

January in the Apiary

Heft the hive to check the amount of stores, you can put fondant on if the hive seems light.

Carry out oxalic acid vapourisation if not already done.

Check the entrance for dead bees.

Check the mouse guards and straps.

Remove any snow blocking the entrance.

Attend any Zoom or Webinar meetings.

Assess your bee suit and gloves.

Finally get round to that theory/reading you thought about last month!

February in the Apiary (same as January)

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March in the Apiary

Plants are growing and there are spring flowers everywhere.

The bees have anticipated this time of renewal and have encouraged the queen to increase her laying rate so that the colony can build and take advantage of the new forage.

The colony is developing from the remnants of the old winter bees and it is a testing time and should the weather turn inclement the bees will need help to survive.

If you are in an area where early pollen is not available it may be necessary to feed pollen patties.

Beware of a sudden cold snap.

So be aware of the amount of stores and don't put the queen excluder on too soon.

If there is a fine sunny quiet day when the temperature exceeds 12 degreesC you should take the opportunity to check all is well.

This inspection should be swift taking no more than 5 minutes and as the colony will be getting cold the bees may not be happy.

The objective of the inspection is to ensure that the queen is present and laying well, has room to continue laying and there are enough stores to last a couple of weeks into April.

Do have a smoker as the bees haven't been disturbed for a few months.

Once you have access to the brood chamber remove a couple of frames to make space, then move frames into the gap and have a look at the faces of the frames to identify larvae. (you don't need to find the queen as it is just a quick look to see how big the brood nest is)

You don't even need to take out these frames as you should have enough space to look onto the faces.

Register the number of frames with brood, the number with adult bees on them and the state of stores (pollen and honey) if you think they are short of stores leave the fondant on.

Looking at your findings have a think about what you have found.

- No larvae probably means that there is not a queen in the brood chamber. She may be dead or laying in the super you left on!
- You will probably have the same number of sides of larvae as sides covered with bees. More bees is good.
- You may have 5 sides (not frames) covered in brood. Any less and the colony is not building up well.
- There should be at least 5KG honey stores. Less and the bees should be fed fondant.

Having finished and decided on the state of the colony leave it for a few weeks.

Make sure you have enough equipment for your beekeeping plans and these need to be flexible as we have little control over the weather.

In the spring when colonies are rapidly building you have the opportunities to solve problems.

In late summer colonies do not have the time to prepare for winter if there is a setback.

April is the time to assess your colony health to make sure it is in good condition to thrive through the summer.

Try to keep in touch with other beekeepers.

April in the Apiary

April is one of the best months of the year if you keep bees. It's full of optimism. There is usually plenty of forage with good quality pollen. You MAY want to feed 1:1 syrup to stimulate increase in size. If pollen is scarce you MAY want to feed a pollen pattie.

When the weather is warm enough that is when you can inspect the colony in more detail. This is for your enjoyment and part of your annual colony management. The most important lesson for beekeepers is 'never inspect a colony without a purpose'. Remember when you open a hive the rush of air from the bottom cools down the colony and the balance of hormones is lost. Always put frames back in their original position as the surface is not flat. If not bee space will be reduced in some areas and increased in others, so the bees will make brace comb or fill with propolis so using up unnecessary energy.

Your first major inspection:-

- Ensure the colony is disease free.
- That the bees have enough pollen and honey.
- Keep a look out for varroa mites and deformed wing virus on adult bees.
- Look for eggs which will indicate the presence of a laying queen. There should be about 1:4 ratio of eggs to sealed brood in April.
- Check the frames. Old dark ones and misshapen ones that the bees do not use need to be replaced when there is a nectar flow. They can harbour disease.
- The brood chamber should be full of frames that the queen can lay in and storage space for nectar and pollen

Study the brood pattern. Are there solid patches of eggs, larvae and nicely capped brood, or is the brood pattern patchy or with raised cappings indicating a failing or missing queen, they may need uniting but be aware of disease.

Prepare Asian hornet monitoring traps.

May in the Apiary

May is the time of year when your colonies of bees can get out of control unless you help them to expand the brood nest. This is known as swarm prevention.

The queen is flat out laying eggs which is dependant on the quantity and quality of forage and nurse bees and the space to lay. If space runs out the bees will naturally swarm. There are many methods of reactive swarm control and learning one way is very important if we open our hives and see queen cells in the making. It usually means that your colony is thriving.

Hopefully most of MBKA beekeepers have had a method shown to them about swarm control by the artificial method in the training sessions.

