

Stockport Apiary Report December 2024

The season of 2024 has undoubtedly been a challenging one.

The 2023/24 winter was good for us. We had 14 colonies go into the winter, and only two failed to go through. One of them was the top bar hive, which has been an interesting project and a good resource from an educational point of view. This hive was struggling at the back end of the season and did not build itself up for winter. It has not been repopulated but left out as a bait hive. (No bees took up the kind offer during the summer.) The other colony that succumbed to the winter failed during the spring build-up as it was not strong enough to absorb the late cold snaps.

With 12 colonies now progressing into the summer period, you would expect to accommodate at least 21 or more by the end of the year, assuming that no reduction techniques are employed.

The actual end-of-season result was that we had 14 hives going into winter.

We experienced real problems with keeping colonies queen right. Especially early in the season. Most of the colonies then decided to swarm around the same time. Then the weather turned bad, and getting the queens mated was very difficult. Eventually, these problems righted themselves, and we had a reasonable crop of honey of 431 lbs. Fortunately, we had replaced our old nine-frame spinner with a twelve-frame machine, which speeded extraction.

Toward the end of the season, we were running short of supers, not for accommodating frames but for using as ekes to provide top-up feeds while awaiting their release back into use following extraction.

The fence securing our apiary is quite a few years old, and the timbers are rotting away. We have identified the replacement steel materials needed for a long-lasting, secure enclosure. We intend to do this work during winter, using a specialist contractor rather than relying on members.

We currently store our goods in a single, congested shipping container, so we approached the Stockport Running Club, which has spare storage capacity. We agreed to use one of their containers to store jars and bee food in return for some jars of honey instead of rent.

In addition to running our tuition courses, the apiary was used for the BBKA Basic Assessment exams and two sessions of the Basic Husbandry exam.

David Lilley, Apiary Manager