



Buzzword

April Comment

As I said in last month's Comment, what you do and when, will be determined by your particular conditions. April is the normal month, in this part of Britain, for doing the first inspection of your hives. However don't be in too much of a hurry to get started. Wait for warmer weather, it is too cold at present, you need a nice warm sunny day, before looking through your hives.

The first task is to remove the mouse guard then take the roof off and lay it upside down to the side of the hive stand. Lift the hive gently off the floor and place it across the upturned roof. Replace the floor with a clean one and gently replace the hive on the new floor. Give the "old" floor a good clean – blow torch if need be, so that it is ready for using on the next hive. Some advocate smoking the entrance before starting, but at this time of the year, I use as little smoke as possible. If you have aggressive bees, you may well need to use the smoker to subdue them. Having replaced the floor, the next job is to look through the hive. Puff some smoke under the crown board as you gently prise it up with the hive tool. Lift out the end frame, check the queen is not on it, gently shake the bees off it back into the hive and lay it to the side. Work your way steadily across the hive checking each frame in turn. Having removed the first frame, there is room to lift out each frame – the second frame is replaced in the space occupied by the first and so on across the box. This leaves a space at the far end where you can put back the first frame removed. Later in the season the first frame may have brood in it, so should be replaced where it was at the beginning. As you work your way across the hive, look for a laying queen, you need to see eggs in worker cells, larvae and sealed worker brood. You don't require to see the queen although it is reassuring to see her there and if you do then you have the opportunity to mark her if she is unmarked and you feel confident enough to do so. Work quickly but carefully and look for any signs of disease or bees damaged by varroa. Check that there is enough food in the hive to last until your next inspection. If there is very little, then you should feed with 1:1 sugar/water syrup in a contact feeder over the open feedhole in the evening. The amount given will depend on the size of the colony. If there are any old or damaged combs, now is a good time to replace them with new ones or if they have stores or brood in them, start working them towards the outside of the box, so that they can eventually be replaced. If you are in an area, which is more advanced, and you find that the bees and brood are well across the hive, then you may need to add a queen excluder and a super. It is always better to super earlier than later.

When I say work quickly, I mean that your hands should move slowly across the frames – bees don't like sudden movements – but check each frame quickly and return it to the hive so as to avoid chilling the brood and the less time the hive is open, the less heat is lost within the brood nest. This can be helped if you use two hive cloths to cover the frames as you work your way across the hive. Finally carefully replace the crown board so as to avoid crushing bees and put the roof back on top. Mark up in your notebook what you saw and perhaps what needs to be done at the next inspection.

Dance of Honeybees..? Key to Survival.



Planting more bee-friendly crops could reverse decline in bee population

The Waggle Dance of honeybees is one of nature's great wonders: a sophisticated form of communication that conveys distances and directions from the hive to sources of nectar. Now a British scientist is hoping to read the dance in order to reverse the honeybee's critical decline.

Francis Ratnieks, the UK's only professor of apiculture is undertaking pioneering research using observation hives and video cameras to determine the plants and flowers

that honeybees visit.

The number of beehives in the UK has declined by nearly 70% in the past century, from about a million to 280,000. The University of Sussex academic believes that one major cause is changes in land use, which have reduced the numbers of flowers. "The use of herbicides and intensive forms of agriculture means that fields of wheat and barley now have few weeds. Fields of grass now have few wild flowers, clover is less used

and much of the heather moors have been ploughed up.

Karl Ritter von Frisch won a Nobel prize in 1973 for decoding the dance and now Ratnieks is going to monitor groups of hives to see which habitat bees prefer, and thereby encourage the public and landowners to plant bee-friendly crops. See waggle dance:guardian.co.uk/environment.

Alison Benjamin the Observer 5.4.09

Butterflies threatened by wet weather



A familiar story...see above.

Another species threatened with serious decline. Not only loss of habitat such as flower-rich grassland and increasingly intensive farming methods, as well as lack of management of woodland sites, butterflies are having to contend with their worst year for more than a quarter of a

century as two wet summers in a row hit species already struggling with changes to the countryside.

Butterfly Conservation and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology said once regular garden visitors including the orange-tip and the small tortoiseshell were among those suffering their worst

year. Some species tolerate the wet weather, and there has been an increase in a number of brown species such as the ringlet and large heath butterfly.

