



# Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - May 2010

The weather continues to tease us beekeepers, just as a promising spring honey flow started towards the end of April it turned cold and dry again, cutting the nectar off in its tracks. Some colonies that had expanded well and started to fill the first super have now 'stalled' and the brood boxes are looking short of stores. If you have done a shook swarm keep on feeding dilute syrup until all the frames in the brood box are drawn. If you have received a swarm (the first in Southampton was on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2010) then also continue to feed dilute syrup until the entire brood comb has been drawn.

Artificial swarms and divisions will also require feeding until the weather improves. I'm expecting the weather to turn hot all of a sudden which will also trigger a lot of swarms. By the first of May 5 of my 25 hives have shown signs of wanting to swarm.

So far this year the spring has been like the spring we had in 1987 (except for the volcanic ash from Iceland, it was Chernobyl then) that year I remember labouring for a builder in May laying concrete. It was cold and dry with constant north winds which suddenly turned into a heat wave towards the latter half of May, it was the hottest Chelsea Flower show on record with temperatures of 27-30°C. Let's hope a warm spell comes soon before the spring flowers are over. As I expected, many things are having an exceptional flowering this year. The brief warm spell in April brought in huge amounts of pollen and nectar to our hives.

The cold weather and cold nights in particular have held back the flowers on many plants so the potential for an extended spring honey flow into early June is possible this year. If this happens then the normal June gap in nectar producing plants may be very small or nonexistent this year, as the summer main honey flow plants normally start to flower in early to mid June in our area.

The Hawthorne looks promising at the moment and I have smelt some of its nectar in one of my hives just this week. It's very distinctive with a pungent sweet almond fragrance. It doesn't yield every year and is normally most productive at temperatures of 23°C. The fact that it's yielding at 13°C bodes well.

Swarming seems to be catching a lot of beekeepers out this year. Try to be a beekeeper not a bee looser, as lost swarms are lost honey crops and a nuisance to neighbours. Queen cells continue to be made up to 6 days after the queen has left in the prime swarm. These need to be reduced to leave just one good 'chosen' one in the hive otherwise more swarms will be lost.

### **Jobs to do May 2010**

- Do shook swarms to control pests, varroa, diseases and swarming (best time to do this is when queen cups/cells are present with eggs or royal jelly in them)
- Make divisions or nucs to control swarming
- Feed dilute syrup (1lb sugar: 1 pint water) to swarms, shook swarms and colonies short of stores. This will help to get foundation drawn and stimulate the queen to lay more eggs.

- Use a shallow frame in the brood box to get extra drone brood drawn for culling, once capped, to reduce varroa infestation without the use of chemicals. Do not leave to hatch or you will breed varroa.
- Use comb trapping to reduce varroa in a colony without the use of chemicals
- Put a super on as soon as bees are nearly filling the brood box and subsequent supers when the super below is two thirds full of bees
- Bees like to draw out comb on foundation in the spring. Putting in a few frames to be drawn in a super keeps the bees busy and happy and less likely to want to swarm
- Extract oilseed rape honey when it no longer drips from the comb when shaken lightly over the hive – before it sets
- If you remove the spring honey crop at the end of the month, be prepared to feed the hives if the weather turns poor or remains cool and dry
- Render down wax from old comb/brood using a solar / easy steam wax extractor.



### **Look out for**

- Queen cups and queen cells – its swarming season. (have your plan of action for swarm control ready)
- Stray swarms; be prepared with sugar syrup empty hives/boxes to give them a home.
- Red pollen – horse chestnut pollen
- Hives running short of room (see April newsletter)
- Demonstrations at association apiaries. It's good to see what's going on in other people's hives.
- Jars – be prepared for your honey crop. (the association has a limited number of jars for sale to members – See April newsletter)
- Bees being bad tempered due to cold/poor weather and shortages of food. Do inspections in early to mid afternoon.



Unmarked queens – old queens are best marked with last year's colour (**green**) newly mated and laying queens can be marked with this year's colour (**blue**). Don't mark a non-laying virgin queen if you should be lucky enough to see it. Wait till eggs appear.

### **POST SCRIPT 19th May 2010**

The weather has now changed and, WOW, what a honey flow is coming in. I've just checked 18 hives today and many have run out of room since last weeks inspections, so an extra trip back to the out-apiarys to put on more supers is necessary.

Even a nuc made up with a queen and two frames of hatching brood and one of stores just 3 weeks ago, has drawn a frame of foundation and filled a five frame Nuc box with netar and needs promoting to a full sized hive.

If the weather stays good there should be another two-three weeks of possible spring honey flow.

## Plants our bees could visit this month

Plant	Pollen Colour	Pollen	Nectar	Comments
Apple		vvv	vv	Flowering very late this year
Blackcurrant		vv	vv	The last of the currants to flower
Bluebell Spanish	Pale Blue/ Pale Green	vv	vv	The bees prefer to work the open shaped flowers of these to our native bluebell
Ceanothus	Blue	vvv	vv	Flowering very well in our area, loved by bees
Cistus		vvv		Worked by bees for pollen until midday when petals tend to fall
Cotoneaster		vvv	vvv	Good garden plants possible honey crop with other plants
Dandelion	Orange	vvv	vvv	Pollen on undersides of bees
Field Beans / Broadbeans	Grey	vvv	vvv	Lovely flavoured pale-medium amber coloured honey
Forget-Me-Not		vv	vv	useful garden / wild plant
Hardy Geraniums		v	v	
Hawkweeds		v		
Hawthorne	Cream	vvv	vvv	Distinctive pungent sweet almond fragrance to nectar, possible honey crop (best at 23c)
Hebe		v	vv	early varieties
Holly	Cream	vvv	vvv	Male tree produces pollen and nectar; female nectar only
Horse Chestnut	Brick Red	vvv	vv	Useful supplies of distinctive pollen and nectar
Hybrid berries e.g. Logan and Tay berries		v	v	
Oil Seed Rape		vv	vvv	Possible Honey Crop - sets quickly. Pale amber, white when set.
Poppies	Black	vv		Black pollen from field poppies
Pyracantha		v	v	End of Month
Raspberries		vvv	vvv	High quality honey tasting of raspberries
Red Clover			v	Best after it's been cut and regrown
Roses - Single □		vvv		Good source of pollen
Sage		vv	vvv	High nectar blue flowers of the garden herb loved by bees
Sycamore		vvv	vvv	Possible honey crop - very thick medium amber with hint of green honey
Tamarisk		vv	vv	Early garden form Tamarisk tetrandra flower earlier than other species and attract bees for pollen and nectar
Veronica		v	v	
Wallflowers		vv	vv	useful garden / wild plant
Willow	Yellow	vvv	vvv	Pollen all over the bees

### Key

V: Okay

VV: Good

VVV: Very Good