

Domestic Beekeeping : Checking Hives and Equipment

DOMESTIC beekeepers should make a detailed examination of their hives during October to check brood, stores, condition of the bees, and equipment. Points which require attention in this work are dealt with in this article by R. Goddard, Apiary Instructor, Department of Agriculture, Tauranga.

WHEN opening the hive the domestic beekeeper should use the smoker with discretion and not as a weapon to drive and force the bees into submission. Too much smoke, beside tainting the honey in the hive and tending to excite the bees unnecessarily, will make working conditions most unpleasant.

After the bees have been gently smoked the lid should be removed and placed upside down in front of the hive stand. The supers can then be lifted on to it, thus enabling the beekeeper to clean all accumulated debris off the bottom board. In northern parts of New Zealand at this time of the year it is desirable to place all the brood together in the bottom box, with frames containing pollen and honey on the outside walls. During these manipulations all damaged frames, including those containing excessive drone cells, should be replaced with good worker combs.

Patchy brood found during the examination may indicate either the presence of a poor queen or disease in the hive. If disease is suspected, a sample of the brood should be posted immediately to the Apiary Instructor for the district. When the hive is re-assembled it is usual for the bottom brood chamber to contain 10 frames, with 9 frames in the second box. Damp and ragged mats should be replaced and all grass clipped around the hive stand.

Stores

It has been estimated that an average colony requires about 25lb. of store honey at this time of the year to meet all future requirements until sufficient nectar is available. The domestic beekeeper must realise that supplies of both pollen and honey diminish rapidly after brood rearing commences. It is therefore essential to keep a close watch on the condition of the hive, and artificial feeding

must be resorted to if the colony becomes low in stores.

Feeding

Feeding is greatly simplified when the beekeeper has used foresight the previous season and kept back frames of honey which can be placed quickly and quietly in the hive. However, as most amateurs are reluctant to hold even part of their crop in storage, it is necessary to feed a substitute for honey. Sugar syrup (equal parts of lukewarm water and sugar) is generally used, and though this can be fed in many different ways, it is considered that either the division board feeder or a 5lb. honey tin with a press-in lid is the most suitable.

The division board feeder, about the same size as a standard-sized frame,



A division board feeder being placed in position.

can be made easily from either wood or tinplate. To give the bees some foothold it is necessary to place a wooden float inside the feeder. An empty frame should be removed from the hive and the feeder inserted where it can be filled readily by using a watering can with the spray nozzle removed.

The domestic beekeeper may find feeding with a 5lb. honey tin the easier of the two methods. A number of small holes are punched in the lid with a frame nail. The tin is then filled with syrup, the lid replaced, and the tin inverted directly over the brood nest. An empty super is then placed on the hive before the lid is put on. If no hive mat is available, sacking may be placed on top of the frames around the tin to preserve colony warmth.

To prevent unnecessary robbing extreme care should be taken to ensure that no syrup is spilt, the bees are not given more than they can take up in a night, and that all feeding operations are carried out in the evening.



Proper attire enables the beekeeper to handle apiary work with the minimum of discomfort.

Equipment

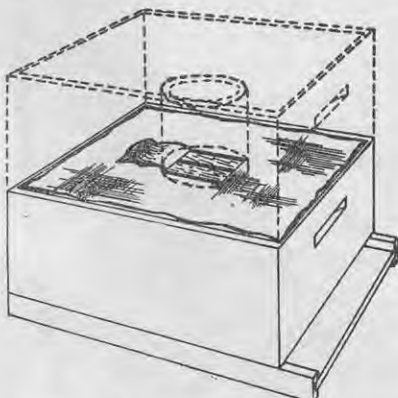
During the shortage of wax many domestic beekeepers resorted to the use of strips of foundation in frames, with the result that the bees built an excessive amount of drone comb and the beekeeper was at a loss to find good worker comb for use in the brood nest. Beekeepers should not try to economise in this important aspect of beekeeping, as it is essential that full sheets of foundation are used at all times.

All equipment should be checked thoroughly during the month and particular attention given to the condition of combs, supers, etc., an ample supply of which should be available for use on the hives as the season progresses.

Rules to Observe

In carrying out apiary work the domestic beekeeper should observe the following rules:—

1. Never open or examine a hive on cold, windy days.
2. During hive manipulation do not disturb the bees unnecessarily.
3. Know what you are doing and do it gently and efficiently with the greatest possible speed.
4. Always be properly attired for apiary work.



Position of tin feeder over hole cut in hive mat.