

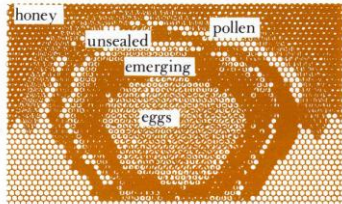
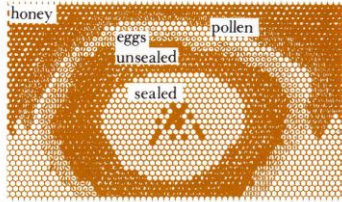
A Guide to Inspections from end of March until the end of June.

What happens in the hive from January - March

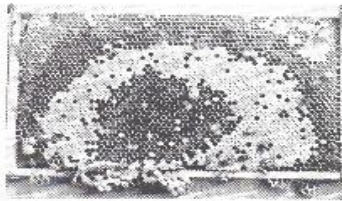
The bees are beginning to stir now the days are getting longer. The worker bees will be feeding the queen a little honey and she will respond by laying a few eggs at the centre of the winter cluster. The bees closest to the eggs will vibrate their wing muscles to keep the eggs at 35degC to enable them to hatch into larva. The only food available is their stores of honey and pollen in the hive. These larvae are fed with royal jelly pollen and honey. The honey has to be diluted with condensation collected from inside the hive as the larva cannot digest undiluted honey. If the weather is warm enough you may see the bees bringing in pollen from aconites, snowdrops and hazel. Fresh pollen is always better than stored pollen and seeing it being brought into the hive is a sign of a healthy colony. From now until the end of March the winter bees will gradually die and be carried out of the hive but will be replaced by new bees from this early brood rearing. The winter population of 8000 bees will gradually die out and be replaced by this early brood rearing. By the time of the first inspection in early April all the bees will be young.

What you should be seeing on the combs during inspections

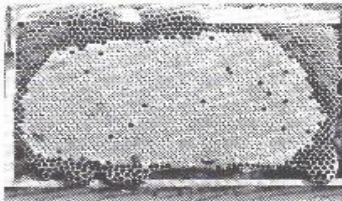
The changing brood pattern



The changing brood pattern (1)

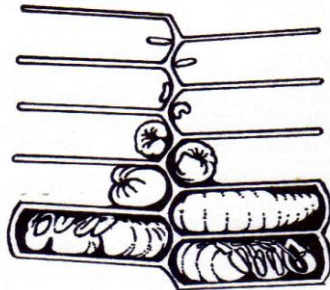


The changing brood pattern (2): note the two queen cells



The changing brood pattern (3)

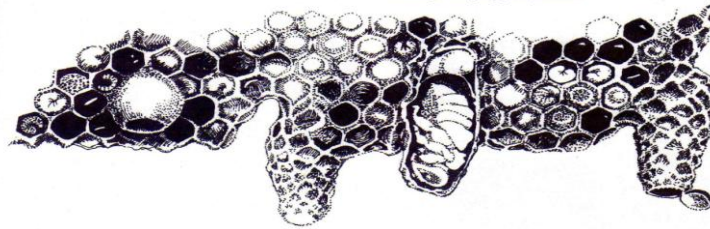
April ... Inspections will now be every seven days, weather permitting. The weather should be getting warmer and the blossoms appearing. The odd drone will be seen and the population should be increasing dramatically. A good brood pattern will be in the ratio of 1:2:4; that is eggs/larva/sealed brood. If you see a circle of sealed brood in the centre of the comb these will be surrounded with larva and these will be surrounded with eggs. The pattern will change when the sealed brood hatches it will be replaced with eggs. The larva will then be sealed brood and the eggs larva. And so the pattern goes on. Supers will need to be put on the hive now.



Section through cells showing developing bee

May ... With good weather a flow of nectar and pollen coming in the queen will be reaching her peak laying rate and there should be brood filling the brood chamber. Add more supers if the bees are crowded in them - give them space. Watch out for signs of swarming. If there are queen cups with eggs the colony wants to swarm. At this stage you may squash these to delay swarming. You can delay swarming but eventually you will have to do swarm management to keep your bees together. For artificial swarming an additional hive will be necessary. For a method of swarm control see below.

Left to right: queen cup, sealed queen cell, section through cell showing developing queen, used cell



June ... Unswarmed colonies will have lots of bees and the queen's laying will slacken. If you have oil seed rape honey in the supers now is the time to take it off or it will crystallise in the comb. You can take a crop of honey now but be aware that the bees need a lot of food and June can be a funny month for a nectar supply. Continue swarm inspections.

The illustrations seen on this page are from the publication 'Bees at the bottom of the Garden' by Alan Campion illustrations by Gay Hodgson. An excellent inexpensive non technical book on how to keep bees.