Beekeepers Gazette

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Springtime Growth, You're in Control

Last month we discussed getting your equipment ready and preparing for the early spring.

In Northeast Florida, the Maple trees are beginning to bloom which means the bees are hard at it.

They've made it through the winter and now are doing all they can to strengthen the hives. You will soon know how to help them do it.

In honeybee biology, we have learned the foraging bees will send a pheromone to the queen signifying there is a strong nectar flow. She will in turn begin to lay copious amounts of eggs (photo on right) so the population of the hives will expand. Keep in mind that if she begins to increase egg production now, it will be 21 days before you will see the population growth. This is why I have said you cannot afford to miss the maple flow. The emerging bees will put us near February, the beginning of the swarm season. (Do you see how this is beginning to fit together?)

If you haven't already, now is the time to equalize your hives. You will move the brood and bees between the hives so each hive will have sufficient bees and brood to facilitate strong growth.

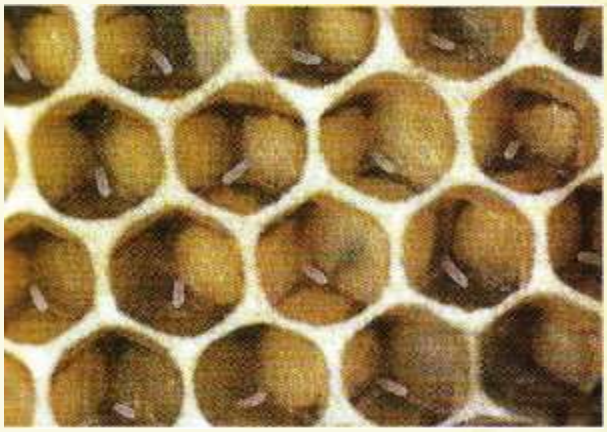

Photo of eggs

Observe each side of each frame and calculate the eggs, larvae and sealed brood and try to equalize that between the hives. Try to do the same with adult bees. After you have equalized the brood (eggs, larvae and sealed brood), sometimes it is easier to put the lids on the hives and let the bees settle down for a couple of hours. Then whenever you re-open the hives you will be able to do a reasonable assessment of the quantity of bees. Make an educated guess and equalize the bees. (Make sure you do not mistakenly move the queens) (Continued next page)

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Growth Continued

Do not worry about the bees fighting. As long as there is a strong nectar flow, the bees should get along with each other.

It is also important you continue to feed your bees sugar water at a ratio of 1:1 (1 part sugar to 1 part water). Springtime growth means the queen needs additional comb to lay eggs. Some estimates are she will lay 1000 to 1500 eggs a day. That is very possible, but reality is she will only lay eggs that the hive can support. Don't expect too much. The comb the queen will need will be built using the honeybee's wax glands. (Photo below)

Another thing we have learned in honeybee biology is that honey bees have eight wax glands on the underside of their abdomen that produce beeswax. The excessive carbohydrates from feeding or an extremely strong nectar flow stimulate the wax glands thereby making comb production much easier. The bees manipulate the wax into honeycomb using their Proboscis and Mandibles.

So, feed your bees constantly during January. The combination of the high protein maple pollen with the sugar syrup will allow the bees to build up very quickly; Much faster than they would without the added stimulation of constant sugar syrup.

More comb = more eggs = more bees = more honey.

Now that we have strong, equalized hives with the bees making comb and the queen laying eggs, we can start thinking about the possibility of splitting your hives in mid-February to increase your apiary hive count and/or to control the ever haunting swarm season.

Swarm season baffles the best of us. Don't worry.

Take a breather and appreciate how you are able to help your bees make your hives stronger for the honey flow.

In the next issue we will begin to understand the things we can do to prevent swarms and keep **your** bees in **your** apiary.

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Consider reading what you can find on the subject of Honeybee Biology and Honeybee Communication. Once you understand the how and why, the rest just falls in place

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Question and Answers

Q: What's the best time to add supers?

A: As in most questions in beekeeping, this one has several possibilities and a couple of parameters to consider.

First, I'm assuming you only have one deep box of brood and there is a strong nectar flow in your area.

Whenever your hive has built out to around 70% or 80% capacity or 7 or 8 frames of brood (assuming a 10 frame box) you should consider supering the hive. I am a proponent of adding two supers whenever first needed because in a strong nectar flow, the bees can fill a box with honey in an amazingly short time. However, only add supers whenever there is a strong nectar flow as the spare space in a hive can harbor problems such as diseases and pests.

Once you add the initial boxes, continue to add supers whenever they reach approximately 70% capacity.

Another thing to consider is if you use a queen excluder, be sure to monitor the brood density of your brood box. Keep it at the same 70% ratio to help avoid swarming.

