

Seasonal management of Honeybees As applied to small, stationary apiaries

by Athol Craig

The following is based on experience over many years. This experience teaches us that seasons vary, but there is a general trend over the years.

Beekeeping is based on respect for the bees. So they must be approached with a mood of observation and nurture rather than one of expectation and exploitation. Success comes from knowledge and understanding of the life of bees and their needs.

As bees are responsive to environmental influences, it is important to gain knowledge of the local seasons, weather and flora.

August

By mid-August the Queen is expanding her egg-laying to boost the population after winter. This is the time to manipulate all the frames in the box. The last 2 weeks in August inspect every frame in the hive.

- 1 Check the general health of the brood (colour and regularity). Look for any disease in the brood.
- 2 Check that the Queen is performing/laying (look for eggs and larvae).
- 3 Remove honey frames and old frames from brood box leaving only two honey/pollen frames on the outsides, allowing 8 frames for the Queen to lay.
- 4 Check / fill / renew beetle traps.
- 5 Extract surplus winter honey.
- 6 Reject / replace any old dark honey frames.
- 7 Do not open hives on cold windy days. The hive will take up to 4 days to return the temperature inside to normal.
- 8 The above list may be used throughout the year when you suspect problems, otherwise the general rule is always to disturb the brood as little as possible.

FLOWERING: Blue Gums, Wattles, Hairy Pea, Spotted Gum, Clover, Citrus, Macadamia, Wild Mustard, Ground Flora

September

It's a busy time in the apiary - Spring!

- 1 Inspect hives not already manipulated since winter.
- 2 Add new frames and supers to strong hives.
- 3 Extract surplus honey. Start collecting your stand-out honey samples for show.
- 4 Be prepared for swarming.
- 5 Plan for splitting hives.
- 6 When extracting consider the 1/3 rule :
1/3 for brood, 1/3 for honey / 1/3 empty.

October

It's still Spring, continue as for September, plus:

- 7 Check for Queen cells.
- 8 Add foundation to discourage swarming.
- 9 The prime month for dividing strong hives and forming nucs.
- 10 Increase vigilance for Small Hive Beetle.

FLOWERING SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER :

Blue Gums, Hairy Pea, Ironbark, Clover, Grey Gum, Citrus, Grevilleas, Macadamia (Sept), Callistemon, Scribbly Gum, Banksia, Wild May, Wild Mustard, Ground Flora

November

Continue Spring management as for Sept / October.

FLOWERING: Ironbarks, Banksia, Grey Gums, Wild May, Messmate, Black Paperbarks, Wild Apple, Grevilleas, Callistemon, Rusty Gum, Ground Flora

December

Honey flows may ease off and rainfall may increase.

- 1 Leave stores in the hives to tide the bees over prolonged rain events.
- 2 Continue Spring management with emphasis on SHB (Small Hive Beetle) management.

- 3 Consider this as the last month to form nucleus hives.
- 4 Only strong hives may be split.
Note : In our area, new hives from now on usually will not build into string hives in time to survive winter.

FLOWERING: Wild Apple, Messmates, Cadaghi, Black Paperbarks, Black Tea Trees, Brush Box, Rusty Gum, Ground Flora

January February

A quiet time. Ensure there is ample food in the hives to tide the bees over prolonged wet weather.

FLOWERING: Bloodwoods, Tea Trees, Stringybarks, Soapwood, Ground Flora

March April May

More quiet times, winter approaching.

- 1 Check hives for disease.
- 2 The bees will fill honey frames to insulate the brood. Leave them.
- 3 Ensure the bees are working all the frames. Remove or add supers as necessary.
- 4 Ensure hives are in a warm sunny position. If not, move them.

FLOWERING: Banksia, Flooded Gum, Paper-barked Tea Tree, Stringybarks, Bloodwoods

June July

- 1 Inspect hives sparingly - leave brood boxes alone unless problems are suspected.
- 2 Inland areas have few flowers, so leave honey in hive.
- 3 Do not open the hive in cold or windy weather.
- 4 Be alert to possible early honey flows, e.g. Blue Gum.

FLOWERING: Banksia, Hairy Pea, Tea Trees, Wattles, Blue Gums (July), Spotted Gum, Clover (?)



Some General Principles

- 1 *Ensure that space in the hive is available -
1/3 for brood - 1/3/ stored honey - 1/3 empty honey frames*
- 2 *Make sure bees are packed, i.e. working all the frames of the hive. Add or remove space to suit conditions.*
- 3 *Keep notes and build up knowledge of your locality - its flora and honey flows. Keep a history of your hives.*
- 4 *Re-Queen hives that show undesirable characteristics
(a) aggressiveness (b) low production (c) poor wintering (d) swarms often (e) failing queen (too many drones)*
- 5 *Keep your hives in good condition. Have equipment in reserve.*
- 6 *Keep yourself informed - attend meetings, field days and read newsletters and magazines, search the internet, there are some fabulous sites to explore.*
- 7 *Use your product in the kitchen as a sweetener, in cooking and drinks.*
- 8 *Honey is an insulator. In winter have a frame of honey either side of the brood. In summer, if the hive is full of honey, the bees will not be hot and hang out of the entrance.*
- 9 *Hive beetle management must continue year-round. Inspect and replenish traps at recommended intervals :
oil traps every 3-4 weeks in summer, every 4-6 weeks in winter. Other methods follow recommendations.*

