



Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - February 2010

Despite their being very few flying days in January this year, most hives will now contain brood again. It is now when brood is present, in slowly increasing amounts that hives really use up their stores. Firstly, to raise and maintain the temperature at around 35°C and secondly to feed all those extra mouths. Make sure that your hives don't run out of food. Heft the hives and any that feel light take a quick peek under the crown board, if you can see capped stores above the winter cluster all should be well. If there is little or no capped stores emergency feeding should be done. A jar of warm syrup can be sprinkled into empty comb and over bees to try and save a colony on the verge of starvation. A block of fondant (apifonda) or candy can be put directly onto the top bars of the brood box so the bees have direct access to it. Contact bucket feeders can be used towards the end of the month, but only if it's mild and there are good supplies of pollen coming in. This is called stimulative feeding and should be done little and often with weak syrup made using one pound sugar to one pint of water. If the weather remains cold DO NOT FEED SYRUP wait until March and warmer weather and feed only with fondant if necessary.

The flowers have been held up by the cold weather but are now like a coiled spring awaiting mild weather before opening. The prospects are good for a lot of flowers this spring as last year was a good growing year. The autumn was long and dry which may have stressed some plants. This stress causes more flower buds to be initiated. The year's growth was also well ripened and hardened by the exceptional autumn so is better able to withstand the cold now. The plants I'm not expecting to flower well this spring are the ones which fruited exceptionally well last year as they will be having a rest year e.g. some plums and holly. Almost all the other plants should flower well which is good news for us beekeepers. All we need is some reasonable weather at the right time, strong colonies, and then a good spring honey flow is possible in April and May.

As spring approaches our hives become more valuable and unscrupulous beekeepers may be tempted to steal hives from an out-apiary. I have been notified now of 4 hives that have already been stolen, 2 in the Portsmouth area and 2 more in the Petersfield area.

The cost of bees is going to be higher than ever this year. This is because of high winter losses and a huge increase in new people wanting to become beekeepers. Thornes have told me that the price of a standard nucleus (nuc) hive this year is £200 each and a single queen bee will be £45. I suspect that even at these high prices demand will be high and there won't be enough to go round.

The only deterrent to getting a hive stolen is to have boxes well branded, but as the bees are now more valuable than the boxes and boxes can be changed, it's probably better to have your hives hidden and in an inaccessible place, which in turn makes it more difficult for you to do your beekeeping. Honey prices will also have to go up to reflect all these increases in costs and the current shortages, caused by 4 consecutive years of poor honey crops, in our area.

Plants worked by our bees in February during mild weather (temp above 6°C) include:

Plant	Pollen Colour	Pollen	Nectar	Comments
Alder		v		No nectar
Chaenomeles (Japonica)		v	v	
Cherry (Autumn/Winter)		vv	vv	
Cherry Plum		vvv	vv	End of Month
Christmas Box		v	v	
Crocus		vv		Nectar out of reach of honeybees
Crocus - Species		v		
Gorse	Rich golden	v	v	
Hazel	Pale yellow/green	v		small pollen loads and no nectar
Heather - Winter/Spring		v	vv	
Heliotrope (winter)	White	v	v	
Hellebores		vv	v	
Honeysuckle - Winter flowering shrubby□		vv	vv	Best plant to have in the garden
Mahonia - late		vv	vv	
Pulmonaria (lungwort)		v	v	
Rosemary		v	vv	
Snowdrops (single)	Jaffa Orange	vv	vv	
Viburnum Tinus		v	v	
Willow - Early	Yellow	vvv	v	Pollen all over the bees
Winter Aconite		v	v	

Key

V: Okay
 VV: Good
 VVV: Very Good

Check list to do:

1. Heft hives and feed if necessary
2. Brand / mark new boxes
3. Get ready for the coming season, clean/scorch used equipment
4. Check varroa counts and if necessary fumigate hives with formic acid (mite away II), (its now too late to use oxalic acid successfully)
5. Check and make repairs if necessary after woodpeckers

Mite Away II pad on a hive



6. Plant snowdrops/aconites in the green to give your bees a natural source of pollen and nectar
7. Order tickets to the spring convention at Stoneleigh

Look out for

1. Rodent / woodpecker damage on hives



Woodpecker damage at the Water Mill Apiary
Photo courtesy of Tony Mabey

2. Increased activity on mild days around the hives
3. Pollen coming in on mild days
4. Dead bees in front of the hives (this is normal)
5. Frost/snow thawing first in the middle of the roofs
6. Winter talks/lectures to go to
7. Staining on fronts/tops of hives indicating dysentery or possible nosema infection (feed fumidil b in syrup next month followed by comb change)

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