

I have been holding back from writing a Wales inspectorate's newsletter until we have our new recruits in place and I can introduce them. The process has been slow because of the public sector recruitment freeze and it is still not finalised. However, I am confident that we will fill the vacancies and that they will be in post very soon. I will send out details of our new inspectors and the new inspection areas as soon as I can confirm them. Until then, I am pleased to say that our newsletter has been missed and, because events are threatening to overtake us, I will wait no longer.

As usual, the highs and lows of our beekeeping fortunes are dictated by the weather. After a warm April, when colonies built up very well, May turned cool and wet in West Wales, and drier and cool in East Wales. Those close to oil seed rape found that the flow ended abruptly while it was still in flower due to the drought conditions and that only pollen continued to come in. At the same time, the tree blossom fell prematurely and the nectar flow from the ground plants dried up. For most of May, we have had cool windy damp weather, cold nights and not much rain in many areas so that there is a serious soil water deficiency.

These conditions do not stop the swarming impulse. In fact, colonies that had built up strongly on the rape and then were idle in the hive with no foraging to do, have now turned their energies to swarming - if they had not done so previously. I fear that many of these have gone feral and perished due to starvation. You should inspect your bees regularly, weekly at this time of year. Only then can you be up to speed with what's going on in the hives and manage any potential swarming.

Queen mating and requeening after swarming, splits and so on, has been very slow. This makes for irritable bees when they have no open brood to look after. On our travels, we have seen splits, nucs and even some slow developing colonies that missed the April nectar flow, on the point of starvation. If you find that your colony is light and lethargic, give it a feed of 1kg/1 litre of sugar syrup, spraying some on the bees or dribbling on the top bars in extreme circumstances. If you are doubtful that there is a queen in the colony, then give it a frame of eggs and young brood from a queen right colony. Provided the bees have not been left too long and become weak and demoralized, they should make emergency queen cells and right the hive. To subdue a restless,

hungry hive, you can carry a hand sprayer containing weak sugar solution to wet them and keep them under control while inspecting.

The warm, calmer weather now should allow all those unmated virgins to get out and mate at last. Remember that they need five days to mature after emergence and then have a three week window of time in which to mate before they become stale. This fine spell has come just in time. Meanwhile, the blackberry, clover and rosebay willow herb promise to be in flower early and we await a flow from them.

The inspectorate team has been busy working on the National Bee Unit's two year Random Apiary Survey sampling programme. This came to a close on 31st May. I am assured that the results of the pathogen screening of the samples collected from around Wales will be posted on Beebase by November this year. We will be visiting new beekeepers in the coming weeks so, when you get your bees, please visit Beebase and self register your details, and we will be in touch.

I will sign off with thanks to David Coles , Seasonal Bee Inspector for South Powys, for allowing me to use some of his seasonal notes and wish you a very productive summer.

Frank Gellatly