

NOTES FROM THE APIARY

MARCH-APRIL

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By now you should have been into your hives checking on their overall condition. Reversing hives where the brood was in the top deep and arranging the honey frames so that the bees can get to them easily. You may have found some brood dead in their cells along the outer edges of the brood cluster. For “New Bees” this is called “Chilled Brood” as the brood was killed when the temps fell and stayed low for over a week in March. The warm February days got the Queen into laying mode and then there were not enough bees when the weather got cold to keep all of the brood warm. As pollen is abundantly available now, you have been feeding 1 to 1 syrup to promote early brood build up haven’t you? You do have all of your equipment ready and repaired/painted right?

A reminder to you folks that have stored your drawn comb over the winter, remember the wax moth crystals that you put with the frames? Those frames should be aired out for 2 or 3 weeks before you put them back on to the hives. The odor of the crystals probably won’t harm your bees but they will be slow about getting to work in those frames. How would you like to spend a week in a closet containing moth balls?

If any of you are planing to do chunk or round section comb honey this year and would like inside suggestions on what works you are welcome to ask me. Believe me, everything that works is not always explained in the bee books.

Now, more on Hive Reversing: Regardless of whether you are using two deep bodies or three medium bodies for wintering colonies, in either case, the upper half of the colony should have been all capped honey in November, and the lower area was some brood, some capped honey, and the cluster of bees. As the winter progressed, the cluster slowly moved upward (never sideways) and by February/March the cluster should be in the upper box and leaving the bottom hive body totally empty of anything except possibly the frames on the outside edges.

In April, brood rearing is well underway, honey stores are being rapidly used, dandelion nectar is about to appear, pollen is available, winter bees are dying, and young bees are becoming numerous. Yet in spite of all this activity, if you haven’t reversed your boxes you will have empty cell space in the empty bottom brood box because the bees REFUSE to go down during these chilly months, and if they run out of queen laying space in that upper brood box, they will swarm.

How often or when do you reverse? Reversing is dependent on colony strength, location, fecundity of the queen, race of bees, average temperature, and maybe some more variables. You inspect your bees, and when you find the upper brood box well filled with brood, bees, queen, and food, and the lower brood box mostly empty or only old capped brood, reverse! BE CAREFUL, don’t split the brood if there are open brood cells in both upper and lower boxes. Sometimes you may need to reverse more than once as it is possible that this procedure may be started as early as late January. You could just place an empty brood box on top of the existing brood box rather than doing the reverse but

now you will have an empty box on the bottom that the bees will have to travel thru and that you will have to remove after the upper boxes become filled with brood and honey!