



# The Beekeeping Year

Lancaster Beekeepers advisory leaflet No 8

One of the most frequently asked questions by people considering taking up beekeeping is "how much time does it take?" Clearly this depends on a number of factors including the number of colonies you have and how deeply you wish to become involved.

This calendar provides an indicative guide based on having 2-3 colonies and assuming a typical, seasonal weather pattern. It needs to be borne in mind that the bees have not read this calendar and that they adapt their behaviour according to seasonal variations and conditions within their hive.

**In particular, the last few years have seen milder but longer winters resulting in the bees being more active and consuming more stores than normal.**

## JANUARY

The bees will be in a cluster, the size and shape of a rugby ball. There may be small amounts of worker brood present but no drones. On milder days, the bees may emerge for short cleansing flights.

### Things to do:

- If there is snow, the hive entrance should be shielded to prevent glare.

**Time requirement:** Less than one hour

## FEBRUARY

The bees will still be in a cluster but the queen will start to lay more. The bees may emerge to forage on crocus and winter heathers on milder days.

### Things to do:

- Now is the time to check and prepare equipment for the coming season and order the new season's equipment catalogues.

**Time requirement:** One to two hours

## MARCH

The queen will significantly increase her rate of lay and the bees will emerge to forage more frequently. Winter stores will be consumed at an ever increasing rate.

### Things to do:

- Regular inspections should be made to check on the available stores and feeding begun if necessary.
- Equipment for the new season should be ordered.

**Time requirement:** One to two hours

## **APRIL**

The colony continues to expand rapidly and the odd drones appear. The bees are out foraging on most days.

### **Things to do:**

- Queens should be identified and marked.
- Now is the time to put on the first supers

**Time requirement:** Two to three hours

## **MAY**

The queen should be at her maximum rate of lay and it should have brood at all stages over most of the brood box. In most seasons the Spring nectar and pollen flow should reach its peak.

### **Things to do:**

- Add supers
- Remove rape honey
- Inspect for varroa and treat if necessary
- Begin weekly swarm inspections
- Make artificial swarms if necessary
- Create nuclei if required

**Time requirement:** Five to six hours

## **JUNE**

The queen's rate of lay starts to decrease. Unswarmed colonies will be very large.

### **Things to do:**

- Check for "June gap" – the gap between the Spring and Summer nectar and pollen flows.
- Feed if necessary
- Extract rape honey
- Maintain weekly swarm inspections
- Make artificial swarms if necessary
- Create nuclei if required

**Time requirement:** Five to six hours

## **JULY**

The queen's rate of lay continues to decrease. Drones are still present. The main summer nectar flow should occur.

### **Things to do:**

- Continue weekly swarm inspections
- Add supers
- Re-unite colonies and artificial swarms.

**Time requirement:** Four to six hours

## **AUGUST**

The colony strength starts to diminish and there is reduced outside activity. There are still drones around. Swarm control checks are no longer needed.

### **Things to do:**

- Take action to prevent robbing
- Re-queen if necessary
- Go on holiday!

**Time requirement:** One or two hours

## **SEPTEMBER**

Drones have largely disappeared and the colony population is largely reduced. The queen reduces or even stops laying.

### **Things to do:**

- Remove honey
- Start winter feeding if necessary

**Time requirement:** Two to three hours

## **OCTOBER**

The bees are preparing for winter. Dependent on the weather, late foraging may still occur.

### **Things to do:**

- Inspect for varroa and treat if necessary
- Finish winter feeding
- Check that the hive is secure for winter
- Enter the honey show

**Time requirement:** One or two hours

## **NOVEMBER**

There will be little external activity and the bees will begin to cluster.

### **Things to do:**

- Clean equipment, repair if necessary and store for the winter.
- Attend the Beekeepers' Annual Dinner

**Time requirement:** Two to three hours (excluding the dinner!)

## **DECEMBER**

The bees will be in a tight cluster.

### **Things to do:**

- Enjoy Christmas!