

## **Preparing the bees for winter**

Colonies winter better with young queens and build up faster in spring. Most important is that you ensure colonies are queenright with plenty of bees going into the winter. Check for laying queen, eggs and larvae and sealed brood. If there is no queen, unite to a queen-right colony or shout for help! Your colony should have at least five deep frames of bees.

This is a time to see which colonies need new mothers. We make a list of all the queens that underperformed in any way. Again – we use hive records for this. You might not have enough queens to replace them all but when queens become available you'll know immediately where you want to put them. Replace the worst first – any hives which show any sign of paralysis or abnormality, poorer yield than the apiary average for no reason, any with excitable/nervous workers, any excessively vicious stock and of course any that have served 2 full seasons in a colony. Only very special queens should serve for a third year and only really for breeding – overwinter them in nucs.

Bees must be well fed going into the winter; if you take honey from them then you must feed them. They need a minimum of 15kg of stores going into the winter. First you will need to estimate the stores by examining the frames. 2 to 1 mixture required. Half fill container with water & add sugar to fill. A number of different feeders can be used. Good idea to have large number of feeders so you can feed all the hives at the same time. Avoid spilling and dripping and evening time is best to feed.

The colony should be disease free going into the winter. Examine for adult bee & brood diseases & send samples to Pat Moloney for diagnosis. Disease is spread by close contact. In winter bees are in a cluster so that is why it important they are disease free.

Treating for varroa – treatment can be with bayvoral 4 strips per colony for 6 wks. However, some instances of resistant mites have been identified in the country, so we will have to start considering our treatment methods.

Apiguard is another option - 50mg tin for 2 wks, then another 50mg tin for a further 2 wks. Leave in the hive until fully used up.

Not yet legal in this country but Oxalic Acid is a good follow-up treatment to the apiguard. Oxalic Acid will kill mites that are living on the bees. It does not kill mites that are in the brood. Treatment should only be when the hive is as close to broodless as possible (around Dec/Jan).

Lastly check that hives are weatherproof, no leaking roofs & put on mouse guards. Batten down for the winter & wash the beesuit & hang it up for a while!