

A MONTHLY SERIES TO HELP THOSE STARTING TO KEEP BEES

# For Beginners: March

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**I am an optimist, so I am looking forward to the coming season. I am quite sure that the next season will be better than the last, I will have healthy bees and the weather will be fine. Oh, and my bees will not swarm.**

Where I live, in north Oxfordshire, many of the spring flowers and plants have been out for some weeks and on warm days the bees have been foraging. It is the appearance of these flowers and the increased warmth which signal the end of winter for the bees. The flowers provide pollen, which is necessary for the development of the larvae. It is the availability of this pollen which encourages the workers to increase the feeding rate of the queen, and the queen, in turn, to increase her laying rate.

Most of the old winter bees will have died by now and you may well find them on the floor



Photo: Richard Rickitt

*The availability of pollen is crucial to encourage spring egg-laying and brood development. Goat willow (Salix caprea) can be an important source of pollen in March.*

of the hive when you do your first inspection. With luck, they will have died naturally, having lived through the winter and sustained the first young of the

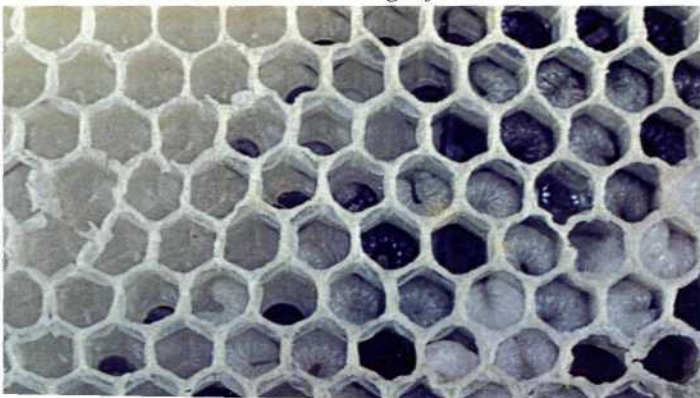
new season.

The number of new workers will be increasing steadily, but they will be under great strain. If you remember the graph from last month (February, page 18), you will know that at this time of the year there are more larvae than adult bees and the adults can struggle to provide sufficient food. They must feed the queen as well as the larvae, keep the brood nest warm and forage for pollen and nectar.

## Spring Surprises

As long as the bees are healthy and the weather is kind, then all should be well. However, as we all know, British spring weather is unpredictable and can turn very cold suddenly and unexpectedly. When this happens, the colony may return to its cluster and the larvae on the extremities of the brood nest can become cold and neglected, leading to a situation called 'chilled brood'. Usually this

*Dark or black shrivelled larvae are a sign of chilled brood*



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