



South Tipperary Beekeepers' Association

Fact Sheet no. 4

First Few Weeks of Beekeeping

Obtaining your first colony of bees can be a very exciting time for the beginner. However, this feeling will soon be overshadowed by the stark reality that you are now the proud owner of bees that needs attention. If you can get help from an experienced beekeeper avail of it.

What needs to be done over the coming weeks depends very much on the time of year you get the bees. If the bees are obtained at the end of the active season as in late July/August preparing for overwintering should be foremost in your mind. Feeding and treating for Varroa would be priority jobs. After a few days when the hive has settled start varroa treatment by whatever is the appropriate method. (Reference Varroa Fact Sheet). Feeding should be attended to also. If the bees are in a full hive it will need 20 kilos of stores to survive the winter. Feed an appropriate amount to make up the deficit. Usually 10-15 litres should be enough. Seek the advice of an experience beekeeper. After feeding, treating and checking that the queen is laying there is very little the beekeeper can do for the colony. Actually, the less interference at this time of year the better chance that the colony will survive over the winter. Make sure the hive is weather and vermin proof and safe from livestock.

Management of a nuc or hive obtained in April requires a different procedure. Obtaining a hive at this time of year is better as the beekeeper does not have the stress of overwintering and the possibility of losing your first colony.

Leave the bees in the nuc or hive for a week to settle in, just make sure the colony has adequate food and space. The seller should advise you on these points. The most important aspect is to make sure the queen is present and laying. There is no need to find her, just check for eggs and brood. If any abnormalities are spotted at this stage you should contact the seller. Check stores and also make sure the colony has enough room to expand. A good laying queen with adequate bees will expand very rapidly at this time of year especially if the weather is mild and if there is a "flow on". Have spare frames for the brood chamber and a super of frames made up and ready for use. Always be prepared for all situations. Remember bees do not wait for the beekeeper. The queen should be clipped and marked by the seller but if not done it needs to be. Again advice and help from an experience beekeeper would be appropriate. When the queen is clipped and marked the colony needs to be examined every 14 days checking for swarm preparation (Ref: Swarm Control Fact Sheet) room and stores. Disease detection should also be part of your regular inspection. At this stage the colony should be developing into a full brood chamber and possibly a few supers of bees. Handling a colony of this size requires a certain knowledge and confidence level. If problems develop, deal with them straight away.

At some stage the bees may start to develop queen cells. A beginner needs to be very aware of this and most importantly needs to know what procedures to follow. Make sure you have a swarm control procedure learnt so that when the situation arises you know what to do.