

Apis m. Esoteria 12

Observing working Honeybees

How do I know my bees are working? You observe them coming and going. You can see them collect pollen in their pollen baskets. When the non-pollen foragers stop on the porch or just inside the entrance and another bee approaches, they will transfer the nectar, face to face.

A lot of bees sitting on the front porch facing the same direction flapping their wings like crazy are creating a wind current through the hive to cool it or help honey dehydration.

If you have a lot of bees on the porch and the front of the hive just sitting around, they are not working. The scout bees have not found a source of nectar or pollen and alerted the other foragers to go to work. The foragers won't waste their energy looking for something that isn't there.

This creates a time of concern on the beekeepers' part. Is this a temporary situation, a day or two? Or is there a dearth period and I have to supplement syrup feeding. Perhaps the hive space is full of brood and food so the foragers have no place to put nectar/honey so they have quit working in anticipation of swarming.

If the dearth is prolonged the bees will abscond, after eating all the food in the hive. This is similar to swarming except the bees depart the area faster. They go to the other side of the mountain looking for food. Usually there is nothing there either, so they perish for lack of food. Building up to absconding, the bees consume all the food in the colony, the queen stops laying eggs, and frequently the bees will cannibalize the larvae (it is just good protein). After absconding you will find no dead brood, food, or dead bees in the colony.

If you need emergency food now, before you can get to the store and buy sugar and then make the syrup, use powdered sugar. You can just dust some of the top bars inside the hive to discourage robbing of the weak hive. Dusting the powdered

sugar on the front door of strong hives will discourage them from robbing weaker hives because they don't need to do it. Reduce the entrance of the weak hive (close it up with screen) and place a little powdered sugar away from the entrance but where it can be located by the robbers. This will keep the robbers on the front porch instead of them going inside. The larger amount of powdered sugar on the strong hive will keep the robbers at home until they lose interest in the weak hive.

Fondant is a good emergency food. Place it on the top bars of the brood box.

To spot robbing, things just don't look normal around the front of the hive being robbed. There is a lot of erratic flying. This will catch your attention. Watch closely and you will see the robber bees come out of the hive and fly directly home instead of taking some flight path up and away from the hive like they are going foraging. Early in the robbing process the guard bees of the weak hive will be fighting and stinging the invading bees. You will see them rolling around on the front porch. After most of the guard bees have died from committing Hari Kari in defense of the hive, the invaders will come and go at will. It may be necessary to move the weak hive at night to confuse the robbers the next day. Twenty to thirty feet within the same apiary should work. Close the weak hive with a piece of window screen to stop robbers from entering and for ventilation, before moving.