



Southampton & District Beekeepers Association

www.southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk

Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - October 2008 Supplementary

- During the first half of October the miracle we have all been hoping for has happened. The weather has improved coinciding with the ivy coming into flower in our area. In these 2 weeks strong hives have been able to fill completely the brood boxes and the very strongest have even filled a super as well.
- Some of the queens have responded by laying profusely and as I write drone brood is even being produced in some colonies. Large quantities of pollen are also being packed into the brood chambers and bees can be seen queuing up to get in with heavy loads of the creamy pale yellow pollen of the ivy.
- This is all good news as honey is far better for the bees than sugar syrup, and all this fresh pollen will help get the winter bees into shape for the long cold months ahead. Whether this has come too late – only time will tell. Worryingly, some queens are still off lay and these colonies have been brood free since September. In 18½ years of beekeeping I haven't seen anything quite like this. I'm hoping the bees know what they are doing; they usually do, but not always!
- Extraction of surplus ivy honey can be a problem as it sets very quickly in the comb, often before it's been capped. If you have a super or two of capped ivy honey and it's still liquid by all means extract it as soon as you take it off the hive. Don't leave it in the extractor (not even over night) but run it off into containers that you can warm to re-liquefy it. Ivy honey does set very quickly and usually it's set in the comb.
- Once set in the comb your only option is to cut out the comb and melt it down gently in a container set into either a larger pan of hot water on the stove or in a warming cabinet. The wax may melt but don't let it melt completely, the honey will be liquid before then. Allow to cool slightly and strain/lift off the wax. The honey can then be filtered and bottled as usual and will set again usually taking only a few weeks.
- The taste of ivy honey is very strong and not to everyone's liking. The flavour mellows after about 6 months and my experience is that the public like it. If you are not sure if your honey is from ivy, go and smell some of the ivy flowers before they go over in November. The smell of the flowers is almost the same as the taste of the honey, it's very strong and quite distinctive. It doesn't take much ivy honey to 'Taint' other less strong honeys, so any leftover summer honeys in the supers of ivy honey are best treated the same.
- The weaker or smallest colonies may still require additional feeding at the end of October and this should be completed by the second week in November at the latest.
- Hives on the Broadlands site appear to have not done so well on the ivy and some will be requiring additional feeding too. Why this should be, I don't know. Perhaps the ivy is a little later flowering in that area?
- If you can cull any drone brood produced then do so, it will be heavily infested with Varroa and these will breed more than doubling your Varroa population if you allow them to hatch.