



Southampton & District Beekeepers Association

www.southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk

Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - October 2008

- October in some respects is the most important month of the year. If you get it right it can set you up for next year. If you get it wrong your bees won't make it through the winter.
- Firstly ensure your hives are queen right. This is your last opportunity to requeen your colonies as queens from other beekeepers can become available as beekeepers unite colonies.
- If you have small colonies from late divisions or swarms, they can be united through newspaper without much trouble now. If you can find both queens then you can dispatch/or give away/sell the one you least like. Which one you keep is up to you. If you can't find the queens then don't worry. The queens will fight it out usually the queen in the bottom box will win, but not always.
- Quite a few hives at the end of September this year were completely free of brood, even though the marked queens were present. This was due to the bad weather and lack of forage/nectar coming into the hives. A gallon of syrup (8lb sugar to 4 pints of water) fed to the bees normally got the queens laying again. This is important as these bees being made right now are the winter bees and will live for up to 6 months. They are the only bees left in Feb/March to get the colony going.
- The ivy is now conveniently coming into flower and supplies vast quantities of both pollen and nectar to help produce these winter bees. We just need some reasonable weather with fairly high humidity (not the low humidity that we have had at the end of September) and our bees will do the rest.
- If the weather is not right and the nectar doesn't pour into the hives (40lb of sealed stores in the brood box (6-8 frames in a national brood box) by the end of October) then you will need to feed.
- I have been shocked by the lack of stores in most of my hives brood boxes. Most on inspection at the end of September had zero sealed stores and only small patches of ivy nectar and very little brood. I don't normally feed at all as the bees have more than enough, but not this year. Most of my hives have had a gallon of thick syrup (8lb Sugar in 4 pints water) as an emergency measure and then I am preparing to top up the ivy flow towards the end of October with another 2 gallons if necessary, totalling 24lb sugar per hive. In 18 years of beekeeping I don't recall ever having to feed our bees so much, but at least they did give me a reasonable surplus, which I know is very rare this year.
- Don't forget to check your Varroa daily mite drop this month. Hives treated last month should be checked now for efficiency of treatment and/or reinvasion from collapsing colonies.
- Some of our hives are showing massive recent invasion of Varroa as our starving hives are robbing out weaker/dying feral colonies. There is still time to treat with Apigaurd but only just. The efficacy will probably not be as good as the day time temperature need to be above 15c for the best efficiency for the whole of the 4 week treatment period. Oxalic acid treatment may be needed later on in December if the mite drops continue to be high.
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Level and Control Required	Average mite drop per day	Proportion of infested drone pupae
Low No Action	8 or less	
Medium Plan Action	Between 8 and 9	
High Take Action	More than 9	

Varroa counts as advised by the CSL, DEFRA

- Plants in flower in October that contribute to the production of winter bees and stores in the brood box include:
 - Ivy – distinctive strong smelling dark nectar which sets quickly to an almost white set honey in the comb, Pale creamy yellow pollen
 - Michaelmas Daisies – Orange pollen
 - Balsam – White pollen stripe on back of bees (continues until first frost) nectar and pollen.
 - Strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*) – mostly nectar
 - *Berberis darwinii* – second flowering of the year
 - Early Mahonia – Pollen and nectar - One of the first wintering flowering plants
 - Early *Viburnum tinus* – pollen and nectar - One of the first wintering flowering plants
- Nosema will probably be a problem again this winter. If you used Fumidil B with your autumn feed last year then don't use it this year. If you didn't then do add it to the autumn feed. New colonies from swarms or unknown sources are probably best treated with Fumidil-B. The new type of Nosema doesn't always show the usual symptoms associated with *Nosema apis* (dysentery and visible adult bee mortality in front of the hives), but the hive will have lacked vigour during the summer season and may be showing signs of dwindling population, with no apparent cause.
- The National Bee Unit will do a Nosema check for £10.00 a sample (30+ bees in a matchbox) Send samples to;

Address: Central Science Laboratory
National Bee Unit
Sand Hutton
York
North Yorkshire
YO41 1LZ

Tel: 01904 462510
Email: nbu@csl.gov.uk
Web: www.nationalbeeunit.com
www.csl.gov.uk

- This is a quick and efficient way to determine if you have Nosema and need to treat, but don't have the necessary microscope/skills for identifying it yourself.
- Your subscriptions were due on 1st October and I do recommend the two magazines which you can get at a discounted rate through our association. (*Beecraft* and *Beekeepers Quarterly*).
- The later one I find particularly interesting having extremely high quality articles in a very readable format from all over the world. After all no beekeeper is an island!
- Lastly, if you had bees during the first two weeks of May '08, have a look at the holly trees in your area now, (before the birds get busy) Because of the short lived good weather coinciding with the holly trees flowering, good pollination took place. This has resulted in a bumper crop of holly berries which are just starting to colour up (don't worry it's not a sign of a hard winter to come), so take a little pride in that your bees did a good job and the birds if not the people will enjoy them before Christmas.

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