

AUGUST

August is a quieter month for the bees as in many areas the summer flowers are coming to an end and the nectar flow is finishing – unless you have Himalayan balsam nearby or are taking your bees to the heather. There is still forage about: sunshine will encourage willowherb, blackberry, red clover, borage, golden rod and garden flowers and the bees will work them enthusiastically while they last.

Here in the north of the county the lime was a disappointment, as the peak of flowering coincided with a cold, wet and windy spell of weather that prevented a good nectar flow and kept the bees close to home. There is ivy still to come to provide a late season boost to stores but we should be mindful of our bees' needs as we take our final honey harvest: that golden bounty has not been gathered for our benefit alone.

As the forage decreases, so will the laying rate of the queen and the brood area will decrease and fill up with winter stores. Drones are no longer needed and the workers throw them unceremoniously out of the entrance to starve: the focus now is on the winter bees. These bees are different for they stay within the hive all winter and do not pass beyond the nurse bee stage, meaning that their hypopharyngeal glands remain full of brood food ready for the spring rush of brood. The survival of the hive during that critical time in early spring is entirely dependent on these winter bees: for them to survive they must be well fed, healthy and free from varroa mites and the viruses they bring.

This means that, for the beekeeper, there's plenty to do in August. This is the month to take off your last honey crop, treat for varroa and start autumn feeding. It's a time to take steps to prevent robbing by other colonies and wasps – reducing entrances, setting up wasp traps. It's also a time for preparing equipment and comb for storage, for cleaning and repairing everything that needs it and for making a list of what you need to buy in the late season sales.

August Summary

Reduce hive entrances to help the bees defend against wasps and robbing by other colonies; if you haven't already done so, set up wasp traps: a mix of beer and jam works well, plum for preference.

Check hives carefully for gaps and small holes that could allow wasps or robbing bees to enter and plunder their stores: seal them up tightly. I use beeswax and propolis scrapings or small pieces of foam as a temporary fix but gaffer tape and Blu Tack are also useful. Don't forget to check floors and roofs, too.

Finish taking off the honey harvest, clean extractor & equipment and put away.

Check the bees have sufficient stores, clean & prepare feeders, buy in fondant/sugar/syrup.

Carry out a thorough disease inspection, ask for help if worried.

Decide on your varroa treatment plan, buy in what you need – and use it properly!

Keep a treatment record.

Unite small colonies.

Start reducing the number of supers on each hive: consolidate or put over the crownboard for the bees to move stores down.

Maintain vigilance for Asian hornet activity: although the queens are confined to the nest at this time of the season, workers will be out looking for food and hawking around your hives. Baits should be protein (cat food/tuna) and changed regularly.

Put empty supers and drawn comb into storage protected from wax moth.

Clean and repair equipment before storing and make a list of needs & wants.

Look back and take stock: what could you have done differently? better?