



Spring Observations

You can learn a great deal about the health status and activity of your bees through observation. This is especially helpful in the early Spring when temperatures are too low to open the hive - don't be tempted until temperatures are consistently hovering around 12 to 15 degrees. On a sunny day, even with temperatures as low as 5 degrees, you may notice activity at the entrance of the hive.

Cleansing flights

Bees have the ability to retain faeces for several weeks rather than voiding in the hive but will take the opportunity to relieve themselves whenever the weather allows. Spotting on hives roofs is not uncommon.



However, streaks of brown on the front of the hive may be signs of dysentery either from fermented stores or nosema.



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Make a note in your hive record for future reference for your first inspection.

You can find out more about nosema from the National Bee Unit here:

<https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/diseases-and-pests/other-bee-diseases-and-viruses/nosema>



Orientation flights

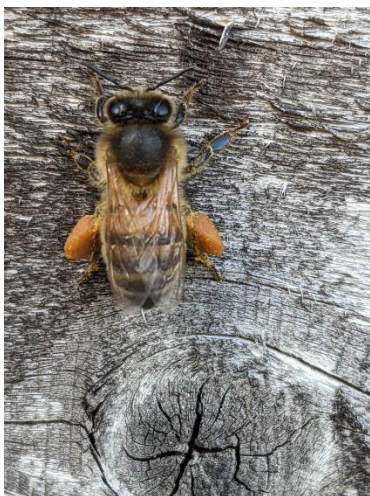
Young bees venture out, perhaps for their first time. They walk out and fly up then turn towards the hive looking at it and making a mental picture of “home”. It is a joyful sight and sound.



It is too early in the season for drones, so if you see drones at the entrance your queen may be failing or she has become a drone layer. Make a note in your hive record.

Foraging flights

Workers bringing in pollen (from snowdrops, crocus and hazel) are a positive sign that there is brood to feed – but remember there is no nectar flow so continue to monitor stores which bees will be using up to feed brood, make wax and keep the brood nest warm.





It is also quite normal to see a few corpses of winter bees which have been ejected unceremoniously out the entrance

No activity can be normal too, especially if temperatures are in single figures as the bees may be clustering around the brood nest. Check that the entrance isn't blocked with dead bees by shining a torch under the mesh floor and peering through the entrance. Clear any corpses blocking the entrance.

If there are no signs of life, take a quick look under the crown board and if the colony has perished either remove it from the apiary or close the entrance to prevent robbing and potentially spreading disease.

Using an Inspection Board

If you want further insight as to what is going on inside, place a varroa inspection boards under the mesh floor for 2 or 3 days.



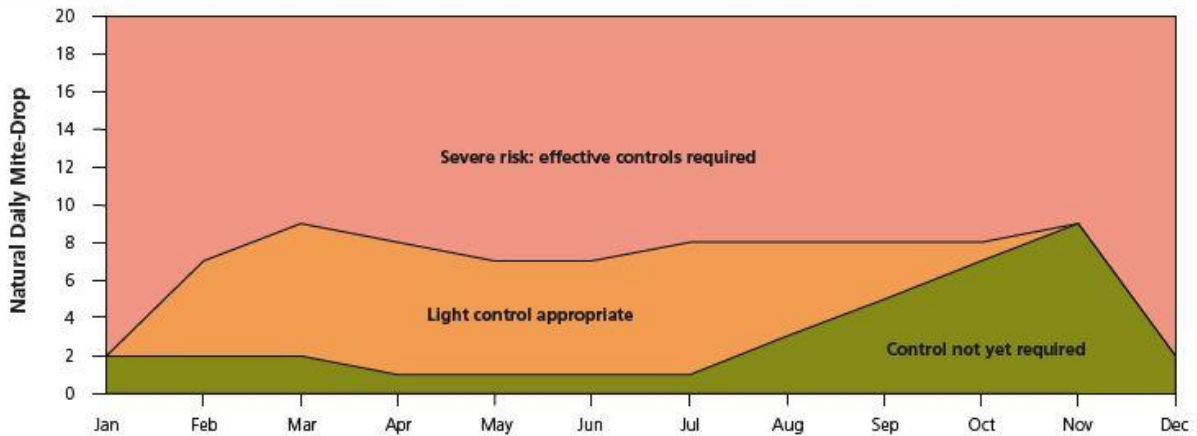
Lines of brown cappings indicate brood is being uncapped and will show the position of the brood nest. Lighter coloured cappings are from stores.





More importantly, do you see any varroa? A daily mite drop (DMD) of 2 per day at this time of year is acceptable.

Figure 54: Using mite drop monitoring to decide appropriate level of controls to employ



You can find out more about varroa from the National Bee Unit here:

[https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/assets/PDFs/3_Resources_for_beekeepers/Advisory_leaflets/APH A_Managing_Varroa_2020_ELECTRONIC_ONLY-1.pdf](https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/assets/PDFs/3_Resources_for_beekeepers/Advisory_leaflets/APH_A_Managing_Varroa_2020_ELECTRONIC_ONLY-1.pdf)

You may find a few mouse droppings as a mouse visits the inspection board. The occasional bits of bee leg, antennae and wing are also quite normal.

However, chewed up cappings and scattered mouse droppings may suggest you have a mouse inside the hive and worth further investigation.

If you have any concerns get in touch with the Mentoring Service

<https://dunblanebeekeepers.com/members-only-2/mentoring/>

The Bee Healthy Team
Dunblane & Stirling Beekeepers' Association
February 2024