

September Beekeeping

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September is the "bedding in" month for your bees. It's your last chance to make sure all is well in each colony. Enough stores to last until next spring, queen right, disease free, varroa free, vermin and weatherproof hive. Without these conditions you are reducing the likelihood of your bees surviving the winter. August was a great month for the bees and the beekeepers. Those who planned for heather honey production will be very pleased.

It's a fantastic crop but not the easiest to process. The weather was ideal to get foundation drawn out, affording an opportunity to replace



Figure 1 Drawing out new foundation

frames or have some put into storage for your spring nuc expansion programme. At this stage your varroa treatments should be in for 2-3 weeks. Depending on what you are using you may need to revisit the hives, for Apiguard, the second tub needs to be put in after two weeks and removed after a further two. If using the Apivar it is recommended that you scrape the strips to make them more efficient. Read the instructions. All hives should be checked at this stage for queen right, eggs, larvae and sealed brood should be present. Not all hives will be ok and it's a shame that sometimes the beekeeper will find that their best hive is now sadly depleted of bees.

If you have a hive, and there is no brood in it, you need to determine if a queen is present. One method is to insert a frame of open brood and see if they draw down queen cells. If they do there is no queen present. You have three options now, leave them continue with the queen cell and hope for the best, break down all queen cells and introduce a laying queen if you have one, or break down all queen cells and unite them. Unite with caution they could kill the queen in the other hive and be mindful of any diseases.

Laying workers are certainly the scourge of beekeeping and especially for our beginners. When you open the hive and find brood scattered around two or three frames it is a sure sign of a laying worker. These workers will be laying in

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worker cells, often several eggs in the one cell and often on the wall of the cell. The colony will usually contain many drones, often more than the workers. A colony with laying workers will sometimes have open queen cells, some may get to the sealed stage, but these will look abnormal, usually emergency cells, longer, narrower than the normal cell and the larvae may be positioned badly in the cell. This colony cannot be saved and do not unite with another as they could kill the queen in a good colony. Best option is to remove the frame and brood box, shaking out the bees and leave the roof and floorboard in position. The bees will go in there and die over a few days.

Another scenario is where the queen is present but only laying unfertilized eggs. This will be evident by the orderly manner she is laying and, she will be laying in worker cells resulting in domed capping rather than flat. If you have such a queen you need to find her and remove her, then you have the same options as above when you introduce a test frame. The drone that hatches from the worker cell will be smaller compared to those that come from standard drone cells.

Last scenario is where there is no brood and the test frame is not used to draw down a queen, there must be a queen there, but she is not laying, you need to go through the hive, find and remove her, then introduce a good queen.

To recap, if you open your hive and you see large number of drones, looks like more than the workers, multiple eggs in cells, scattered over the frame, its laying workers. A test frame with queen cells, there is no queen. Some queens are very slow to lay and if by mid-September there are no eggs you need to act at that stage.

Wasps can be a major problem this month and they probably are at their peak numbers right now. Most problems with the black and amber could be avoided if the beekeeper took some action. Reduce all entrances especially on small colonies. Only have the one entrance, holes in the boxes should be plugged. Do not drop any debris on the ground, a small piece of fresh wax, propolis or honey from the hive will be an immediate attraction to the wasp. Once they get a taste of what they like in the vicinity of the hives the wasp will return in numbers and start to work on the weaker colony. They do not give up and persist which will eventually overcome the colony. Set up traps and it will remove the big numbers from your area.

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If the weather continues dry why not look at the timber hive stands. It would be a good time to replace those that need preservative or repair. Put out a new stand and bring in all the old so that you can work on it over the winter. Feeding



Figure 2 Apply preservative to out of use stands

will be necessary, but always check. No point in having colonies too heavy. The bees do need room for the queen to lay and, they need empty cells to cluster. It's a balance, so watch it as the season progresses. If feeding, you use 2 kilos of sugar in one liter of water. Feed at 5l quantities now so they will store it and ripen quickly.

Continue with other cleaning jobs, the honey house might need a final tidy. Make sure all your buckets of honey are properly sealed.

This is the month to start thinking of study classes, why not organise a group in your area. It's a great way to get the work done. Study will make a good



Figure 3 Knapweed great for all insects

beekeeper a great beekeeper, unfortunately it doesn't make a bad beekeeper a good one. Assess how you did this year. It was a tricky year, but the weather was good, it rained when we wanted it to rain, and the sunshine came just at the right time. Crops varied from fair to very good. Various results on queen rearing but if you failed persist with it next year.

Autumn is a traditional month for planting bulbs, consider a few that will suit your bees, hyacinths, blue bells, grape hyacinths are all visited by the bees. Plant a few shrubs that flower during the colder times of the year, the Christmas box bush, some of the viburnums and the mahonia to name a few, check our web site for further information on planting ideas

Beekeeping is a complex subject especially since Varroa arrived. Attention to detail is important, a good plan is needed every year, never strive for perfection, you could overshoot and end up on the wrong side, just look at incremental improvements every year and you will get there eventually. Leaving the weather and the forage aside, the two most important fundamentals are, **the knowledge of the beekeeper**, they need the knowledge to manage the production colony and have the skill to have replacement stock, nucs and queens, and the most important parameter is **the quality of the bees**, a good Irish bee

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will outperform any Buckfast, Italian bee any year. This year our locally bred bees produced four times as much honey as those that were imported. Remember all bees will sting and beekeeping is not for everyone. Happy Beekeeping to ye all