Beekeeping Calendar for British Columbia

Apiculture Bulletin #103 **Updated: 08/15**

January

- Make or order hive parts, equipment and supplies required for the season. Order bees or queens. Select suppliers from websites, journals or contact the Apiculture office.
- Keep hive entrances clear of dead bees.
- In snow-free areas, gently tip the colony forward to gauge its weight. If light, supplemental sugar syrup may be applied. Limit disruption of colony as much as possible. If using a frame feeder, carefully crack the inner cover and slide sideways, pour the room-temperature syrup. Make sure to add a floating device to prevent bees of drowning. Don't open hives and disrupt the winter cluster.

February

- In southern areas, pollen patties are sometimes applied to stimulate brood rearing. This practice is not essential. When used, make sure that ingredients are all digestible. Non-digestible materials may cause dysentery and stimulate Nosema disease.
- Only when weather is warm at the end of the month, the first inspection of the top box may be done. Look for bee brood, pollen and food reserves. Don't bother searching for the queen when eggs are visible. A strip (Apivar or Apistan) and a sticky board for 24 hours may beinstalled to determine mite levels.

March

- New beekeepers should apply for registration of apiary location(s). Registration forms are available on the Ministry of Agriculture website.
- In warmer parts of the province, bees will be flying intermittently, bringing in pollen.
- When weather permits, take hives apart and clean floor boards. If there are no bees in the bottom brood chamber, remove, sort combs, clean, repair and paint where necessary.
- Check for eggs and brood to confirm a laying queen. Install entrance reducer. Stimulative feeding of syrup may begin or continue. Ensure sufficient pollen stores or provide pollen patties.
- Feed warm, thick syrup. Prepare sugar syrup by adding 3 parts sugar to two parts hot water (some prefer 2:1). If broods disease is detected and antibiotics are required (refer to Bulletin #204-Antibiotics for Control of Bee Brood Diseases)
- When weather permits and bees have resumed flight, test for Varroa mites (refer to Bulletin #222-Varroa Mite Detection Methods).
- If tracheal mites are suspected, apply formic acid treatments (Bulletin #219-Tracheal Mites in Honeybee Colonies).

April

- Packaged bees arrive. After hiving, reduce entrances to about 8 cm.
- If the bee package is placed on foundation only, feed a minimum of 1 gallon of sugar syrup every week and pollen patties every two weeks.
- Brood chambers of wintered colonies should be reversed.
- Check all hives, whether wintered or packages, for queens and stores every 10-14 days. Apply antibiotic only when brood disease has been confirmed.
- Feed syrup as required and replace queens if necessary.
- Wintered hives in southern areas may need an additional super.
- Check for Varroa mites at least once-month throughout the beekeeping season.

May

- Continue feeding syrup as necessary and examine colonies for disease regularly. Stop feeding syrup when bees bring in nectar.
- Prevent or control swarming by recommended manipulations as outlined in Bulletin #404-Swarming. If a swarm emerges, and no additional colony is required, return the swarm to the hive from which it came. Kill the old queen and install a queen cage with a purchased queen (*Note: Don't release the new queen for 3-5 days. Then, remove plug and allow queen to self release from cage).* Alternatively, kill the old queen and allow colony to raise own queen. Remove all queen cells except one after 11-12 days. New queen will emerge on day 13.
- Check hives for queen swarm cells, disease, stores and space requirements.
- Replace frames with 10% drone cells or more, with worker comb or with full sheets of foundation.
- For colonies started from packages, add a second brood chamber as soon as bees have begun to occupy the outside frames of the first brood chamber.
- Use drawn combs when available or a super of foundation with one or two drawn combs in the middle. These combs may be removed from the bottom brood chamber and replaced with foundation.
- Add supers of combs or foundation as required to provide room for expanding bee population and for the storage of surplus honey.
- If a queen excluder is used, place it over the second brood chamber. Do not use a queen excluder if foundation is used in the third box.
- Select a few colonies at random in the apiary and test for Varroa. When mite levels are high (approx. 50+ on sticky board after 24 hours), remove honey supers and apply recommended numbers of Apistan or Apivar strips. After a few days, remove strips and replace honey supers.

June

- Continue regular hive checks for queen performance, swarm cells, stores, disease, and sufficient space.
- Reverse brood chambers when bottom chamber is underutilized. Do not use antibiotics when honey supers are on.

July

- Nectar flows are at their maximum in most areas. Add supers as necessary.
- In some areas, beekeepers begin extracting in July. Supers should be removed and honey extracted as soon as combs are two-thirds capped.
- In areas of high production and where the flow extends to mid-August, extracted combs should be returned to the hives.
- Test for Varroa in randomly selected colonies. Be aware of colonies with unusual population expansion may be receiving large numbers of Varroa infested bees from collapsing colonies nearby

August

- All supers containing honey in excess of what is required for wintering should be taken off and extracted in the second half of the month.
- When removing honey supers, and when the honey flow is over or temporarily ceased, remove supers in early morning or near sunset to prevent robbing.
- From the middle to the end of the month, install entrance reducers to prevent robbing by bees and wasps.
- Colonies may be requeened with young laying queens following the removal of honey. Feed sugar syrup when requeening.
- Do not spill syrup as this may initiate robbing. If weather remains warm, substitute solid entrance reducers with fine wire-mesh barriers (except for the 2-inch opening).
- After honey supers have been removed, <u>always</u> test for Varroa. Apply control products as needed. For application methods refer to Bulletin **#221**.

September

- Finish extracting. Check all hives for wintering needs.
- Select hives suitable for wintering. Do not attempt to winter weak colonies, queenless colonies, colonies with a poor queen, or one that has little or no pollen.
- A hive requires 50-80 pounds of honey (depending on area) and pollen stores equal to two combs filled on both sides with pollen. When honey stores are insufficient, supplement with sugar syrup.
- Feeding should begin early enough to finish by early October in the north, and by late October in the south. Feeding too late prevents bees from inverting the sugars, evaporating the moisture, and properly storing and capping the material.
- Testing for Varroa is optional.
- Test for Nosema by submitting a sample of adult bees or fecal scrapings. If confirmed, add fumagillin to syrup according to recommendations in Bulletin #204.

October

- Finish feeding. In colder areas, wrap hives for winter near the end of the month.
- Entrance openings are adjusted for winter according to regional requirements.
- Complete cleanup of apiary.
- Test for Varroa. This is the last opportunity to determine Varroa mite levels. In case treatment is needed, don't apply formic acid because of low temperatures. Apply strip formulations for 6 week treatment period (as per label instructions) or apply Oxalic acid treatment in late November.

November

- Equipment should be sorted and stored or set aside for cleaning and maintenance.

December

- Continue sorting and maintaining equipment. Order new equipment and supplies for the new year. Assemble new hive equipment

**Mite controls: Mite control treatments suggested in this may not be the only effective methods available. Efficacy is determined by many factors including management and climate. In areas with prolonged winter conditions, the frequency, timing and duration of mite control treatments may be different from those applied in areas with mild winters.*

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