



Pre-Winter Checks

Practical Fact Sheet

1

Please note: This series of MBKA Fact Sheets are intended to accompany practical sessions and demonstrations at members' apiaries during the season.

Of course, there is no "right way" to keep bees and most objectives can be achieved in several different ways. The advice presented in these notes is therefore selective, representing the method or methods used commonly and generally accepted as "best practice".

They should be regarded as guidance notes. It is expected that revisions will be frequent in the early phase of their production!

There are the 4 key aspects to consider prior to winter; dealing with these satisfactorily will give the best chance of strong colonies emerging next spring, ready to store the early honey flows such as top fruit and oilseed rape.

- Ensure hives are wind and waterproof
- protect against mice, woodpeckers
- reduce varroa population
- ensure that adequate stores are available

Ensure that hive parts fit together without gaps and that the roof is completely waterproof. If you have solid floors, slope the floor slightly towards the entrance so that water cannot accumulate at the back.

Fit mouse-guards and take measures to stop woodpeckers from attacking the hives, should this be a problem in your apiary. A chicken-wire cage that fits over the whole hive, with a 6-9" air gap, is probably the most reliable defence.

Autumn is the time to give serious consideration to varroa numbers. Chemical treatments, including thymol-based products, can be used once the honey supers have been removed; these products should be used strictly as stated on the labels. If you have been using IPM methods during the year and have determined that mite numbers are low, you may decide to postpone treatment until the spring. Continue to monitor Daily Mite Drop in case of late invasion. (See separate fact-sheet on varroa treatment options)

When the bees are finally bedded down for winter, there should be a full complement of frames with stores; 40 lb is generally reckoned to be necessary. This may be achieved naturally if there are late flows (eg Ivy) but, should such flows not materialise, the colonies should be fed with strong sugar syrup from a rapid feeder.