



Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - March 2010

Spring finally seems to be arriving. The few warmish dry sunny days at the beginning of March were a welcome change and will have benefitted our bees tremendously. There have been very few days this winter when cleansing flights were able to be done. Some hives are showing signs of dysentery as a result. Collection of water becomes more important now as well, as bees need water to dissolve set stores and move honey, not eaten, out of the way of the expanding brood area.



Having checked most of my hives on the 1st march I was pleasantly surprised on how well they were doing. Most do not yet re-

quire feeding. Two or three will receive syrup in the early part of March and probably start stimulative feeding when more pollen becomes available. Any unused fondant can be removed and turned into syrup and fed back to the bees. Mix it with its own volume of water and heat to dissolve. Spring flowers will probably come in a rush all together this year rather than spread out over several weeks/months. Many horticulturalists are getting excited as there will be many things flowering together this year that normally flower at different times from one another. This means that our bees will be spoilt for choice later, but for the farmers some crops might not get properly pollinated with the bees cherry picking the best plants from an extended choice and ignoring others. The potential for a good spring honey flow is there if we can get our colonies strong enough by the end of April.

On the 1st march my strongest colony had 9 seams of bees. If the weather improves a full spring inspection can be done this month. Wait until a warm day (14c) when the bees are flying well. You need to know if your colony has a laying queen and that the eggs are developing into workers and not drones. If the weather doesn't warm up, be content with a quick look under the crown board.

Increasingly in recent years apparently strong colonies dwindle in the spring because of faulty queens. Some queens just don't resume laying, others have run out of stored sperm and become drone layers, and others are simply missing having died at some point in the winter. In all of these cases the colony is doomed unless you do something.

I usually cull faulty queens as soon as they can be found and unite with a queen right colony that requires bees i.e. a small but otherwise healthy stock of bees. Two small stocks are best united together to give a stronger one. This will increase your chances of getting a spring honey crop, otherwise be content to allow them to build up for the main honey flow in summer.

To my knowledge I have lost only one stock of bees out of 27 colonies this winter, but I do not yet know how many of these are queen right. This will be my priority this month to assess them all, should we be lucky enough to get the right weather. Surplus stock will be sold off at the Meon Valley bee auction in early May.

I have seen other people's colonies that are on the verge of starvation and require emergency feeding now. I have also heard of high losses (5 hives dying out of 7) locally. If you have a hive or hives that die and you do not know why they died, ask an experienced beekeeper to take a look at them.

Our new regional bee inspector, Nigel Semmence, would like winter losses reported, particularly if there are no obvious reasons for it to die or high numbers of losses, so he can assess any trends. Some common causes of colony loss are varroa, viruses, dysentery/nosema and starvation or queen failure. Isolation starvation can happen when the bees become separated from stores in the hive, but won't leave brood to chill in cold weather.

Nigel's contact details are:-

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He would prefer email communication, but as I know, this is not always possible.

Check list to do this month

- Heft hives and feed syrup if necessary using contact feeders
- Close entrances of dead hives to prevent robbing. Find out why it died.
- Ensure water is available near to hives
- Do first spring inspections if warm enough (14c)
- Report winter losses
- Unite small or failing colonies if they are not diseased
- Check varroa counts
- Get ready to do shook swarms next month or treat with mite away II
- Order any equipment (frames/boxes, etc) soon if you think you will require it. Demand is extra high this year and supplies are limited.
- Plan your chosen methods of swarm control and varroa control
- Attend association lectures and first apiary meeting at the end of the month
- Ensure all equipment is clean and ready to go for next month as it will be busier then
- Start bailey brood comb change process
- Clean solid floors if still being used



Plants our bees could visit this month

Plant	Pollen Colour	Pollen	Nectar	Comments
Alder	Dull orange	v		
Almonds and Apricots		vv	vv	End of Month
Berberis Darwinii		vv	vv	End of Month
Butterbur	White/Cream	vvv	vv	
Chaenomeles (Japonica)		v	v	
Cherry (Autumn/Winter)		vv	vv	
Cherry Plum and Blackthorn		vvv	vv	End of Month
Chrsitmas Box		v	v	
colts foot		vv	vv	
creeping comfrey		vv	v	
Crocus		vv		Nectar out of reach of honeybees
Crocus - Species		v		
Dandelion	Orange	v	vv	Pollen on undersides of bees
Evergreen clematis 'Armandii		v	v	End of Month
Flowering Currant		vv	vv	
Gooseberries		vv	vv	
Gorse	Rich golden yellow	v	v	
Hazel (late)	Pale yellow/green	v		small pollen loads
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
Hyacinths		vv	vv	
Japanese Quince Japonica		v	v	
Mahonia - late		vv	vv	
Mimosa		vvv	v	
Pulmonaria (lungwort)		v	v	
Red and White Currants		v	v	End of month
Rosemary		v	vv	
Snowdrops	Jaffa Orange	vv	vv	Plant / divide now
Viburnum Tinus		v	v	
Willow - Early	Yellow	vvv	v	Pollen all over the bees
Winter Aconite		v	v	Plant now

Key

V: Okay
 VV: Good
 VVV: Very Good

Look out for this month

- Hives not expanding as quickly as others
- Pollen coming into hives / not coming in others
- Signs of dysentery / soiling in the hive or/and at the entrance
- Do not leave empty boxes directly over the brood frames. Unless it has a feeder in it (the hive loses heat)
- First super may need to go on strongest colonies towards the end of the month to give the bees room also so that unused stores can be moved up by the bees
- Keep hives warm, insulation can be put under roofs to help colonies get going. Keep inspections to a minimum
- Remove mouse guards to allow pollen in (if used)
- Masonry bee nest boxes can be put out this month
- Soiling of washing when pegged out to dry in good weather – this can be brushed off when fully dry.

