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## July Beekeeping

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July is the last month in the beekeepers' calendar. It can be a month of great excitement for those who managed to keep their bees in the box and now have supers full of bees hoping for the right conditions to collect the crop. For those who failed, there is always next year. Try to learn from your mistakes. Usually they are associated with the loss of a swarm or the colony ending up queen less. Looking back over June it certainly wasn't a bad month. It was a mixture of heat and rain, maybe not enough rain but the next few weeks will tell its own story. The famous June gap wasn't as prevalent as other years. Some apiaries did seem to manage with a little foraging everyday, but others were certainly hungry and some needed feeding. It's amazing how conditions can vary from one area to another. Swarming wasn't too bad this year and most of it was associated with lack of room for the queen as she reached her maximum egg laying. Most hives did manage to fill the brood chamber and now there are some very strong hives.

A few quick tasks for July, firstly order your sugar and secondly decide what treatment you intend to use for Varroa and order it now, both will be needed after you remove the crop.

During the early part of July, you might still have to continue with swarm control. If after two inspections, there are no sign of queen cells I would be inclined to leave the colony alone and just make sure there is enough room in the supers. A strong colony should have 3-5 supers full of bees now. A big colony like this can be daunting for a first-year beginner. Colonies like this might be considered "cross" however it is the noise and the sheer volume of bees that scares a beginner. The colony is not cross, but it can be very intimidating, just move slowly from frame to frame examining each side and if necessary, shake the bees into the brood box if you are looking for queen cells. Remember those small runt cells, not easy to see if covered with bees, you must clear the frame to find them. Do not over smoke the bees just enough to keep them from boiling over. It's a good idea to have a crownboard without the holes for the supers when you take them off, one top and bottom, thereby locking the bees in so that at least they cannot annoy you as you examine the hive. July is a good month to consider some nuc production and queen rearing. Everyone should try it as every beekeeper will need both.

**Supering:** Hopefully supering the hives as the crop flows in will be your top priority task for this month. Supering on top is the easiest and you can keep a check on it by lifting the crown board. As the bees fill the centre, move the centre frames to the outside of the box and put the empty ones into the center, then add your next super. This helps to get an even fill in all the frames. As the season comes to an end do not over super otherwise you will end up with a lot of partially filled

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frames. If interested in producing a few cut comb frames place them in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> super and the bees will draw them out quickly and fill. You must be ready to do this just as the main flow starts, no point in putting cut comb frames in near the end of the season as they will not be capped fully. Do not place them in the first super as the bees might place a large amount of pollen in them. If you are selling them with pollen, explain to the buyer about the benefits of this, it's not pollen now but "bee bread" and this is what the bees use to make the royal jelly, don't forget to charge extra for this.

**Queen Rearing:** July is a good month to consider queen rearing, there are several methods, grafting, miller method or simply select some queen cells if the colony starts to produce them. A colony that starts to swarm end of June /early July will be at its maximum



Figure 2 Curler with queen cell positioned in frame

strength. It's a good characteristic of the queen that she progressed to the point of building the colony now with a brood chamber full of bees and at least three supers of bees. When you find mature, sealed queen cells, cut them out with a sharp scalpel, do not use the hive tool, place them into a curler, place some food, a mix of pollen and honey in the bottom.

Remember cover the top of the curler, tinfoil will do the trick otherwise the bees will eat in through the top of the



Figure 1 Queen Cell was in curler for 7 days and hatched ready to place in nuc

cell and release the virgin and you just lost a swarm. You could do this with several cells, min of three, max of eight and place them into the brood chamber, cut out space in the frame. Leave for 7 days and recheck, usually there should be a good number hatched. These can be placed in an Apidea, a small mini hive or you can make up nucs. This is a very practical subject so attend your local apiary demos to get the finer details.

**Nuc production:** Again, every beekeeper needs to have a nuc or two going into the winter, a simple make up could be a frame of bees and brood from one or two or three colonies and leave them for a week. Then add in your virgin queen from above. If making up nucs in this manner, there is a few precautions. Make sure you are not taking the queen with you and make sure all bees and combs are disease free. Proceed as follows. Have a nuc box ready, close the entrance. Take one frame of bees and brood from the first hive, spray a little sugary water onto them, repeat the same procedure at the next hive, then on the final hive shake in a frame of bees. Close up, move to a new site if possible, do not forget to open the entrance and leave for a week, they will start queen cells and will expect to have a virgin queen in the hive so when you add in your newly hatched queen it will not be a surprise to them. Easiest way to do that is when the queen is hatched in the cage remove the empty queen cell, and firstly check that the queen looks ok, all legs and wings in place and lively. Plug the top with candy or a marshmallow sweet. Place the queen and cage into the nuc, remove a

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small portion of comb if needed, hang the curler upside down between the frames and they will release her. Before you do this, you must go through the two frames of brood and remove all queen cells, remember to watch out for the runt cells.

**Removing the crop:** Consider how you are going to remove the crop, have you got clearer boards, if so, make sure they are in working condition, clean and free up the port holes. You may need to buy equipment and now is the time to do that. Order buckets, jars, have the honey extractor booked, last chance to paint and polish the honey house, make sure there is no smell of paint left. Clean out the light covers, everything should be pristine. Do not rush into removing the supers, wait until all or almost all the combs are sealed. Capped honey is the bees' "seal of approval" for their quality product. When the flow is over you should wait for 10 – 14 days before you take the supers off. This allows the bees time to settle as they can be cross immediately after the flow is over, so the temperament will have calmed, and they will have time to ripen the honey



Figure 3 Partially capped super frame

**Feeding:** Big colonies will gather a big crop and have it all in the supers. When you remove that crop the brood chamber can be feather light so be ready to feed, many a beekeeper lost their best hive because they failed to feed. When the crop is removed, and the hive have adequate stores start to treat for varroa.

Hope everyone got at least a small crop of honey. Bees are complex and it takes years to master the craft. Happy Beekeeping.

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## Photo Gallery

Study the following three photos of different type of queen cells, 1<sup>st</sup> photo shows three runt queen cells easily missed if you have bees on the frame. Do not use for queen rearing, 2<sup>nd</sup> photo shows a long cell not normal width same diameter the whole way down and smooth sides, break down, break down the open cell above it also, 3<sup>rd</sup> photo, a perfect queen cell where the queen has hatched, note rough sculptured surface, wider on the top than the bottom, a perfect well-nourished queen emerged from this cell.

