**Things to do in February**

**Queen marking:**

The queen marking colour for 2014 is **GREEN**

**Here is the colours for the years**

Honey bee colonies, and the Queen that heads up the colony, can survive for a number of years (I’ve been able to keep a good Queen for four seasons before needing to replace her).  Because of this, a system of Queen marking colours has been devised which, if followed, gives an indication of the age of the Queen.  The Queen is marked with a spot of paint on her thorax (between her head and her abdomen) and the colour scheme is as below. **Now is the time to mark your queen if she is not marked as the hive is low on bees and she can very easily be found and marked. Later on she will be a lot more difficult to find**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **2010** | **2011** | **2012** | **2013** | **2014** |
| **Blue** | **White** | **Yellow** | **Red** | **Green** |

This mnemonic helps remember it.  Although if you wanted to start with 1, a good mnemonic is Will You Rear Good Bees!

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Be** | **Warned** | **You** | **Require** | **Gloves** |
| **Blue** | **White** | **Yellow** | **Red** | **Green** |
| **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** |
| **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** |

The numbers are matched with the year-end number.

Usually, if you do a swarm method such as the Curry Method of Swarm control, you replace the queen every year. In that case you do not need to colour code your queen and white will suffice.

**Food Stores:**

The mild winter so far has, I’m sure meant that the bees will have been using up their stores so do check whether the hives feel light and, if necessary, feed the bees with some **fondant** placed immediately over the brood on top of the frames.

**Here is a recipe for homemade fondant.**

Beekeeping Fondant Recipe
12 lbs. sugar
1.5 lbs. corn syrup (non flavoured, no vanilla)
1.25 quarts water
1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar
Heat mixture to 238 degrees.  Add tarter at 230 degrees, mix and boil to 238, cool to 200, whip/stir with spoon or beater till white in colour.  Note: Whip/stirring is not required, but makes a less dense fondant.

**Pollen:**

Check that the bees are bringing in pollen which the bees need help feed the developing larvae. If necessary you can give them some pollen substitute. This will get the queen laying and so have a strong colony ready for when the nectar starts to come in.

**Here is a recipe for homemade pollen substitute**

1.5 cups (8oz.) fat-free soy flour
1.5 cups (12oz.) granulated sugar
.5 cup (1oz.) Brewer’s yeast
1.5 cups (12oz.) Sugar Syrup (2:1) or your honey
NOTE: You can also use regular soy flour. Add water as needed to mix. In very warm climates it may be necessary to add an oil to prevent drying.

Mix dry ingredients together.  Then add dry mix slowly to syrup/honey until mixture is like stiff bread dough. Press between wax paper. Place bee patty over cluster with wax paper up.

**Water Source:**

Bees work out very early in the year where their water source is to be so make sure you provide somewhere for them near to the colony – otherwise they may choose somewhere you don’t want them like by your neighbours back door!

Use a plastic tray (such as is used for Grow bags) with a few stones and some capillary matting – this seems to work a treat.

**Tidying up**

Ensure that hive entrances are clear of debris and dead bees. There may be a lot of older winter bees that have died but not been cleared away from the hive. Also clean up outside the hive. You may have long grass and rubbish that as accumulated over the winter which needs clearing away. It’s like the old saying that cleanliness is next to godliness

**Planning;**

It’s not too late to plan what you want to do with your bees this year. How many colonies do you want to have by the end of the season, do you plan to increase your colonies, do you want to do any queen rearing etc. It’s also a good time to look at your apiary – if you want to move any hives now is a good time to do it while they are relatively light.

**Equipment:**

Do make sure your equipment is in good order for the season and decide what else you may need to buy. You can even have a go at making some equipment yourself. Many a beekeeper have been caught out when the bees start to work the honey flows, finding that they have not enough brood chambers, supers, frames etc. Remember, sometime in the coming season you will need to do some kind of swarm control and will need an extra set of equipment for each hive you swarm.

Now is the time to get everything ready, not when it’s too late or you have to run around in a panic getting things ready. It’s surprising how quickly things move on.