

APRIL

April generally marks the beginning of the active season with warmer days and the appearance of early blossom. After a winter of unceasing rain and endlessly unsettled weather we finally have some forage for our bees: the early snowdrops, hazel and alder have given way to wild plum and blackthorn, spring flowers and shrubs and my bees are taking full advantage.

Oil Seed rape may be available locally providing early forage depending if the local farmer has planted it this year.

Spring can be a dangerous time for our bees: the queens increase their laying rate as the days lengthen and, as stores in the hive dwindle, our bees need to go out foraging at every opportunity. No forage, no food and if poor weather prevents foraging there is the risk that our winter bees will perish before the colony has new foragers to take on the task. Bees can starve in an astonishingly short time – we beekeepers need to maintain our vigilance where stores are concerned and feed where necessary with syrup in a contact feeder once bees are flying freely.

The arrival of spring means it's time for regular inspections and the completion of any winter tasks we didn't quite get round to because soon we will have to turn our full attention to swarm prevention and control. Don't panic, there's plenty of help and information out there – just ask. If you need extra equipment BeeTradex, the county auctions and the BBKA Spring Convention may all be good sources of second hand or new equipment.

April Summary

Continue to check stores by hefting, checking floor inserts or a quick look in.

Carry out your first detailed inspection if you have not already done so.

Be clear what you are looking for:

- Queen present & laying?
- Brood at all stages?
- Good brood pattern with biscuit-coloured cappings?
- Bees looking normal & healthy?
- Acting normally?
- Any sign of disease or varroa mites (be sure to check floor inserts)?
- Are there enough stores to last the bees to your next inspection?
- Has the colony got enough room?

Check the queen's mark and renew if indistinct.

Add a queen excluder and super when the brood box is full of bees, not stores.

Replace any dirty, mouldy, or damaged comb with frames of sterilised comb or new foundation or move these frames to the outside of the brood nest to replace later.

Read up on your chosen method of swarm control and assemble equipment.

Assemble the equipment you will need for swarm collection and read up on how to do it.

Set up Asian hornet traps and monitor closely: put a piece of foam or kitchen roll into the liquid reservoir to prevent non-target insects from drowning.

Keep on reading and asking questions but most of all, watch your bees and learn.