



Southampton & District Beekeepers Association

www.southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk

How Do I? Information Sheet #3 Extracting Heather Honey Author Tony Mabey September 2007

1. Information Sheet #2 describes Getting The Most From Your Bees On The Heather and details one method of processing heather honey, (Ling heather). As heather honey is thixotropic, (jelly like, but liquefying on agitation/stirring), it is difficult to spin out in the normal way.

The comb can be spun but after uncapping it needs to be needled with a perforator, (this punctures the midrib/foundation in the comb & in the process agitates the honey so liquefying it temporarily). The comb is then spun in a tangentially arranged spinner, (a radial spinner doesn't quite do the job as the honey is still so thick).

An alternative way to extract the honey from the comb is to press the honey out using a heather press. The barrel is lined with straining cloth and then loaded with mashed up comb. This information sheet will describe the pressing method.



2. Uncapping of the frames. An experienced hand can remove the cappings without having a significant affect on the honey yield. This first stage is an optional extra for those beekeepers who want to harvest the wax cappings. These cappings are found to produce the best quality wax for showing and candle making.



3. The frame, uncapped or otherwise, is then held over a honey bucket for the removal of the honey comb cells and their contents. A “Smith Cutter/Scraper” is available from Thornes or alternatively any suitable implement (of food hygiene standard) can be used.



With care, this method of extraction will leave the original frame and foundation intact. The scraping can be completed without damaging the foundation midrib of the drawn comb. These ‘wet’ frames can then be temporarily returned to the original hive whereby the bees will remove any honey residue leaving frames ‘dry’ for storage and use next season.

4. The honey will soon return to a jelly like consistency and will need to be stirred before pouring into the press. The straining cloth is then twisted and folded over ready for pressing.



5. The honey is pressed and flows into another honey bucket and, if successful, will be free of any wax residue. Pressing continues until the press reaches it's maximum compression. The honey can then be left for an hour or so to allow any remaining honey to flow into the bucket.



6. Now for the science bit. A main factor in a honey's quality is the water content. heather honey has naturally higher water content than traditional honey. It is advised that the heather honey is only removed from the hive once fully capped. Honey with more than 21 % water content, apart from heather or clover, where 23% is admissible, is not fit for sale, except for industrial use. 18% or even 17% represents a much higher quality.

For heather honey the maximum water content is 23%. Extracted honey should be tested after extraction.

7. Heather honey has a distinctive look to compliment its texture. A jar of heather honey will have lots of air bubbles trapped in it which is a recognised sign of quality. The jars need to be filled almost to the top to reach the right weight.