

National Bee Unit

Advice Note June 2011



Wasps

This year has seen exceptional weather patterns and in the south and east of England there was an early warm spring. Many beekeepers noticed queen wasps around their apiaries and it is clear that nest construction started earlier than normal. The first worker wasps usually emerge into the wider environment from mid June, however this year in the south and east in particular the bee inspectorate and many beekeepers are reporting the presence of large numbers of worker wasps in apiaries and around bee hives. It is likely that wasp populations will peak earlier and for a longer period this year.

Wasps are often seen beside beehives generally looking for dead bees to use as food but they are often intent on robbing honey from beehives particularly when their maternal colony collapses later in the season, usually October. The writer has already observed wasps robbing hives of honey. With the prospective high levels of wasp populations and the possibility of earlier wasp colony collapse, be on your guard and take preventative measures.

Generally strong healthy colonies can defend themselves but smaller colonies, nuclei, etc., are at a higher risk of robbing. The presence of varroa mites, especially if mite populations are over the economic treatment threshold, also increases the risk.

There are three elements of control that beekeepers can use:

Trapping wasps in the apiary.

Placing wasp traps such as jars containing a mixture of water, a teaspoon of jam and some wine or beer dregs will help. Cover the jar aperture with a lid or paper cap and punch a hole in it about the diameter of a pencil. Plum jam seems to be best! Do not use honey, sugar syrup or Ambrosia. Wasps will go these traps as an easier option than bee hives and drown.

Commercial traps such as 'WaspBane', which may be more effective and easier to use, are available from some bee equipment suppliers and other commercial outlets.

Assisting the bee colony.

Reduce the hive entrance to make it easier for the bees to defend the colony. With severe problems cut the entrance to a single bee-way. A small tube entrance can be easier for bees to defend. Closing open mesh floors with the floor insert will also help.

Wasps attacking the reduced entrance of a nucleus colony



Controlling wasp nests in the environment.

Destroying nests in the spring and summer is clearly a good method of reducing the overall wasp population and reducing robbing problems; so ensuring no wasps' nests are close to your apiary helps. However destruction of wasp colonies on a wide scale is disadvantageous to the environment. Further details are on BeeBase, please see FAQ number 35 Honey bee colonies and Wasps.

National Bee Unit

Food and Environment Research Agency

Sand Hutton, York. YO41 1LZ

Telephone 01 904 462 510 e mail nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk NBU Web site: www.nationalbeeunit.com

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