Dr. Tom Bereton, head of monitoring at Butterfly Conservation said more management of woodland, and paying farmers to provide land beneficial to butterflies was needed.



Weather still very mixed as I write this, so take note of Ian's advice in his April comment. We all want to have a look at our bees around this time, but patience is a virtue and will surely be rewarded.

Thanks to Ian for his Comment, also to Tony for the

article on the governments admission that dying bees had not been a priority for them, but they have now wakened up to how potentially serious the problem will be for all of us if it is not resolved.

Beginners who have borrowed books and have not

been able to return them yet, may bring them to Association Apiary. The first meeting is on 25th. April. Full details on the ADBK website.

Thanks again to those who contributed to this months Buzzy. Any comments will be gratefully received. Suzanne.

Dying Bees “were not a priority”

A top civil servant has admitted research into bee disease has not been a “top priority” despite mounting concern about declining populations.

But Dame Helen Ghosh, of the environment food and rural affairs department, said more money was now being ploughed into solving the crisis. The registered bee population in the UK has shrunk by between 10% and 15% but the real number may be much higher. There are fears a Europe-wide shortage of bees could affect crop pollination.

But Dame Helen who was giving evidence to the Commons Public Accounts Committee, played down fears food production could be affected, arguing bees were “one of many” crop pollinators. She said the government had woken up to beekeepers’ concerns and had recently announced a Healthy Bees Plan - to cover research, husbandry and disease control - and another £500,000 a year from Defra for the next five years, supplemented by more money from partners.

BEE BASE

She said £1.1m would be spent over the next few years to get more people registered on the voluntary Bee Base.

Public Accounts Committee chairman Edward Leigh said £200,000 spent on bee health research seemed very little. He said he was surprised there were only 37 part-time inspectors at Defra’s bee unit and had only been 32 inspections per 100 registered beekeepers in 2008. Defra bee expert Stephen Hunter said their hours were being extended and more inspectors employed to seek out more beekeepers who were not registered.

Dame Helen said when economic times were tight it has not been a government priority.

AMATEUR BEEKEEPERS. There is no compulsory registration, and the number of 37,000 beekeepers in England and Wales is an estimate.

As evidence of a problem has become clearer, ministers had decided to put a significant extra boost into research. She denied being laid back in dealing with the problem saying the investment being put in showed the government was being “far from complacent”.

Labour MP Don Touhig said 39 commercial crops relied on insect pollination and bees were estimated to be worth £200m a year to the UK economy. Asked if their decline threatened the food chain, Dame Helen said they played an important role, most significantly in pollinating apples, runner beans and dwarf beans, but added: “they are one of many pollinators”. The MPs also asked why a National Audit Report had found only three reported cases of bee disease in Scotland - compared with 463 in Wales and 8,071 in England. Bee health is a devolved issue, handled separately in Scotland said Mr. Hunter. There was no evidence Scottish inspectors were missing vast numbers of bee disease.

“In a sense I am admitting we had not given this the high priority we should have done”

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Who killed the Honeybee?
BBC Four Thursday, 23rd
April 9pm

A Chinese Beekeeper extracting Honey.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What is Queen Substance?

A: A complex pheromone produced by the Queen. It is transmitted throughout the colony through the exchange of food between workers to alert other workers of the queen's presence. Its presence stops worker bees rearing more queens and/or inhibits them from laying eggs.

Q: What is Foundation?

A: Beeswax sheets impressed with the shape of cell bases and the bases of the cell walls. It can be obtained in sizes suitable for worker and drone cells. It can be strengthened with wires or used without.

Q: What is brood pattern?

A: The brood pattern consists of concentric rings, semi-rings or arcs of larvae, eggs or sealed brood. The more obvious it is, the higher the percentage of eggs the queen is laying. The primary thing that any beekeeper must see or be able to see is eggs. Eggs confirm that the queen is present and laying. There is no need to see her until the colony is trying to swarm.

Q: What is a contact feeder?

A: One which gives the bees direct contact with the contents. It does not cover the whole of the hive surface area and must be surrounded by an **eke** or empty super so that the roof can be replaced tightly.

Q: What is an eke?

A: Four pieces of wood nailed together into a square the same size as the hive. Used to extend the hive when required