Wally Shaw has produced a booklet called There are queen cells in my colony, what shall I do! If you do not have a hard copy there is PDF on the WBKA website.

Also there are experienced beekeepers in MBKA to help you.

It as always a good idea to have a spare floor, brood box with 11 frames foundation, crown board and lid at the ready.

Be aware that swarming can happen from late April through to the Autumn.

Keep a eye on nectar flow and space in supers, adding more when needed.

June in the Apiary

This time of year used to be called the June gap and it all depends on where your bees have access to forage and the weather conditions.

It is always important to check that your colony has enough stores.

If the weather is poor and forage limited a large colony will get through its stores quickly.

Varroa management is important to, as a large colony will have an increase in mites.

Remember varroa mites cause stress to the bees and they provide a vector for viruses such as deformed wing virus.

Carry out a varroa mite drop and calculate the number you may have in your colony. The NBU has the calculator on its website.

Treatments in the summer can be something like MAQS or a pyrethroid if you have not used one in the last 5 years.

Keeping varroa mite numbers down at this time of year will help ensure winter bees are in top condition, with no viruses.

Hopefully the weather is warm and the bees are working well.

The colonies that have not swarmed will be preparing for the nectar flow next month.

If there is a good nectar flow it will be a good time to change frames of old comb in the brood nest as the bees will have the energy to draw wax.

Bees can still swarm in June so weekly inspections are still important.

July in the Apiary

This month we will be keeping our fingers crossed that the weather will be kind and that there will be a good summer flow of nectar.

Make sure you have enough space in your supers. The aim is to get the majority of each super frame capped as soon as possible.

When the supers are getting heavy and the last one added is 2/3 capped then another can be added.

If the super has drawn comb then that can be placed on top. If the super has foundation then place it on top of the queen excluder where the temperatures are higher and the bees are more likely to draw comb.

If the summer is warm then the honey will stay liquid. When the flow is over in your area you will need to remove the supers and extract the honey.

Some can be taken off at the end of July. Take the supers off the hive as quickly as possible because you are reducing the area for your bees to live and they can get tetchy.

Use a rapid clearer board and if you have a spare super, put that underneath the supers you are clearing and the bees will have space.

Once you have extracted the honey the wet frames can be returned to the colony and if you have put on an extra super, this can now come off.

Remember that at this time of year robbing starts either by wasps or other bees, so clearing overnight and removing in the early morning is good and putting the wet super back in the late evening is also good practice.

Check your monitoring traps for signs of AH.

August in the Apiary

Remove and extract all the ripe honey in the supers.(see last months information.)

Check that the bees have enough stores in the brood nest when you do this. Feed fondant if they are low, or sort through super frames and leave partially capped frames for them.

Make the hives beetight and reduce the entrance to prevent robbing and wasp attacks. Your traps will help reduce wasp numbers and you can either buy or make a wasp deterrent entrance remembering to put it on late evening.

This is a good time of year to take a close look at disease and start preparing for winter. The colony size will have peaked and the queen will be reducing her laying rate. Forage will be reducing except for balsam and heather and ivy.

We want our bees to be healthy going into winter and have about 40lb honey. When you have finished extracting and you think your nectar flow is low, now is the time to feed 2:1 sugar syrup.

AH workers are seeking protein, so you could add a monitoring trap with a bit of cat food in it.

September in the Apiary

Prepare your colonies for the winter ahead now.

Check colonies are disease free and pest free.

Check they are queenright.

Monitor for robbing by wasps and other bees.(reduce the entrance, put up wasp traps)

Check for sufficient stores by hefting and feeding syrup as necessary.

Combine weak/small colonies.

Buy fondant for the winter.

October in the Apiary

Heft the hive to check the amount of stores.

Remove queen excluder.

Put on a mouseguard.

Strap your hive down or put a couple of bricks on the top.

Think about protection from woodpeckers if you have them in your area.

Start a general tidy up in your apiary.

November in the Apiary

Heft the hive to check the amount of stores, you can put fondant on if the hive seems light.

Carry out a varroa mite drop.

Clean, sterilise and store spare equipment in a cool dry shed.

Make a note of your equipment and start planning for next year.

December in the Apiary

Heft the hive to check the amount of stores, you can put fondant on if the hive seems light.

Monitor varroa and apply oxalic acid in vapour form.

Check the entrance isn't blocked by dead bees.

Consider doing some theory learning/ reading.