



Southampton & District Beekeepers Association

www.southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk

Things to do and see

Author Andy Willis - September 2008

- This is the month that many experienced beekeepers refer to as the start of the beekeeping year. Decisions and jobs done now will have a great influence on your bee's survival through the winter and therefore your honey crop next year.
- Colonies can usually be united now with few problems (using a sheet of newspaper between the two stocks).
- The colonies whose queen you keep is your choice, but, I would recommend culling the worst tempered first followed by the least productive and finally the oldest queens (as these might fail during the winter). A vigorous young supercedure queen heading a strong healthy stock which was productive this year is ideal and is what you should be aiming for, but we are not always that lucky so the nearest you can get to this ideal the better.
- If you intend to expand the number of colonies you keep next year, (or are just starting up) don't miss out on the end of season sales that Thornes have this month. The first is at their Windsor branch located at Oakley Green, Windsor and the second is at Chilbolton Down Farm, Stockbridge on the A30. Do get there early well before the start time. It's a bit like Harrods sale day with normally genteel beekeepers scrabbling to get the equipment they require before they sell out. It's usually 5-15 minutes of mayhem before the calm returns and you join the queue for paying. Its first come first served and with an average saving of $\frac{2}{3}$ rds of the normal price the bargains are soon all gone. If you require foundation (and you don't have any wax to exchange) then you are better off waiting until the on-line sale in January.
- If you didn't harvest your honey crop last month, then now is probably the best time to do it. When extracting, try to keep the separate types/colours of honey separate. Extract the palest ones first followed by the medium and lastly the dark honey. If you don't all your honey will end up medium and tasting the same (some people prefer this) but this does restrict you if you intend to put some in the Hampshire or National shows in October and November or enter our show next summer.
- The bad weather in August has meant that many colonies have already been using their winter stores and the brood boxes are now very light. Feeding with a little syrup is best done soon or immediately you take the honey off (2lb sugar to 1pint water) this syrup is best heated to get all the sugar to dissolve and then cooled before feeding to the bees using a rapid or contact feeder. Fumidil B can be added to this autumn feed to help prevent Nosema/dysentery in the bees. (If your colonies were given Fumidil B last year then don't give it again this year, unless you are sure your bees have got Nosema)
- Your aim with feeding is to ensure there is 40lb of stores in the hive by the end of October, as this is what is generally accepted as the average requirement for most colonies in most winters. To achieve this traditionally 14lb sugar was turned into syrup and fed to each hive. The weather these days in autumn is generally better with higher temperatures due to global warming. This means that plants like Ivy which start to flower this month are worked much more by our bees, and in recent years have made a surplus of honey for the beekeeper. This means that most hives don't require feeding in our area at all.
- Whether you feed syrup to your bees or not is therefore up to you and how much you need to feed is determined by the weather, the area in which your bees are kept and the strength of the colony.
- I prefer not to feed unless the colony is about to starve (as honey is better for the bees). If I do feed I usually do this at the end of next month once the Ivy honey (if any) has come in.

- The bees on the Heather won't require feeding, the bad weather in August has lessened the crop but the honey flow is now on as I write (25th August) and supers and brood boxes are now filling up with Heather Honey.
- Continue to monitor Varroa levels in your hives, levels can jump up as the brood nest area starts to decrease. If you are not able to monitor or are at all in doubt about the numbers of Varroa then treat with Apigaurd. The day time temperature needs to be above 15°C for the whole of the 4 week treatment period, so to guarantee this you need to start treatment soon. If you have been using integrated pest management and all has gone well and Varroa levels are low then no treatment is required.

Level and Control Required	Average mite drop per day	Proportion of infested drone pupae
Low No Action	6 or less	
Medium Plan Action	Between 6 and 8	
High Take Action	More than 8	

Varroa counts as advised by the CSL, DEFRA

- An Indian summer/good weather now (and we are overdue some good weather) often gives an autumn honey flow in our area. Within the City the garden flowers and shrubs often have a late flush of bloom and aphid levels usually peak giving a crop some years of dark honeydew honey.
- This influx of nectar can sometimes trigger late swarming from crowded boxes (the honey supers having been removed) Replace spun frames as soon as you can to help prevent this and you may be rewarded with an extra harvest!
- Drone production in most areas has stopped but sometimes resumes this month with the autumn honey flow. Don't miss the opportunity to do drone culling to remove some more Varroa from your hives before winter, if this does occur.
- Plants in flower in September that can contribute to an autumn honey flow/ the winter stores for the colony include:
 - Mint
 - Helenium (sneezeweed)
 - White clover (continues particularly if it's been cut down on lawns)
 - Sedum spectabile (ice plant)
 - Sunflowers (requires high temperature for nectar to flow)
 - Russian vine / mile a minute
 - Japanese knotweed – no pollen
 - Himalayan Balsam (bees dusted with white pollen down their backs)
 - Single dahlias – mostly pollen only
 - Michaelmas daisies
 - Flea bane – mostly pollen only
 - Ling heather – thixotropic honey (jelly like)
 - Honey dew (from aphids on various plants) – dark honey
 - Ivy – Pale cream pollen, dark runny honey which sets almost white very quickly – strong scent
 - Late Hebe shrubs
 - Tamarix pentandra
 - Caryopteris x clandonensis
 - Arbutus unedo – Strawberry tree (towards end of the month)