



Southampton & District Beekeepers Association

www.southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk

Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - April 2008

- This is the month that can catch you out even the most experienced beekeeper, the month when beekeeping gets under way in real earnest and preparations made in previous, quieter months really pay dividends.
- Shook swarming to control varroa and disease can usually be safely undertaken this month.
- Drone culling to control varroa should get underway
- Swarm prevention should also start by making sure the colony doesn't run out of room and artificial swarms done to those strong colonies already starting to produce queen cells.
- Monitor for varroa by uncapping sealed drone brood with an uncapping fork. Also slide a monitoring tray in for a few days under an open mesh floor, count the varroa that drop and divide by the number of days the tray was in to get a daily mite count.
- If you have very low levels of varroa, then you are very lucky indeed and probably won't need to do any active IPM. But you will still need to continue to monitor on at least a monthly basis as varroa can build up very quickly.
- Any early swarms should be housed on new foundation. Laying unmarked queens should be marked with last year's colour (yellow).
- April is the best time to find a queen in a colony as she should be well fed and plumped up for egg laying and the number of frames to look at in the brood nest is fewer as well.
- The recent cold spell over Easter won't have affected strong colonies with enough stores, but some might now require feeding to prevent them starving.
- Small or weak colonies (if otherwise healthy) should be united together using newspaper. Further stimulation feeding (little and often) should continue with small colonies to help them build up for the spring honey flow.
- The spring honey flow weather permitting usually starts this month. The spring flowers that contribute to this are:
 - Dandelion (Orange Pollen)
 - Apple
 - Sycamore
 - Hawthorne
 - Late Willow (Yellow pollen, large loads on legs and dusting all over the bees)
 - Cherry
 - Late plums
 - Horse Chestnut (Brick red pollen)
- Oil seed rape also is in flower this month and bees will fly up to 3 miles for it!
- Varroa infestation level using daily mite drops for April
 - Low <2
 - Medium >4 and <8
 - High >8

- Varroa infestation level using Drone brood monitoring (number of cells with varroa, not the number of mites themselves):
 - Low less than 1 infected larvae in 50 drone pupae
 - Medium 1 infected larvae in 25-50 drone pupae
 - High more than 1 infected larvae in 25 drone pupae
- If you have a high or very high varroa mite level you will need to use an effective control ASAP as your colony is at severe risk, i.e. do a shook swarm, followed by drone brood removal.
- There is still time to put out red mason bee nest boxes, but only just.
- The solar wax extractor can come into its own now. Using free energy too!

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