



Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - December 2009

The exceptional weather this autumn during October and November will have allowed many of our queens to continue laying. This is good news as most colonies have benefitted with an increase in stores of ivy honey and pollen from late flowers. This will mean we have plenty of young healthy winter bees with good provisions to see them through the winter.

The bad news is that varroa will have continued to breed as well and some hives have shown surprisingly high levels of varroa, despite Apiguard treatments and/or low mite drops in late summer. These colonies will require an organic acid treatment in a brood free period which I suspect will also occur later than expected. The exceptional mild weather in November means that most queens have continued to lay all month. To ensure a brood free period we need to wait for 3 weeks after the queen has stopped laying. This year that brood free period may occur for two-three weeks at most over the Christmas and New Year period. By early January the increasing day length usually stimulates queens into lay again.

Organic acids can be applied when brood is present, but the brood can be damaged or killed by the acids and any varroa in sealed brood is not likely to be effected by the treatment. Formic acid fume pads as in Mite Away II for the 21 day treatment period will alleviate this problem and give a good varroa control even with brood present, but the hive must be strong (see December Newsletter).

Your aim is to have one or less Varroa mites dropping per day for December.

Level and Control Required	Average Mite Drop per Day	Proportion of Infested Drone Pupae
Low No Action	1 or less	
Medium Plan Action		
High Take Action	More than 1	

Here in Southampton we have yet to have a frost at the time of writing, (end November). This has resulted in some very strange things happening in our gardens. Currently there are summer plants in flower, autumn plants in flower, winter plants in flower and even some 'spring plants' in flower. Quite what has caused this plant confusion I am not sure but our bees have and will benefit from the extra availability of pollen and nectar.

The first hazel catkins shedding pollen were spotted on 21st November and by 25th November the pink camellia flowers were out in a neighbour's garden. My winter flowering shrubby honeysuckle has a huge number of flowers out already and is worked by my bees and keen late bumble bees. My summer flowering Hebe is also still flowering along with the occasional flower spike on my blackberries! I have also spotted a chaenomeles (japonica) covered in buds and the first flowers already out.

Plant	Pollen Colour	Pollen	Nectar	Comments
Chaenomeles (Japonica)		v	v	
Cherry (Autumn/Winter)		v	v	
Fatsia Japonica		v	v	
Gorse	Rich golden yellow	vv	v	
Hazel (Early)	Pale yellow/green	v		small pollen loads
Heather - Winter/Spring		vv	vv	
Heliotrope (winter)	White	vv	vv	
Hellebores		vv	v	
Honeysuckle - Winter flowering shrubby		vv	vv	
Mahonia		v	v	
Rosemary		v	vv	
Viburnum Tinus		vv	v	

Key

V: Okay
 VV: Good
 VVV: Very Good

Check list for December 2009

- Do the Varroa counts and treat with organic acids in the brood free period if necessary.
- Check hives after storms to make sure hives are still weather tight.
- Ensure entrances are not blocked by leaves or debris or liable to flooding
- Heft hives (they are at their heaviest at the start of winter) 40lb of stores + bees + frames + comb = very heavy box
- Hives that are light may require fondant or bee candy in January and February
- Get ready to order goods on the on-line Thornes sale which starts at 09:00am on 29th December 2009. www.thornes.co.uk
- Make a wish list for Santa to bring, to help you out in the beekeeping department.
- Any unused syrup left in feeders should be removed.

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