North Eastern Apiarist's Association Inc

Introduction to Bees and Beekeeping Workshop Notes – Spring Management

Early Spring - Hive inspection

- **Assess results of pre-winter preparation –**
  - Bees to hive space ratio [number of frames of bees]
  - Adequacy of stores
  - Suitability of location – presence of excess moisture in the hive?

- **Is the hive 'queen right'?**
  - Presence of eggs, larvae, sealed brood
  - If not consider uniting with other hive or introduction of brood and bees

- **Assess quality of the queen –**
  - Laying pattern – Are there several frames of brood at all stages of development?
  - Spotty brood or raised brood [drones laid in worker cells] could indicate a failing queen

- **Disease inspection –**
  - Presence of brood diseases ? [refer to pest and disease management information.]
  - Contact Apiary Inspector for further advice
  - Continue to monitor for presence of disease throughout season
  - Do not administer antibiotic [OTC] unless disease status is known

- **If free of disease but queen is failing or hive is low in bee numbers –**
  - Access to more hive resources is the first step – local beekeeper may be able to help
    - Papering over a stronger hive or a hive with a younger queen
    - Introducing brood and bees [especially young bees] from a stronger hive [will hold hive until queens become available]
  - Supplementary feeding in emergency situation may be necessary
    - Sugar fed dry or as a concentrated syrup late winter/early spring to avoid starvation
    - Do not feed honey unless disease status of source hive is known [to prevent AFB infection]
  - Temporary relocation of hive may be considered if conditions are not favourable locally

Mid-spring – hive build-up – [Assuming hive is now queen-right & disease free]

- **Brood manipulation – Aim to maximise brood production for hive growth**
  - When colony occupies at least 6 frames of bees and sealed brood, add super of drawn combs to single box
  - When hive has 7-8frames of bees and brood lift 1-2 frames of sealed brood to centre of super and place two good laying combs into brood box – being careful not to isolate young brood in weaker hives when cool weather still prevails.

- Doubles can receive the same brood manipulation
- Use of excluders – small scale operation may not require excluding of honey supers [main reason is keeping brood out of frames to be extracted]

- **Swarm management**
  - Ensure hive has plenty of room for expansion
  - Annual re-queening greatly reduces swarming tendency
  - Monitor strong hives for queen cells – weekly inspection will ensure that unwanted cells can be removed before they hatch. Though if a lot of cells are raised the hive may still swarm before cells hatch.
  - Hive can be allowed to exercise swarm impulse without losing bees or creating local public nuisance – refer to Apiary Code of Practice.
    - **First method** – taking splits – Brood, bees and honey may be removed to make up new hives that can then either make their own queen or a new queen or queen cell may be introduced. Making sure old queen remains with parent hive.
    - **Second method** – catching the swarm before they leave –
      - Find old queen and place the brood comb she is on into an empty brood box
      - Spin original hive around 180°
      - Place queen and her new brood box on original hive location
      - Place unsealed brood into new brood box and extra empty combs
      - Leave bulk of sealed brood in original hive
      - Add a super to the new brood box
      - Re-queen hive at rear either with their own cell which they will raise or laying queen or queen cell chosen by beekeeper.
      - Older field bees will return to original hive location with old queen, which is essentially what the swarm is.
      - Hive at rear retains all young bees, sealed brood and adequate stores to survive until new queen mates and brood production recommences, and field force re-builds.
    - In both cases hives can be re-united [if desired] later in the season

- **Hive has swarmed? – what to do?**
  - Identifying hive that has swarmed –
    - Presence of mature or hatched queen cells
    - Depopulation
    - Broodlessness or break in the brood pattern
  - Catching the swarm –
    - Locating swarm
    - Hiving swarm – use of excluder between hive body and bottom board
  - Monitor hive for cells/ virgins and eventual laying of queen [allow 16-26 days]

- **Assess pollen and nectar resource**
  - Do-not extract spring honey until later honey yields eventuate
  - Generally for hives that are not migrated to honey flows, do not extract below third box [second super]