



South Tipperary Beekeepers' Association

Fact Sheet no. 8

Spring Management of Bees

The objective of spring management is to have each colony of bees at full strength to maximize the main honey flow which usually takes place between mid-June to the end of July. The colony has to be built up in advance of the flow and not in it. A hive that has a good laying Queen, adequate bees and well fed the previous autumn will require very little management to attain this objective.

Early February all hives should be hefted especially nuclei to check for adequate stores. If a colony feels light a slab of fondant can be given over the feed hole. It may be necessary to adjust the feed hole so that it is positioned over the cluster. Occasionally beekeepers place the fondant on the topbars directly in contact with the cluster. Nuclei because of their small size can be very short of stores. Clean water supply should also be provided near the apiary. It is also good policy to change the floor board on all colonies especially nuclei unless OMF are in use. Usually the floors on nuclei can be very wet and full of debris. A clean floor gives the colony a great start. If using inserts on the OMF clean away all debris. Check roof on all colonies. Any damp/leaking roofs should be replaced.

Liquid feeding can commence after mid-March. However remember liquid feeding bees at this time of year will encourage abnormal amounts of brood rearing if all other conditions are correct which in turn could lead to early swarm preparation. This type of feeding may be necessary if the colony is in danger of starvation or if an early crop such as Oil Seed Rape is to be harvested (Ref: Oil Seed Rape fact sheet)

Egg laying and colony expansion start in earnest during April. At this stage the temperature is increasing and the amount of forage both nectar and especially pollen is more plentiful. April is usually the month when the first spring inspection is carried out. The main objective of this 3 minute examination is to determine that the queen is laying. Also check that there is enough store and that the queen has enough room for expansion. Both conditions can be found in the apiary the first is remedied by feeding and the 2nd by removing of the outside combs of honey and replacing with foundation or drawn comb. First supers will be added during April. Better to add a little early rather than wait for the colony to become overcrowded and then possibly set off swarming. If a colony has 6 frame of brood the bees will have 8-9 frames of bees and it is then time to super. It is a good idea to add two supers to give plenty of room and ventilation. It will probably slow down development a little but remember bees have until end of May / early June to reach max strength.

April is also a month when the dandelion flowers and a good flow can result in an equally good nectar intake. It is a good time to draw foundations in the brood clamber.

Examinations need only be on a fortnightly basis checking hooper's 5 points. (Fact Sheet 9) If all ok leave all alone. Bees develop better when left to their own devices. A constant check should be maintained for signs of diseases April/May is a very good time to assign one visit for disease assessment. Brood diseases AFB and EFB should be thoroughly checked for. Changing brood frame at least four can be carried out during April/May. If a full brood change is required complete the Bailey frame change (Ref: Fact Sheet No. 15)

Remember for spring development the colony needs a good queen, plenty of bees, adequate room and food. During Feb to April the number of brood in the hive is greater than the number of bees in the hive (reference chart below). This makes it a very testing time for the colony. The old winter bees, very old now in bee years have to work harder than ever, foraging on a good day and looking after the increasing brood in the hive and maintaining the brood nest temperature. This makes it a very critical time for stores/water and heat. Monitor the hive entrance for activity and note the pollen loads on the hind legs to get an indication of the forage available to them.

Population Graph

