
August Beekeeping

Tom Prendergast, Irene Power, Gerry Clancy.

August is the start of “next year” for the beekeeper, the end of one year and the start of the next. It’s difficult to even think of such a scenario but what you do now will determine how your bees will perform in the next season. You cannot influence the flora or weather but you as a beekeeper have a big influence on the quality of your colonies in 2022.

Looking back, July was a good month for us. It started with the bees being very busy, filling the frames, and then we had several days of rain. Moisture in the soil is always welcome, we then had two week of record hot temperatures. Bees got a great chance to collect a crop before the rain returned. It will be interesting to see how the month finishes out. I’m sure some beekeepers will be disappointed with the season, take a deep breath and analyse what you think went wrong, then discuss with an experienced beekeeper. For those who have several hives, no point in talking about the one with five supers, you need to examine what happened to those with one or none.

The main flow should be over now, and the bees will be ripening and sealing the crop. Do not disturb them for at least ten days. There are several tasks that need attention in the next few weeks.

Removing the crop: This does need some planning. Firstly, where are you going to store the supers when you take them off. It needs to be in a bee/rodent proof area away from any strong smells which could taint the honey. The area needs to be dry; honey will pick up moisture and eventually ferment. Cleanliness should be your number one priority.

There are several methods to remove the super. Remember supers can be quite heavy so be mindful as to how you lift them off. Don’t be tempted to lift above your capability, get help if needed. The two methods we recommend are “brush and shake” and the “clearer board”. If you are a one or two hive beekeeper there is no reason why you cannot just shake the bees off the frames and remove them.

If shaking out, smoke the bees lightly, over smoking can taint your honey or the bees may start ripping open the frames. Remember the frames can be stuck together from one super to the one above or below it. When you do separate them, they will start dripping. To avoid this, separate each super with your hive tool by lifting them about 25mm, do this on two opposite sides. This will “break” the seal that the bees have created between the different supers. If you only have one or two supers, there is no need to remove them at this stage. You can do this early morning and by evening time the bees will have all the honey mess cleared up and the super will be ready to be taken off. If you do remove the super without giving the bees a chance to clean them up, you will have honey dripping all over the place. Have two empty supers ready remove the first frame and shake the bees off, then brush off the last few remaining bees. Place this frame in the super and replace the top board to keep the bees out, proceed until all the frames are removed. Do not

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squeeze the last frame back in as you may damage the comb thereby having honey dripping, this is time consuming, which allows the bees time to get back into your supers. Remove the empty super. Keep going with some speed until all the supers are off.

If you are using a clearer board, the three most popular are the use of a porter bee escape, the rhombus escape, or the Canadian board. All are popular with beekeepers and all have their advantages and disadvantages. The Rhombus board is very easy to build and works very well. Go to the hive again, smoke lightly, remove all the supers, and place your board over the brood box. Replace all the supers over it, make sure there are no holes for the bees to gain entry to the supers, if so block up or the bees will rob your honey. Pay particular attention to the roof, it's a good idea to have a flat board to fit over the top super or a piece of plastic. If you do it early in the morning the bees can be gone out of the super by evening time, but in any case by the following morning. When removing the supers the following morning, before the bees start to fly, block the entrances to prevent the bees coming out, proceed with the removal in a hasty but quiet manner. If you find that the bees are still in the supers, it could be because there is brood in the super frames. Only option here is to go through each super and put all the frames with brood into one super and leave it back on the hive. If there are eggs present, well now you have a bigger problem, it means that the queen may also be above the excluder, remove same and put the super with brood on top of the brood box, then shake all the bees from the broodless frame, that way ensuring that the queen will go down. The joys of beekeeping.

Queenright: When all the supers are removed it is necessary to check if the colony has a viable queen, a queen that is laying and have sealed brood with a good pattern. If this is present all is well. Several hives will have no brood and the beekeeper need to determine if there is a queen present, seeing her is reassuring, but if not laying take note as you start feeding all your colonies rechecking the broodless hives one-week later. Watch to see if the frames are organised in an orderly manner. Honey around the edges, pollen present, but an area in the centre of the comb with cells cleaned out and a shiny surface on the bottom. This is a good indication that the colony is getting ready for the queen to lay. If there is still no brood after the week, insert a test frame of young larvae and again leave for 7 days to see if they draw down queen cells, if so, the colony is queen less and you can either leave them draw down the cell or break them down and introduce a laying queen.

