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## Barry's Bees

### Preserving Bees for Our Future

#### APRIL NEWS LETTER

##### Topics for this News Letter

Summer Inspection, Swarm control and  
Splits, Varroa and Disease Inspection  
Jobs to complete in April

As the start of summer looms ever closer and the days have noticeably warmed up, the beekeepers' workload on the colony will increase. What seemed like a small 5 or 6 framed colony at the beginning of the year has now suddenly exploded into a healthy 8 to 10 framed brood nest and the bees are getting restless to move.

The bees' natural survival instinct tells them to swarm and reproduce and one of the most common causes of this is the lack of space within the colony to expand.

Early anticipation of your colony's desire to swarm and your intervention to prevent this may well be the difference between the colony being capable of producing a good honey harvest and one that is constantly reduced in size due to its desire to swarm.

Anticipate having sufficient spare frames to provide the colonies with space when needed and hives or nucleus available to collect swarms.

Swarming can start as early as the third week of April and there have been recorded incidences of swarms happening before then. So be prepared!! It will be flat out now through to the end of the season.



**Above** – First real inspection into the colony. Good stores and brood at all stages is what we are looking for.



**Left** – The early plum fruit blossoms will be breaking. Apple blossom will follow soon.

Catkins and crocus will be coming to an end, but others will be stepping up to fill the gap.

**Right** – Sun covered cherry blossom providing good pollen flows.



**Summer Inspection:**-Chose a reasonably warm day to open the hives fully for the inspection. Lightly smoke the colony and take off any propolis and burr comb seated on the tops of the frames. This will save time when the colony gets much stronger in the coming weeks. Start from one of the outside frames and methodically inspect the colony working across the brood box.

**What to look for:**- Look for any signs of early problems within the colony. Small patches of brood, mite infestation, hive beetle, colony strength, any stores left, what, if any, pollen is coming in, eggs, larva, brood and the health of them all. When capped, does the brood display any problems. (dimple holes in the top of the cell caps) sunken cells; harden uncapped brood, or signs of wax moth? If these are found identify, treat or notify if required. Ensure the colony has sufficient room to expand, consider swapping out “on rotation” old frames and placing on a honey super if they need one.

**Remember** Record all the information you observe on your record card including treatment and supplementary feeds if given. Close up the colony and leave until your next routine inspection. Don't spend ages searching for the queen; if there are eggs or brood present then so is the queen.



**Above Left** – Healthy bees covering sealed brood

**Above Right** – Chance encounter of the overwintered unmarked queen from last year, healthy bees and a new frame of eggs, larva and stores.

**Swarm Control:**- One of the main causes of swarming is the lack of space within the colony. Carefully monitor what available space the queen has to lay in and what space the bees will require as the new brood hatches. With nectar flows starting, especially OSR (Oil Seed Rape), the bees will need extra storage space and can quickly fill brood cells with honey forcing the queen to slow in egg laying and production. This slowing is interpreted as a failing of the queen right when the bees need extra brood to expand. Swarm cells are prepared and the queen chaperoned into laying in them. The bee keeper has inadvertently triggered the swarming pattern within their own colony.

To avoid this I always rotate old frames for new and allow the bees an extra super on top. Bees will naturally store nectar around or on top of brood so will fill the honey super or supers quite quickly. Never be frightened of putting another super on if needed. If you find capped queen cells, opt for colony splits. Select the best 2 or 3 cells preferably on separate frames and destroy every other cell. Establish these frames in Nuc boxes, adding extra bees from other colonies to prevent or reduce swarming in those. Give foundation to replace the frames removed from the existing hive and feed. In the Nucs, use a dummy board to close down the colony to just 2 frames, ensure they have stores and if not feed them, reduce the entrance size and walk away. I try to select a queen cell on capped brood as this will supplement the workforce when hatched. Inspect in 21 days for a new queen and signs of laying etc.

**Benefits:**- Controlling swarming is an integral part of bee keeping, it allows the beekeeper to produce replacement queens, start new colonies or replace those colonies lost during winter and expand the number of hives if required. And all this at no cost. When, and if required, the original colony can be reunited with frames and bees when ready.

**Drawbacks:**- Can disrupt an early honey flow if chasing a single crop like OSR.

**Varroa:**- Varroa destructor mite, will start to take hold in your colony or colonies very rapidly. What seemed like no infestation in Feb /March or very low numbers of infestation at the beginning of the season can quickly escalate into hundreds within a few weeks. The Varroa mite lays its eggs onto the surface of the pupa within the brood cell just before being capped. Several eggs are laid and these will develop into male and female mites. Their ability to rapidly reproduce and multiply is the colony's downfall. These colonies must be regularly inspected and before mites are seen we need to consider treating. Even if you think you have none, trust me they will be there!! So treat early to suppress your Varroa mite numbers.



Your colony will appreciate it, the young bees will emerge undamaged and these nurse bees will go on to conduct all the duties of the worker force to ensure the colony's survival.



## Jobs to Complete in April

- 1.** Conduct a spring/early summer inspection of the colony to confirm its overall health, growth and that it is starting to expand. Ensure the colony still has food reserves available as this is the time it can run out especially if we get a cold snap that lasts for several days. Record all your findings on a hive record card. If pollen sub was used what have they consumed, consider giving more if required or removing if not used. Ensure sufficient frames are available to swap out the older frames you identified in the first inspection and ensure you have supers ready to go on.
- 2.** If brood is present and the colony hasn't been treated for varroa yet, then consider treating it now. Early treatment will benefit your colony later. It's also worth noting that certain vapour treatments require warmer or increased temperatures to be effective. Select a treatment that will work well for the next 14 days. Remember to record types of treatment given, serial and batch numbers.
- 3.** Remove the hive entrance protector (mouse guard) and any remaining weather protection to the outer hive. Consider treating the exterior of the hive with a bee friendly paint before the bees become too active. If insulation has been used (weather permitting) this can be reduced and stored for next season.
- 4.** It won't do your bees any harm to have a sugar syrup feed through a contact or centre rapid feeder, about 2 to 3 ltrs should be ample. Check to ensure you have sufficient made up frames and nucs as the swarming season will soon start.