

Winter is Coming

Apart from the challenges being faced by Beekeepers in achieving a good price for their honey, the milder autumn has created additional challenges for many beekeepers.

Normally by now hives would have been 'wintered down'.

This includes:

- treating for Varroa, making sure that the manufacturer's instructions are followed, using the correct number of strips per brood box and adhering to the time the strips should be in the hive
- monitoring after the Varroa treatment has been removed and retreating if necessary
- checking the food stores of honey and pollen so that the bees won't starve during the winter
- making sure that the hive(s) are getting some morning sun and will be sheltered from early spring winds
- AFB inspections will have been done
- any old frames and boxes that need to be repaired or replaced are
- removing the queen excluder so that the queen and the cluster can access the food stores
- fitting an entrance reducer to help the bees guard against wasps and to prevent mice entering the hive

(The book "Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand" starting on page 92 has a comprehensive list of what to do when wintering down your hive(s), as well as on page 93 suggested guidelines for winter stores)

Due to the mild Autumn this year, in many places the queen has not shut down with her cluster of winter bees, as she normally would have by now and consequently, due to a shortage of foraging food in some areas, the winter stores are being consumed faster than they normally would. This means many beekeepers are having to supplementary feed.

Having some moisture in a beehive is normal. Too much moisture can impact on hive health. Feeding sugar syrup can increase the amount of moisture in the hive. Reducing the build-up of moisture in the hive is important.

A few ideas to help with this are:

- using a mesh floor
- placing the hive on a large paving stone (can help to reduce the dampness from the ground)
- having the back of the hive higher than the front so the hive slopes towards the entrance
- placing a matchstick at the 4 corners between the top box and the hive mat or
- using a hive mat with a notch cut into the rim

Once your hives are wintered down, winter is the best time to look at what gear you have, and what your hives and equipment needs for next season will be, as well as completing any maintenance that needs to be done.

Organising your order over the next couple of months, especially for boxes, frames and other hives means all your supplies will be ready for the start of next season. What about your suit, smoker, hive tool etc.? Do any of these pieces of equipment need replacing?

Something to consider, second-hand beekeeping gear (unless it has never been out in an apiary), may seem like a bargain, but unfortunately it carries the risk of introducing AFB into your hives.

If you enjoy reading? Winter is also the ideal time to be catching up on beekeeping reading and research. We have a great selection of books for you to choose from.

One last thought, whether you are looking to increase your hive numbers or will need to requeen your hive(s) it is a great idea to get in contact with a reputable queen breeder from your local area now and place your order for your spring queens or nucs.

