

SEASONAL MANAGEMENT OF HONEY BEE COLONIES

Principles of Bee management

All the management practices needed for increased honey production revolve around the following basic principles of bee management.

- Ensuring built-up of foraging force of bees at right time for collection of surplus nectar.
- Providing space for storage and ripening of nectar into honey by the bees.
- Removing honey from hive at right time and extracting it. iv)
- Preparing the colonies to withstand any period of dearth and menace of bee enemies.

Generally, beekeeping activities start with the onset of spring in cold areas. Therefore, it is appropriate to know the management practices, starting from spring. However, in some parts of the country there are different seasons and the management varies as per season.

SPRING MANAGEMENT

The advent of spring, particularly in northern parts of the country, marks the beginning of warm weather and blooming of several tree species and cultivated crops. Following management practices are performed:

- Remove the protective covering of lightly packed hives in the early spring. But in the heavily packed colonies, the packing is removed only when daily maximum temperature has reached 16°C.
- Examine the colonies on a sunny day. Check the food store and general condition of the colony. The examination should be for short duration to avoid brood chilling and robbing

- It is a good practice to equalize the strength of normal colonies in an apiary by giving brood frames to the needy colonies
- The colonies which do not have brood, are likely to be queenless or if queen has failed and has become drone layer, there will be predominance of drone brood. Such colonies if are weak (less than 5 frames), be united with other needy normal colonies. If these are strong, then provide a mated queen and if not available, give a frame of brood with eggs and young larvae for rearing new queen
- Give stimulatory feeding of sugar syrup (dilute syrup; 30 per cent) to the bee colonies on the onset of spring which is indicated by the start of blooming of spring flowers. Take all the steps to guard against the robbing by bees. Bees will put their whole force during this period for brood rearing
- Provide raised combs or frames with comb foundation sheets if raised combs are not available so that there is no shortage of space for brood rearing. But be careful not to over expand the brood in the uncertain weather conditions of early spring, which may result in chilling of brood. Once the colony is strong enough to cover the brood, there is no risk of this problem
- Examine the colonies at least once a week on a sunny day and when conditions permit, clean the debris from the bottom boards. Provide empty frames as per needs of the colonies. Ensure that each colony always has at least 5 kg of food stores
- During spring old bees die which are normally replaced by young bees. If mortality of old bees exceeds the rate of emergence of young bees, the colonies show sign of dwindling which is known as spring dwindling. Such colonies should be provided with adequate stores of pollen and honey and be given 1-2 sealed brood frames from the strong colonies.

If all above mentioned practices are followed, the colonies will be well built up by the time of honey flow when maximum strength is needed. However, increase in strength also induces swarming. In warmer areas of the country, all these practices can be carried out during early summer.