

BeeZeen – Autumn (almost) 2019

Welcome to Westerham Beekeepers' Autumn (almost) BeeZeen, a canter around beekeeping in our local area.

Cue music....."And now, the end is near....."etc. Yup, soon be ready to pack away the bee gear and make vague promises to oneself about cleaning it up later.....

In this edition, we look at:-

- > Indian summer
- > How to keep out of jail (if you use chemical miticides)
- > Uniting colonies
- > (Br)exit drones
- > Bubble scum - processing honey tip
- > Finding eggs

Indian summer



August sees the cessation of our main nectar flow from blackberries, white clover, sweet chestnut and lime trees. But 'building a bridge' to the ever dependable ivy are rosebay willow herb across our countryside and the much loved & despised, in equal proportions, himalayan balsam ("HB"). The latter attracts fierce debate as an "invasive weed ruining our river banks" versus "a godsend to our honeybees". Not a few times has the shout been heard at our place: "Get that *\$#^+~% weed out of

my patch!" Well, we may have stumbled across a sustainable solution to restore domestic harmony. In its northern Indian homeland, HB is used in curries. The seeds can be eaten raw or lightly roasted and have a mild nutty flavour. Have a look at this:

<https://www.eatweeds.co.uk/himalayan-balsam-seed-curry-recipe>



In addition, the seeds can be used to make gin or wine. Is HB a saint or sinner? Either way, we have the makings of a decent party 😊

For our newer beekeepers, alarm bells ring when first seeing bees returning to the hive that have been working HB. Moving in and out of the flower leaves a creamy stripe of pollen down the back of the bees (see pic).



Varroa treatment legislation



Varroa miticide treatments - get this wrong and you could end up in Lewes Prison.

The government views honeybees as food producing animals. Consequently, beekeepers must comply with legislation covering chemical treatments to protect the consumer. The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 require the keeper of a food-producing animal, including bees, to maintain records of the purchase and use of medicinal products. This means that beekeepers, who use chemical treatments to reduce varroa, must fill in the Veterinary Medicine Administration record card, which has to be kept for 5 years. Here's a

copy which can be downloaded from the NBU website.

VETERINARY MEDICINE ADMINISTRATION RECORD – TO BE KEPT FOR 5 YEARS

NAME:	ADDRESS:
APIARY NAME/LOCATION:	POST CODE:

TO BE COMPLETED AT TIME OF PURCHASE					TO BE COMPLETED AT TIME OF ADMINISTRATION						
Name and Address of Supplier of Medicinal Product	Date Purchased	Identity and Quantity of Medicinal Product			Date of Administration	Hive numbers/ID	Duration of treatment	Withdrawal period	Name of person administering veterinary medicine	Total quantity of veterinary medicine used	Date & route of disposal if not administered
		Name	Batch No	Quantity							

Beekeepers are required to keep proof of purchase and a record of purchase, administration and disposal of all veterinary medicines for a minimum of 5 years under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2011SI 2159. Further information can be obtained from Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Woodham Lane, New Haw, Addlestone, Surrey. KT15.3LS. Telephone: 01832 338911. www.vmd.defra.gov.uk

I'm sure you're all aware that there is a restricted product set for varroa chemical treatments. If you're found using other substances (eg; homemade oxalic or thymol treatments) then you are **liable to prosecution**. For full disclosure, here's the link for the up-to-date list of 15 regulated products that you are able to use:

<https://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/ProductInformationDatabase/Default.aspx>

(Ed: That's me kept out of the clink)

Uniting colonies - tips

In the wild, colonies of bees getting together just doesn't happen. But in the "newspaper-unite", we have a simple and effective method of unnaturally combining two colonies. This can be useful to make a strong colony ahead of winter, but do make sure BOTH colonies are healthy.



Key to the success is choosing one Queen and a slow process of coming together, so that the bees gradually get used to each other's pheromones and odour.

Tips:

- Move colonies close together (3 foot at a time)
- Entrances facing the same way
- Choose a Queen (don't let them fight it out in case both get injured)
- Put the Queen in the top colony – this initially keeps her away from the other colony's most aggressive bees (foragers and guards)
- Take off any brace comb hanging from the bottom of the frames of the top colony before combining
- Add a queen excluder over the newspaper to avoid it blowing away
- Add a few small slits in the newspaper to get them started

Bees will chew a small hole through the newspaper in a couple of hours, but don't intervene for a minimum of 4 days. This task will be carried out by 'cleaner' nurse bees – they are the kindest souls in the colony, which helps explain the lack of inter-colony aggression.

Signs of success:-

- Shredded paper being carried out of the entrance and falling through an open mesh floor
- Little signs of fighting (dead bees being carried out and a mound of them in front of the hive)

(Br)Exit drones



Shocker for the boys ahead. It is the time of year that the female casts in the colonies re-assert their dominance. The drones have served their role to provide mating material for virgin queens and are now about to be thrown out to conserve winter stores. This poor chap is having his wings chewed off. Charming.

(pic credit: Mahako Bees).

We also saw evictions earlier in the year during the June gap nectar dearth – these girls are ruthless.

But let's not under estimate the role of the drone. Here's a summary of their vital contribution to the colony:-

Contributes 50% of the genetics during mating with virgin Queens

We need drones from other pleasant temperament colonies to complement our own chosen queen genetics.

Feral colonies naturally have about 15% drone cells; sometimes they are used for drone breeding and the rest of the time for honey storage.

What do we do in modern beekeeping? Give the colonies foundation with in-printed worker bee cell sizes..... And fork out drones to kill varroa..... Then moan when queens aren't mated well. Consider giving your best colonies an extra frame of drone comb.

Provide warmth in the hive

This year, I witnessed drones keeping sealed brood warm. The colony had been through an artificial swarm and was unbalanced – but the boys stepped up to the role. They are walking “hotty-botties” in the hive due to their bulk. Occasionally, you'll see a drone overwintering – clearly a charmer.

Bubble scum (*an old Top Tip but timely.....*)

After the honey has been through the sieving and settling process (leave it for 24 hours), air bubbles drift to the surface forming a foamy layer, sometimes referred to as slub-bum. To this, add cling film



And pinch out from the middle



Any leftovers around the rim can be spooned out and added to the breakfast honeypot, together with the slub-bum, for a yummy snack on hot toast.

The final product (below) with a clear surface ready for jarring.



Egg spotter

Either one's eyesight is failing, your apiary is perpetually in the shade or the sun goes in during the inspection. "I just can't seem to see eggs" is an often heard lament....

These little torches fit neatly in your beesuit pocket and cost under a fiver. They shine a bright light directly into the bottom of the cell where the egg is laid. Can't miss 'em! Some folk also use a magnifier of some sort, but there never seems to be enough hands....



National Honey Show:

This year's dates for the diary are Thurs 24 Oct to Sat 26 Oct and again, it takes place at Sandown Park, Esher. There is a stack of beekeeping gear to ogle, informative lectures and workshops. The keynote speaker is Dr Ralph Buechler, the mentor for our own treatment free project – he will be talking about some of the techniques we are using! Click the link for more <http://www.honeyshow.co.uk/>

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