Other colonies may have a good pattern with all raised cappings, this is a drone laying queen, which needs to be found and killed. You have the option of introducing a good queen then.

The worst scenario is where you find scattered raised cells and open cells with a multitude of eggs, these are the laying workers and at this stage the colony is doomed, the only option is to kill all the bees, **there is no way to save them.**

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Feeding: After removing the crop some brood chambers will have no stores, especially large colonies where the queen was laying. A colony in this condition can starve very quickly. Make sure you feed, preferably that evening or the next day after removing the crop. Heft each hive without the supers and act accordingly. Make up your autumn feed at a strength of 2kg sugar added into 1 litre of water. Use a 4.5 litre rapid feeder or go for the large type such as Ashford or Miller.

Varroa: Varroa treatment is a must if you want to take care of your bees. Two options are recommended Apiguard or Apivar. The Apiguard needs high temperature and bees do stop foraging while being treated so make sure the colony is well fed beforehand. If you are using Apiguard you need to start latest mid-August otherwise it will be too late in the season, and it doesn't work due to dropping temperatures. If treating nucs use ½ doses. Apivar is a two-strip treatment for six weeks, make sure you read and follow all instructions with whichever treatment you use. Before you start any treatment, it is good practice to put in the inserts to get the varroa levels before treatment and repeat during and after treatment.

Autumn can be a good time to replace some of the old combs in the brood chamber, especially if you didn't replace any during the season. Some large hives will draw out combs quickly if fed. If you have a brood chamber that needs a full change out, and there is little brood in it, why not remove all the combs bar one and replace with foundation. You could add two dummy boards and reduce the number of frames to seven (or 1 large dummy board and move all the frames to the front) which is adequate for overwintering, next spring remove the dummy boards and fill up the space when the bees need it. Another option is to place another brood box over the original and let them expand up, and then remove the old one.

Uniting Bees: Some beekeepers talk about uniting colonies, if you are considering this, try to establish why this is necessary, weak colonies die in nature and that guarantees survival of the fittest. Always check for disease, and if in any way suspicious, do not proceed. Two weak hives will not necessarily make a strong one. A weak hive united with a strong hive could destroy your good hive. Uniting doesn't happen in the wild.

Check that all your hives are weather/vermin proof. Check the fencing around the apiary. Clip back overhanging bushes and long grass, allow good air circulation around the hive, check stands, are they ok for the winter? Now is the time to replace any suspect equipment and not in the middle of winter when the bees are in a tight cluster.

Extracting the Crop: If you are not into comb honey you need to extract the crop. If you are a full member of our association, you can get a loan of an extractor, but booking is essential. Book it in time, but do not keep it as others will be waiting. If a beginner, you are probably extracting in the kitchen, remember honey drips and is messy and sticky. Organise it so that the place can be kept tidy. Lay down newspapers on the floor area. Proceed with speed, if you own 1-2 hives a few hours should get the job done. Have all your buckets ready and spotlessly clean. Fill each bucket and only leave enough space to put on the lid, avoiding air gaps. Leave the buckets to stand overnight and the

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wax will rise to the top. Remove excess wax from the top of the bucket before you close, leaving some wax adds to the flavour of your honey. Order the jars if needed.

Flora: The bee will still be working on some plants this month. Himalayan Balsam will be in flower (please note this is a very invasive weed and beekeepers should not aid in the spread of it). There will always be a few stragglers from the briar, the rose bay willowherb, and sweet meadow. Of course, from mid-August the heather on the mountains will start to bloom. Getting a crop from here depends on the strength of the colony and of course the flow. If moving bees to the heather only move those that have a new queen and a good population. Best option would be to give drawn comb, any partly filled cut comb could be extracted and given to them. Colonies can starve on the mountain, it can be a bleak barren place if the weather is not suitable, fed if needed. Order some flower bulbs for the Spring, bees love the Hyacinths, both the grape and the large flowering type.

Summary: It's a special month in the beekeeping calendar, removing and extracting the crop, some for friends, some for sale. Feeding and treating is a must, change a few combs if the opportunity arises. Tidy and secure the apiary. Plant some bee friendly flora. Last point close down the entrances on the colonies if wasps are giving problems especially on the nucs. Happy beekeeping to ye all.