The third thing you can consider is adding another deep box on the hive without an excluder to allow the queen to increase the brood considerably. Whenever both boxes have plenty of brood, it will be easy to do a split. This would be an alternative to a honey super if you are more interested in making more bees than making honey.

Q: Which is preferable, wax foundation or plastic foundation?

A: Everything considered, I believe the bees prefer wax foundation. That's not to say there isn't a place in the hive for plastic.

Whenever you chose one over the other, there are things to consider such as the labor involved in wiring wax foundation as well as when using wax the bees will remove 15% to 20% around the parimeter. Therefore you realize less brood or honey per frame. The bees have been known to chew it out whenever there isn't a nectar flow and it isn't as durable.

Plastic foundation is not as readily accepted by the bees, but more durable, easier to use and the bees may use more of the space available.

The actual cost of the foundation is similar, but in using wax, you need wire, a wiring jig, and a couple of other hardware type items.

So, for sake of simplicity, a lot of people use plastic.

One thing to consider is if using plastic, some people prefer to paint a thin coat of wax on both sides of the foundation in addition to what comes on them to give the bees sort of a head start in building out the foundation.

With that said, I personally use both. However, my recommendation is not to mix them until they are built out. The bees will tend to build out the wax foundation first and ignore the plastic.

Durraguilt is wax foundation with a very thin plastic sheet between the layers. If damaged, the bees tend not to repair it. For this reason, I am not a fan.

To submit your questions to be answered, please e-mail us at

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The Busy Time of Year

Comments from the Editor

I hope all of you had a great Christmas and I wish each of you a Happy New Year.

Christmas is a time to rejoice. It is a time of giving and sharing and a time for spending quality time with family and friends.

At this house, I feel it is a time to realize we have been truly blessed. I sincerely hope the same can be said for you.

This issue is about continuing the preparation for spring we began last month.

There is plenty to do if we are to expect our hives to flourish and produce a large crop of honey.

Most of you have less than four hives of bees. I want you to consider if your goal is to grow your number of hives or primarily try to produce honey or both.

The reason I point this out is that I believe a large number of beekeepers do not realize the full potential of their hives and therefor their full potential as a beekeeper.

Earlier in this issue, it was said, "More bees = more honey." Truer words cannot be spoken.

Think about this for a moment.

If you are constantly trying to do splits, the bees are constantly trying to make increases and therefore never concerned with nor have the chance to store honey.

On the other hand, if you are constantly adding supers, the bees are going to spend all of their energy making honey stores and you will seldom make splits.

The thing to consider is whatever you choose is fine. I am merely trying to point out that you should develop a game plan and work toward that.

I've found that the best results may possibly be realized if you dedicate a couple of hives for growth and a couple for that wonderful reward called honey.

Only you can make such a decision.

I have only one more question.

Isn't this a wonderful hobby?

Ray

If Jimmy cracks corn and no one cares, why is there a song about him?

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Is A NUC Right For You?

We've heard about them, we've talked about them and quite possibly we've bought one or two. What, if I may ask is a nuc good for?

A nuc is simply a beehive with four or five frames instead of eight or ten. (For the purpose here, five may be best) It has a queen, eggs, larvae, sealed brood and plenty of bees.

That is the primary reason, if you have three or more hives, you shouldn't be without one.

Let's consider the moments in beekeeping that makes us wonder, "What in the world am I going to do?"

You are going through your hive and realize your hive is queenless or the queen isn't producing as expected. If you have a nuc in the corner of your yard, you can simply cage the queen in the nuc and replace the missing or nonproductive queen in your hive. The now queenless nuc will simply re-queen itself and life will go on as if nothing has ever happened.

Whenever you are going through your hives and you find a hive that isn't as strong as you would expect, you can merely take a couple of frames of brood from your nuc and place them in your weak hive.

Put two empty frames back into the nuc. The nuc will simply regrow that brood and all will be as it never happened.

Are you beginning to see where a nuc can be considered an unbelievably valuable tool?

And, as with most hives, a nuc will also at some point get overcrowded and get the urge to swarm.

You can then simply remove a couple of frames of brood and the queen and start another nuc.

By leaving eggs, brood and bees in the first nuc, it will re-queen itself and regrow the missing brood.

Whenever the two nucs get strong enough, you will still have a maintenance nuc and now a spare to start another hive.

Is this a great idea or what?

To contact us or to ask a question,, please e-mail us at

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We need your ideas for future issues

If you have a subject you would like us to consider for a future issue, please let us know.

If you have something going on in your bee yard or club you would like considered, again, let us know.

If you have questions that you would like answered, we may be able to help.

Submit your ideas and questions to;

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The Editor
Ray Claxton