

Spring Examination of Hives

Seasonal Notes for the Domestic Beekeeper

WITH the start of the new beekeeping season, R. Goddard, Apiary Instructor, Department of Agriculture, Tauranga, outlines spring work in the apiary and the method of determining whether a colony requires urgent attention by an examination of hive entrances.

THE early-spring examination of hives is perhaps one of the most important tasks undertaken by the beekeeper each season. Decisions made at this time affect the progress and welfare of the colony during the critical months to follow.

When hives are first opened in spring it is not necessary to examine each frame individually; a quick glance at one or two frames taken from the centre of the brood nest is usually sufficient. Although colony condition varies greatly in all districts, the competent beekeeper is able to judge in a few moments the condition of a hive of bees and their immediate requirements.

Points to Watch

For those beekeepers who have wintered hives for the first time and who are starting a new season the following points should be watched during the course of the first spring examination.

1. Has the colony wintered well?
2. Are there sufficient stores? At least 25lb. of stored honey is required.
3. Has the colony a queen?
4. Is the hive free of disease?

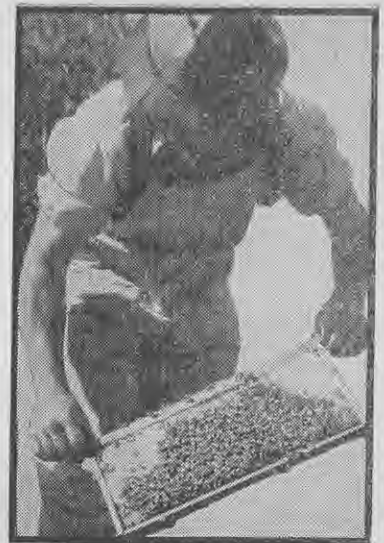
These reminders are of extreme importance. Domestic beekeepers too often fail to appreciate the necessity of this early-spring examination. Consequently, it is sometimes too late

to remedy trouble which could have been checked if discovered in the initial examination.

In spring when hives are breeding heavily honey and pollen are consumed in large quantities by the bees and a break in the nectar flow often leaves the colony with very little stores. It has been noticed frequently that, although domestic beekeepers have wintered their hives successfully, they tend to overlook the supply of stores during spring, with the result that bees are lost through starvation. This can be attributed only to negligence on the part of the beekeeper, as a little time spent on examination of colonies would save undue loss and further expense in establishing new hives.

Signs at Hive Entrances

The beekeeper who studies the habits of bees and who takes an intelligent interest in their behaviour can judge the condition of a colony to some extent by an examination of the movements of bees at the hive entrance. The beekeeper who notices a few dead bees at the hive entrance in spring need not be concerned. However, large quantities of dead and decomposing bees may mean that the colony has been robbed of its stores and has died from starvation, or is suffering from some adult-bee disease. An immediate examination of the interior usually reveals the cause of the trouble.



[Sparrow Industrial Pictures Ltd. photo.]
Making a quick examination for brood and stores.

Robbing

Robbing may be detected by watching hive entrances closely. Fighting bees and small particles of wax cappings can be seen sometimes on the alighting board. If, on the other hand, the bees are on the verge of starvation due to lack of stores, dead larvae pulled out of the brood cells are sometimes deposited in front of the entrance. Hives in this condition would not live long unless fed immediately with combs of honey saved for the purpose from the previous season, or a mixture of equal parts of sugar and warm water placed in a feeder.

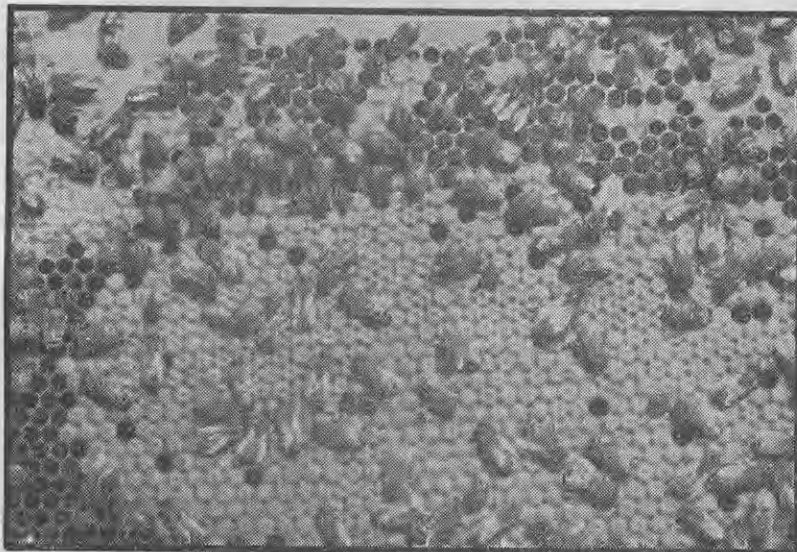
Recognition of Presence of Disease

Crawling bees, apparently unable to fly, sometimes indicate the presence of some adult-bee disease. Bees suffering from a form of paralysis, which is more prevalent in the warmer districts, generally have distended abdomens and are greasy looking. They also appear to shake and tremble and crawl from the hive in large numbers. There is no evidence of transmission of the disease to nearby colonies.

Nosema apis disease normally attacks bees in spring. Infected bees appear very sluggish and are often found at the hive entrance. However, if hives suffering from these diseases are requeened with a young, vigorous queen they usually recover and gradually regain their strength.

On warm sunny days later in spring bees are often noticed clustering at the hive entrance. This is usually a sign that the bees are short of room and the addition of a super is all that is required to start the colony working; but a quick examination of the colony inside the hive is desirable.

By adopting the principle of watching hive entrances closely in spring, the domestic beekeeper who has a minimum of spare time is able to pick out the colonies which are in need of urgent attention.



[National Publicity Studios photo.]
Brood in healthy condition and normal activity in the centre of the brood nest.