

Additional Q&A for Webinar talk 27/08/2020

Q Hi there, we are beginners with a top-bar hive. Can you tell me what hefting is please?

A Hefting is the process of lifting the hive from each side to judge its weight. You will find some informative videos if you google hefting bee hives. Can be helped by having more than one hive to compare the weights.

Q If you have planted your garden for pollinators, i.e. with early, mid and late pollen and nectar rich plants, then do you really need so much feeding if there are plentiful stores by way of large cottage garden/wildflower meadow

A How much, if any, feeding is needed is dictated by the amount of stores in the hive itself, not what is apparently available around it. You need to be sure that your bees have exploited those (or other) nectar sources before you can decide whether or not any supplementary feeding is needed.

Q Two questions: Should I put supers back on for cleaning out after taking honey off if I am treating with Apivar which I put in just after taking off honey? When should I stop autumn feeding? I'm a first-year beekeeper.

A Generally, varroa treatments should not be applied with supers on, which you intend to extract (MAQs being an exception to this rule). If you are just putting the supers back on for the bees to clean out so as to be able to store them dry over winter, I see no reason why not.

Q What month do you put in the narrow entrance?

A Personally, unless the colony is especially big, I do not completely remove the entrance block at all so the bees have a small entrance all year round. Certainly, once there are wasps about, the entrance should be reduced to allow the bees to defend it easily. As for mouseguards, I tend to put these on early November but not everyone uses them and when they should be put on is very dependent on the weather conditions. An early cold snap might see mice looking for somewhere warm to over-winter much sooner! A good hive stand, an entrance with the dimensions Wally suggested and an open mesh floor will deter mice.

Q At what date should all supers be removed and replaced with feeders?

A This is really dependent on local conditions and nectar flows, and how much stores the bees have in the brood box. I still have supers on some hives as they have been working Himalayan balsam but I use MAQs as varroa treatments on these (because they can be used with supers on) and will begin feeding as soon as the supers are removed. If you are using a temperature dependent varroa treatment, e.g. thymol based, you need to take the supers off in good time (August) to allow for the treatment period, usually 2 x 2 weeks, and then time to winter feed as they don't tend to take syrup down during thymol treatment.

Q I have a second super on top of 2 deep brood boxes with partially drawn frames but with no stores. Should I remove this to help bed the size of the hive down for winter? [The top brood box has lots of stores and no brood and the 1st super also has 80% honey store]
Gerry (1st year bee-keeper)

A I would certainly take the empty super off as leaving it on would just give the bees a larger space to keep warm through the winter. So, condense as much as you can whilst ensuring they have adequate reserves to get through the winter. One deep brood box will be sufficient for the winter period. Some beekeepers will over-winter larger colonies on double brood but dummied down (to perhaps 8 or 9 frames in each box).

Q My entire hive of bees died but I have the queen who landed on my bag at home and I'm feeding her honey. What has anyone tried to help survival of a lone queen?

A A few thoughts from the panel on this one.
Probably not a good queen but she needs to go in a nuc or hive.
If it was a honey bee queen and her colony had died out it would be because the queen had been unable to produce enough brood and keep the colony alive. My experience with colonies that have died is the dead queen can usually be found somewhere in the cluster of the last survivors. We did the other day spot a queen (almost certainly a virgin) sitting on a blade of grass in front of a hive. No idea what that was about so we just stepped aside rapidly so as not to confuse the issue and allow whatever was going to happen next happen. So, I suppose this could have been a virgin queen having flown from the hive to avoid being murdered by a sister?

Q Hi, first year bee keeper and moved hives to an organic farm - don't want to use Varroa treatment - would you say this was good way to go?

A No, unless you are prepared to lose your bees. There is a case for non-treatment but it is not as simple as just not treating and really not recommended for beginners. There are soft varroa treatments available which may not be organic but are based on natural chemicals, so a low impact on the environment.

Q How long do you leave acetic acid on stored supers? Left all season and wires rusted.

A This is a potential hazard especially if there is any foundation present. On drawn comb it is not usually a problem as the wires are covered in wax and the acetic acid fumes will dissipate in a few days. The minimum treatment period is a week to ten days. As was stated last week, the treatment should be done on a board as acetic acid will eat into concrete. As was also said during the presentation, there is usually no need to fumigate super frames.

Q I have a small colony from a late cast swarm only half filled a deep brood box - should I combine with a bigger colony or move into a nuc box?

A I would combine rather than risk losing them through the winter.

Q This is my first year of bee keeping. There are quite a few wasps around the hive and I saw a European hornet today. I'd like to look in the hive but am concerned about the wasps. Any suggestions?

A It is essential to inspect the hives to be able to assess their status (are they queenright) and the level of stores. If the colony is small and weak, wasps will attack it whether you open it or not but, if the colony is strong, they will usually be able to defend themselves with a reduced entrance. Don't prolong the inspection any longer than necessary and, if feeding, do so in the evening.

Q I have a new poly hive but there are no holes in the crown board so how do I put a feeder in?

A You will either need to buy a crownboard with a feeder hole or (holes) or make holes in the one you have.