



Southampton & District Beekeepers Association

www.southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk

Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - December 2008

- December has traditionally been a quiet and reflective time for beekeepers apart from the obvious getting honey and candles ready for gifts as Christmas presents.
- If you are new to beekeeping there is an excellent range of books available both new and old that can be put onto your wish list for Santa. Some of these have been reviewed in the latest edition of Hampshire Bee talk. Suppliers are:

| | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| Name | Northern Bee Books | Bee Books New and Old |
| Address | Scout Bottom Farm Mytholmroyd Hebden Bridge HX7 5JS | The Weaven Little Dewchurch Herefordshire HR2 6PP |
| Email | Sales@recordermail.demon.co.uk | |
| Website | www.beedata.com | www.honeyshop.co.uk |
| Telephone | 01422 882751 | 01432 840529 |

- This year I find myself unable to put away my boots and bee suit as late infestations of Varroa mean that December is now a busy time in the apiary. Oxalic acid in sugar syrup needs to be applied to hives with high levels of Varroa and is applied directly to the seams of bees in the winter cluster within the hives. You can read about the method in the February 2008 Newsletter article titled [A November meeting at the Broadlands Apiary](#).
- The average daily mite drop for December is just 2 or less per day and your hives should be fine, but above this, you really do need to do something. One of my hives showed an alarmingly high count of 200 mites over 4 days giving an average of 50 mites per day. This will definitely need treating, and may already be too late to save depending on what viruses are present in the hive.

CSL guidelines for November average Varroa mite daily drop

| Level and Control Required | Average Mite Drop per Day | Proportion of Infested Drone Pupae |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Low No Action | 2 or less | |
| Medium Plan Action | | |
| High Take Action | More than 2 | |

- If you don't check your daily mite drop regularly, you could easily be caught out by late infestations. Using an open mesh floor and sliding in the monitoring tray gives minimal disturbance to the bees and leaving it in for only a few days gives you easily countable numbers of mites.

- The bees are very clean creatures and if bad weather confines them to the hive for a week or two, the first good mild day after that will see great activity in the apiary, around midday. This is because the bees will not defecate in the hive and will 'bottle it' up until they can fly on a good day. This 'Bee poo' can be a problem on washing that has just been hung out to dry, or on a freshly washed/waxed car parked near to the apiary. It is not harmful and usually constitutes a minor nuisance value. Once dry on the washing it is easily brushed off and doesn't usually stain.
- If you notice large amounts of defecation on the front of hives or even within the hive then dysentery or Nosema could be present. Nothing can be done at this time of year but brood comb change in the spring would be recommended.
- Bees continue to fly on mild days (temperature above 6c) and will work any flowers they find.
- Plants in flower this month visited by our bees include:
 - Autumn/winter Cherry (*Prunus x subhirtella* 'Autumnalis')
 - Various Mahonia species and hybrids
 - Winter flowering shrubby honeysuckle (*Lonicera fragrantissima* and *Lonicera x purpurea*)
 - False castor oil plant (*Fatsia japonica*)
 - *Viburnum tinus*
 - Early rosemary
 - Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*)
 - Winter Heathers (*Erica Carnea*)
 - Tree Heather (*Erica lusitanica*) Towards end of month
 - Early Christmas box (*Sarcococca*)
 - Early snowdrops
 - Early Hellebores
 - Gorse (*Ulex*)
 - Early Hazel (Pollen only) towards end of month
- If you have time and want to get away from the hustle and bustle of Christmas, visit a winter garden like the one they have at the [Sir Harold Hillier Gardens](#) at Ampfield near Romsey. It has the largest winter garden in Europe and away from the public areas, bees are kept in a small apiary. This enables the keen eyed visitor to spot the plants the bees prefer to work during the mild spells even in winter.
- Happy Christmas to all my readers and many thanks to those who have contacted our association with comments about this page on our website.

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