



Things to Do and See

Author: Andy Willis – July 2010

The main honey flow started in our area on 21st June. Since then it has been more or less constant and full bore. Strong colonies are filling/drawing a super of foundation a week. Even queen less stocks are being choked with honey and Nucs are also in a similar condition. How long this will continue I don't know, last year the same thing was happening in our area, only to stop dead in its tracks at the end of the first week in July with a change to cool damp weather. No more honey was produced until the ivy flowered in October and many hives went short of food and ate most of the honey that had been made. If the weather continues hot and dry the honey flow will be cut short by drought in the middle to latter half of July. Dark honeydew honey may then be produced once the flowers have dried up. Some rain now and a quick return to good weather could result in an extended honey flow into August/September in urban areas.

I have witnessed bees working for nectar and pollen plants not normally thought of as good bee plants, this is probably due to the unusual more continental weather we have had this year. One plant caught my eye in particular just yesterday. The common hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) that grows in abundance on road side verges, I witnessed every head at lunchtime had at least one honeybee on it.

Each head comprises many hundreds of tiny white flowers (like giant cow parsley). It's a relative of the parsnip and was used extensively in the past as pig fodder, hence its common name. A pollen trap put on a hive revealed a good proportion of cream/beige pollen (from the hogweed) but a prominence of brown (clover) and a good bit of grey (blackberry) and some yellow (Sweet chestnut). This pollen was from one of the association hives on the Broadlands site.



The honey coming in is mostly pale and despite the drought probably mostly white clover honey with other nectars in varying proportions. The only exception to that is within the city where dark strong flavoured honey is being produced. The lime trees which normally yield within the city are struggling as it's so dry. There is a smattering of it in the combs but darker multi-floral and possibly honeydew/sweet chestnut is dominating at the moment. The new comb being built in all sites is beautifully pale/white and the cappings are looking good too, possibly some good show frames will be produced, so long as the honey doesn't granulate.



The spring honey this year is granulating, some in the comb, which is then difficult to extract/filter (as sugar crystals block the holes in the filters) Jarred spring honey is setting beautifully, possible show prize winners.

If when you extract you find your honey has started to set, run it straight off into a bulk container and warm before trying to filter and jar. Frames completely set can be cut out and melted down (wax and all). Allow to cool, the wax will set again but the honey will remain liquid, so it can be strained; otherwise feed it back to the bees once the whole honey crop has been removed.

Things to do

- Continue to use solar wax extractor (it doesn't work in winter!)
- Still time to make up nucleus hives – these won't make honey this year but the young vigorous queens produced will be excellent for next year. (My best colonies this year are headed by late raised queens last year and have not wanted to swarm yet!)
- Mark new queens once they have started to lay eggs
- Unite stocks. Cull the oldest / worst performing queens. (Use a sheet of newspaper between stocks.)
- Keep adding supers as the hives/honey flow dictates – don't allow the brood area to be choked or you risk losing a swarm.
- Do weekly checks on hives for swarming and supers filling up.
- Extract honey crop when frames are capped put the best aside in a case for the coming show season.
- Order jars and labels (don't get caught short!)
- Wash jars and air dry, store clean empty jars upside down so nothing can fall in them.
- Undrawn end frames of foundation can be moved in to the middle of the boxes to get drawn out. In the brood area only move one at a time. In the supers empty/undrawn frames can be moved into the centre of the box. They will be drawn out/filled up faster.
- Reduce brood and half colonies down to a single brood box; ensure the queen is in the bottom box before moving the queen excluder down.
- Put varroa monitoring boards in to get an accurate daily mite drop. Ideally you want less than 1 mite per day average drop. Higher than this and varroa will be a problem later on.
- Start Apiguard treatments as soon as you can towards the end of the month or in August depending on when the honey flow stops (you must take the honey crop off first). The higher the daily mite drop the sooner treatment should start.
- Ensure you have enough varroa treatments to treat all of your hives in August/September
- Continue drone brood culling to reduce your varroa levels (drones will stop being made as the honey flow slows/stops)



Things to look out for

- Unusual coloured pollens can turn up now in the hive e.g. green (meadow sweet), violet /blue (Scabious and willow herb), purple (purple loosestrife)
- Black honey; produced from honeydew excreted by aphids on some trees/plants. Don't blend it in but keep it separate at extraction time. Black honey is quite rare and wins prizes in shows, the weather needs to be dry and warm for a long period to get any quantity.
- Supersedure cells; one or possibly two extra large queen cells produced by the colony to replace an old or failing queen. These once capped can be 'harvested' to make up Nucs. The hive will usually make more to replace their queen.



- Propolis, this is collected in hot weather and can make gloves, hive tool and bee suit very dirty/sticky. Wash soiled equipment in a hot strong solution of washing soda, as it is not soluble in water and doesn't wash off with soap. When extracting wear disposable gloves or remove propolis from fingers with nail varnish remover on a cotton wool ball or cloth.
- Robbing, when the honey flow ends hives can be robbed by wasps and other bees, reduce the entrance down to make it easier to defend.
- Bad tempered bees, bees naturally become bad tempered when the honey flow stops, you have a large workforce which is then unemployed. Wait a week or two to see if the situation improves. If it doesn't, consider re-queening by amalgamation with better tempered stock, having culled the queen.
- Drones being expelled at the entrance of the hives. This tends to happen when the honey flow stops.

Plants in Flower this month

Plant	Pollen Colour	Pollen	Nectar	Comments
Blackberry	Grey	vvv	vvv	Best under sunny, humid but dry conditions. Rich medium amber coloured honey.
Borage		v	vvv	Huge quantities of nectar giving flavourless very pale water white honey.
Catmint		v	vvv	Favourite June plant in my Lincolnshire garden
Clover	Brown	vvv	vvv	Best after rain or heavy dew. Pale mild honey (can have a high water content)
Evening primrose		vv	vvv	Worked in the mornings before flowers go over.
Fleabane	Orange	vvv	v	Mostly worked for pollen
Goats rue	Dark Orange	vvv	vv	Mostly worked for pollen
Golden Rod		vvv	vvv	Good source of late pollen and nectar
Heather - Bell		vv	vvv	Port wine coloured runny honey.
Hebe		vvv	vvv	Worked well in urban gardens
Himalayan Balsam	White	v	vvv	White stripes down the back of the bees
Hollyhock	White	vvv	vv	Tall garden plant
Lavender		v	vvv	Requires hot sunny, dry conditions
Lime			vvv	Pale amber/green tinge to a pure sample of honey with a cool minty flavour when fresh. Pollen not normally collected.
Mallow	Pink	vvv	vv	Wild and cultivated forms much worked
Meadowsweet	Green	vvv	vv	Wild flower of waterside and damp patches
Privet		vv	vvv	Bees love it, but it has a bitter taste to the honey that most people don't like.
Purple Loosestrife	Purple	vvv	vv	Wild flower of waterside and damp patches
Roses - Single		vvv		Pollen only
Scabious	Violet	vvv	vvv	Worked freely by our bees
Sedum - Ice plant		v	vvv	Good drought tolerant plant.
Snowberries		v	vvv	Urban bees work this garden shrub avidly.
Sweet Chestnut	Yellow	vvv	vvv	Yields best with close, sultry nights and hot sunny, dry days, temperature around 27c. Pollen dusted all over bees.
Thistles		vv	vv	Wild flower / weeds worked by many types of bees
Thyme		v	vvv	Wild and garden types worked freely.
Willow herb	Blue	vvv	vvv	Pale water white honey, good flavour and density.