

WALES BEE INSPECTORATE SUMMER 2011 UPDATE

New inspectors

The Welsh Inspectorate welcomes new team members Dinah Sweet and Adrian Morris who will be covering Cardiff and the Valleys, and Monmouthshire respectively. This has altered the areas covered by Seasonal Bee Inspectors in South Wales while North Wales remains largely unchanged. Contact details and revised areas are set out on an accompanying sheet.

Seasonal observations

We're almost at the end of July and, following brief spells of summer, we're going past the peak of honey flow. It may continue, of course, for those of you lucky enough to have bees with access to large areas of balsam.

Swarming has been a prominent feature of the season having started as early as April. Fortunately, apart from a few late building colonies or particularly swarmy bees, the swarming urge is now dropping off.

Robbing

This year's abnormal weather pattern may be responsible for wasps putting in an unusually early appearance. For at least the past 3 weeks, they have begun to be a nuisance around hives and other sources of sweetness. They are not usually a problem until late July when wasp larval brood rearing in their nests declines. Larvae reward the workers who feed them with a sweet secretion. It seems that, this year, this source of sweetness is drying up prematurely. There did also seem to be an above average number of queen wasps coming out of hibernation in spring.

Honeybees themselves are not averse to robbing weaker colonies. This fits in with Darwinian rules of survival of the fittest. You may notice behaviour changes like bees hovering and zig-zagging in front of entrances as well as skirmishes and dead bees there. There may also be large, yellow flakes of fresh wax on the floor and entrance after where the robbers have ripped the cappings from the honey.

Robbing can quickly wipe out vulnerable colonies. It can also be a major cause of pests and diseases spreading within and between apiaries. The best way to avoid it is to prevent it in the first place as, once started, it is quite difficult to stop.

A few words about robbing and some preventative measures you can take:

1. Practice good apiary hygiene by avoiding spillage of honey during manipulations and removing any brace comb and debris produced from the site. In addition, try to avoid having supers and brood nests open and vulnerable for too long.
2. When feeding, it helps to put syrup on at dusk when the majority of bees are not flying, and avoid spillage.
3. Try to reduce drifting by not having hives arranged in straight rows or exposed to strong cross winds.
4. Keep hive entrances down to a size that the colony is able to defend. Even the strongest hive needs an entrance no bigger than 20 square centimetres, and weaker ones should be much smaller. In extreme cases, a mouse guard with all holes but one blocked up with tape or the entrance reduced with foam and a short length of garden hose poking out for the home bees to walk down, will put robbers off.
5. If you have another site available, consider a temporary move of either the 'victim hive' or, if you are able to positively identify it, the 'robber stock'.
6. Put out wasp traps around the apiary. A bait of water, jam and perhaps a few dregs of wine or beer in a container with a small entrance can trap and drown large numbers.

Varroa

The main varroa treatment period will be on us shortly. It is important to use thymol based treatments whilst the weather is still warm. By taking your honey off in the first half of August, you can then apply varroa treatments and allow enough time for autumn feeding before the end of September.

If you invest time and care in the health and strength of your future winter bees, you should be in a good position to minimise losses over the winter. I enclose our revamped Integrated Pest Management (Wales) factsheet on the subject. Further factsheets can be found on [Beebase](#).

With thanks to John Beavan and David Coles for contributions to the factsheet and newsletter respectively.

Frank Gellatly