MBKA Medway Beekeepers Association

Varroa Treatment - Queen Trap

Practical Fact-Sheet

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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!

The control of varroa populations is vital to the health of our bees and this can best be achieved by the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM takes into account the level of infestation, the time of year and strength of the colony and then makes appropriate choices of treatment from an array of chemical and non-chemical options.

Typically, an Autumn treatment with a chemical varroacide followed by a winter treatment with an organic acid will keep things under control. This approach should be reasonably reliable, although instances will still occur when mite levels start to reach damaging levels in the spring or summer, times when the queen is in full lay (which rules out oxalic or lactic acids) and honey supers are in place (which prevents the use of thymol-based products). MAQS (formic acid) may still be a suitable chemical option but many beekeepers prefer to use non-chemical methods during the active season.

There is a very efficient method for removing mites which requires a queen in full lay and can be accomplished with honey supers in place – this is the queen-trapping method. Efficiencies of 95%+ are claimed and honey yields are frequently impressive too.

The method is simple and requires little extra equipment, however the time-table is important and it will be found easier to carry out the manipulations with two beekeepers; a marked queen is highly desirable.

Full details of the method are documented elsewhere (eg NBU Leaflet "Managing Varroa") but, in essence, the queen is restricted to a single frame for 9 days (frame A), then moved on to frame B, then frame C and then released. On each occasion, once the frame has been laid up for 9 days, it is left in the colony for a further 9 days (during which time, all of the cells are sealed) and then taken out. Thus, over more than a complete brood cycle, all of the reproductive opportunities for the mite come to nothing; they are destroyed in their sealed cells.

The method can be accomplished, as above, using 3 sacrificial frames and 9-day intervals or, alternatively, with 4 frames at 7 day intervals. The latter regime will suit weekend beekeepers and is probably preferable in any case if smaller brood frames are used (eg standard British National)

This is a valuable technique; it is very effective and can be used when other options are limited. It may seem complicated on paper but is quite simple in practice – give it a try!!