

I could have sworn at the beginning of the month I saw Snowdrops appearing out of the ground, maybe it was a dream because they were out then were soon buried again under the heavy snowfall we had!

I always find February and March a strange time here. We have a period of mild days where the bees



are out flying but this can be suddenly be followed by a period of cold wintry weather with snow. It is even more important now, is to make sure they have enough food and not separated from their stores. There is little forage so early in the year but any activity will sent them straight to their supplies.

Hefting the hives to check the weight is fine, but it doesn't tell you whether the bees are separated from their stores. Checking the debris under the hive is a way of telling you where the cluster is. A quick check on frames of honey stores in relation to the cluster is fine, but it should be a quick look. If you think there is a gap between bees and food, then rearrange the frames so the food is at the edge or over the cluster. Take great care not to disturb the cluster. Frames of honey can be scored to expose the honey making it easier for the bees to get to.

If there are few supplies left, a small amount of Bee food syrup, such as Ambrosia or Invertbee and even 1:1 sugar solution, can be drizzled down over the cluster. The bees will eat this immediately giving them the energy to reach the fondant which can then be placed above them, between the frames.

As the queen should be starting to lay brood, pollen patties or supplements can be added to fondant. Using a takeaway tray or something similar, make a pollen sandwich, laying a layer of pollen supplement between the fondant and place either on the frames above the cluster or if the cluster is just under the crown board, place on top of the crown board over the hole.

Another important thing to check is the hive entrance. Make sure it is not filled with dead bees and that the bees can get out to take cleansing flights, otherwise they have no choice but to defecate in the hive which increases the risk of nosema. Dark staining over the frames or the front of the hive could indicate signs of dysentery.

On a dry, mild day watch your bees fly and see if they are bringing pollen back – the first signs of a healthy hive that has survived winter and is building up.

I mentioned last month that this time of year is a good time to get prepared and plan for the new season. We have all been caught out scrambling for equipment when the need arises.

This is a good time to look for additional apiaries or new apiary sites. If hives need to be moved, this is a good time to do it, before the bees start flying properly and getting to know flight paths. If transporting a distance, disruption to the cluster can be minimized by wedging the frames in so they don't swing and making sure the hives are placed with the frames running in the direction the vehicle is travelling.





I will be cleaning and scorching my spare floors so they are ready to replace the over wintered ones next month. Spare equipment can be cleaned, frames made so you are ready to go when the need arises. It all helps a little, in keeping ahead.