May beekeeping Tips.

We will be soon approaching the swarming season which can even start in April if the weather is mild enough. May though is the time it all starts to happen. We all know the old beekeeping song about the swarm in May is worth a load of hay, well it’s so true. What you should be looking for is a build-up of drones in the hive as this is a sure sign of the bees getting ready to swarm. The only want drones for one reason and that is to mate with a virgin queen. One they are of no use they are ejected from the hive, usually around august time.

Bees unlike mammals cannot reproduce individually, but have to multiply, hence they swarm. You then have 2 colonies instead of one, thus reproducing them. If they did not swarm the whole population of bees throughout the world would die out, it’s as simple as that.

So we have by early May a rapid build-up of bees, there will be plenty of pollen coming in, which is used mainly for brood rearing as it’s the protein they are after to feed the brood. Just go and look at your bees bringing it in and you will soon know what I mean.

What should we do about it, let the bees alone and wait for a swarm to come out. NO WAY, this is silly beekeeping; it is irresponsible beekeeping for the following reasons. When the bees swarm, only the flying bees leave the hive, they are all the ones that bring in the honey, so what you have is a loss of production. Also they bees that leave eat as much of the stored honey in the hive as they can as they have no idea when the next meal is coming from. So you have most of the honey gone and no bees to bring any in until the house bees are ready to forage. A total disaster as far as you getting any honey in August. You will get some but not as much as you would if you had sorted the job out now. Also when bees swarm they could go into next doors garden, sting them and you will have trouble from them which you can do without.

So what do you do, you swarm them yourself, This will ensure that at least everything is under control, you will not have the flying bees eating the honey and you will not have trouble with the next door neighbours.

There are many different methods of swarm control for the difficult ways to the easy ways. I use the Curry Method of swarm control which I find is easy to carry out and is very effective.

I have put, a link below, showing the method. If you are in doubt after reading it contact your mentor or club, they will be able to put you right.

<http://www.blackburnbeekeepers.com/Curry%20Method%20with%20Pictures.pdf>

If you want to just split a hive instead of doing the Curry method, just do the following instead. This will just get you a small nucleus of bees which will build up into a nice strong hive. Don’t expect to get any honey of the split. Here is the link with the instructions.

<http://www.blackburnbeekeepers.com/Making-nucleus.pdf>

**Please note that it is the only time in the spring and summer months that you can treat part of the colony with oxalic acid as the swarmed colony will be broodless.**

So swarm control in May is very important, but there are other tasks that need looking at too, these being.

1. Make sure that your queens are all now marked up. She will be very difficult to find later if you need to find her for queen rearing or indeed any other manipulation you may have to do which involves finding the queen.
2. Make sure, if you have not already done so, that you have enough equipment ready for swarm control and honey gathering. This means an extra set of brood boxes and frames as well as has many supers you need for the honey flows that are on their way.

Keep your eyes open for Varroa infestations as the mites will have built up whist the queen has been slow in laying and the colony has not built up. This is the time when the mites increase more that the queen lays and it’s when you have a potential problem on your hands. There are many methods to control Varroa, but one I wold not recommend at this time of year is drone uncapping. To me it’s a waste of time at this time of year as you need the drones for possible mating and also you are knocking down drone’s cells where the workers will only make more, so instead of making worker cells and increasing the population of the hive they are making drone cells for you to break down. Same with honey production and all because of Varroa control, whereas there are many other ways to control. It’s OK later in the year to do a bit of drone trapping, when all the swarming and queen rearing is over, but not now. Talking about other ways to control Varroa, there is now a great product on the market called Hive Clean, which can be used at any time of the year. I have used it in Thailand to control Varroa and also tropolelaps mite and its really good stuff. Details are available from the usual suppliers. Here is some info on the product by way of a utube video which you should find interesting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6s_hBdHHisI>

1. Some of you may want to have a go at queen rearing, there are lots of different ways of going about this, but as above with the hive spit or the curry method of swarm control, its already been done on a small scale. It’s if you want to make a few more, that the process becomes more complicated and there are many different ways of going about it. I have put on a PDF file on a few ways of going about it. Written by Khalil Hamdan Apeldoorn, of the Netherlands it as all you need to know about queen rearing. The link is at <http://www.countryrubes.com/images/Raising_Honey_Bee_Queens_8_30_10.pdf>

4. Attend meetings as there is a lot of knowledge out there amongst other members and remember that the more people who share information, the better.

5. You should be registered with bee base Defra site and dept. dedicated to us beekeepers. You can find them at <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm> there is lots of information on the site for you and if you have any doubts about anything you can always ring up and ask for a visit from your local bee inspectors, who are very helpful, especially to new and beginner beekeepers. It’s all free too.

6. There are always other things to do such as keeping all your equipment up to date, removal of dirty frames, which should be an ongoing process, as checking for, and removal of damaged and dirty frames is an essential part of beekeeping. A clean, disease free hive is a happy one.

I think I have covered most of what need to be done. So enjoy your beekeeping and ets hope the weather is kind to us all.

Michael and Bob.