 hives (which are in my back garden) are drawing a super of foundation and filling it in less than a week. The 2 hives are looking more like the twin towers each week, as at the time of writing they are on a brood and a half with 5 supers full of honey and a fresh box of foundation just put on with a note to check in 4 days time to ensure they haven't run out of room.

The reason for this super strong honey flow which is fairly consistent throughout our area is a fluke in the weather. Normally the weather will favour one or other of the 4 major honey plants in our area, giving a blend with a bias towards one or the other. This has not happened this year. The sunny dry weather has favoured the blackberry to yield nectar and pollen (the first time in the last 3 years). The recent rain has helped the clover yield nectar, the humid thundery conditions has also favoured the lime trees to yield. Now it's turning hot and humid, perfect for the Sweet Chestnut to yield the most nectar, just as it's starting to flower.



This has resulted in all 4 major nectar sources to be peaking at the same time. A rare event indeed.

The bees are working from dawn till dusk (some bees returning as late as 10:45 pm when it's almost dark). I quite like to visit the apiary after dark, just before I go to bed. The hum from the hives is so loud as they process and ripen the nectar that it reminds me of the noise you get from an old fridge motor in hot weather. The heady scent of nectar, honey, warm wax and hot bees fills the air in the Apiary on a still evening and gives the promise of heavy supers and a bumper crop to come.

Don't get complacent now that the honey is coming in. This has been a swarmy year and swarms and divisions done in May are now showing signs of wanting to swarm again. Try and get them to change their minds by giving them plenty of space in the hive for the nectar and plenty of room for the queen to lay. Remove a few frames and make up a Nuc if you have to. Frames choked with pollen can't be laid in and nor can ones choked with nectar and honey. These will be ideal for queen rearing in a Nuc or queen rearing queen less stock. Frames of foundation inserted in the brood box (to replace the choked frames) will be drawn very quickly.

If you run short of supers you can use a spare brood box instead. Once extracted the drawn brood frames can be used next year when you do shook swarming to control varroa. Make sure that your extractor will take brood size frames!

Some stocks are superseding their queens I've had three do this all ready, so don't panic if you should see one or 2 queen cells, the hive probably isn't swarming, any more however and swarming is still likely.

My Heather permits have already arrived, there is still time to apply for a heather permit and take your bees to the heaths in the New Forest, but only just, the deadline is the 4th July to get your applications in. The heather I believe will flower early this year. The bell heather is already in bloom. Hives to go to the heather should be ready to go at the end of July, or the first week in August at the latest this year, each headed with a vigorous young queen.

Drone brood should be culled in all hives now. Varroa will be building up its numbers and these last few drone brood cycles this month will be heavily parasitized and your last chance to remove varroa without chemicals.

In line with the CSL guidelines the Varroa count for July

Level and Control Required	Average Mite Drop per Day	Percentage of Infested Drone Pupae
Low No Action	1 or less	Less than 3% (3 in 100)
Medium Plan Action	Between 2 and 8	Between 3% and 7%
High Take Action	More than 8	More than 7% (7 in 100)

Fully capped honey can be removed when you are ready to extract it, but make sure to leave plenty of room for the bees. The bees tend to spread out further in the hot weather and 'bubble' over the sides of the boxes during an inspection, a bit like fizzy pop at a picnic on a warm day. Use the smoker to get them out of the way when replacing the boxes at the end of the inspection; you don't want to squash any of your workers.

If you have several small colonies, because of swarming, but new vigorous queens, these can be united using newspaper to give you a stronger colony headed by a young vigorous queen.

This should give you a small honey crop. If you require more colonies because you are expanding or to make up losses then 'plumping' a colony would be your best option to get a honey crop..

To plump a colony, you require 2 medium strength colonies (or three weaker) fairly close together. The colony to be plumped should be the strongest one and positioned half way between its original site and the other colonies that are having bees 'bled' off. The other colonies are then moved more than three feet away with a change of direction of the entrance. This manoeuvre is done in early afternoon while a honey flow is on and the bees are working well. Do not open or disturb any of the colonies other than to move them. The flying bees will all return to the one colony which is then 'plumped' with an extra workforce. It will go on to make more honey for you. The moved stocks will not make a surplus of honey but will recover and make enough stores for themselves to over winter. I usually use this technique in August to get the most of the Heather honey flow but can be done at any time so long as there is a honey flow on. The stock to receive all the bees should have a new young queen which is less likely to want to swarm with all these extra bees, but nothing is ever guaranteed in beekeeping.

If you think you will require extra jars for all this honey don't hesitate and get on and order them. I'm sure demand will be high and stocks will run out quickly next month when most people will be harvesting their honey.

If you are after cut comb or sections then now is the time to put them on. The best position is the second super up (or higher in strong colonies) as there is less chance of pollen being placed in the comb by the bees and getting travel stain on the cappings. Travel stain is caused by thousands of dirty feet covered with pollen/oils from plants walking over the cappings and staining them.

Propolis is collected most prolifically in hot weather (rising from pine trees/sticky buds from other trees) and will appear everywhere inside the hive, but usually most will be on the lugs of the frames and get onto your gloves or hands. Regular changes of gloves will be required when doing inspections. The marigold gloves that I use are washed in hot strong washing soda solution and given a good rinse in cold water and can be reused several times until a hole appears or the insides become unpleasant. Leather gauntlets cannot be washed (as the leather then goes hard) and are best used for gardening. The build up of propolis on them also makes it easy for the beekeeper to transfer diseases from one infected colony to all the other colonies that they touch.

When extracting honey disposable latex gloves come in handy as this saves a lot of propolis from getting on your hands. If you do get some on your hands it will not wash off with ordinary soap and

water. You can remove it with cotton wool soaked in nail varnish remover and then washing with soap and water in the usual way.

Plants that our bees will be visiting this month:

Plant	Pollen Colour	Pollen	Nectar	Comments
Bell Heather		v	vv	
Birds foot trefoil		v	vv	
Blackberry	Grey	vvv	vvv	Best in sunny weather
Catmint		v	vv	
Clover	White		vvv	Best after rain or heavy dew
Cotoneaster, Late		v	vv	
Evening primrose		vv	vv	Early morning
Fleabane		vvv	vv	Towards the end of the month
Goats rue	Rich Orange	vvv	vv	
Golden Rod, early		vv	vvv	
Hebe		v	vv	
Himalayan Balsam	White	v	vvv	White stripes down the back of the bees
Hollyhock		vvv	v	
Lavender		v	vvv	Requires hot sunny, dry conditions
Lime			vvv	Best in thundery, humid weather
Meadowsweet	Green	vvv	v	Waterside/damp ditch plant
Privet		v	vv	Bitter tasting honey
Purple Loosestrife		vvv	vvv	Waterside/damp ditch plant
Snowberries			vv	
Sweet Chestnut	Yellow	vvv	vvv	Needs high temperatures, bees dusted with pollen all over
Thistles		vvv	vvv	
Willow herb	Blue	vv	vvv	

Key

V: Okay
 VV: Good
 VVV: Very Good

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