

Patterson's Page

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Roger Patterson is often seen in the apiary with his camera. Here, he shares with us some of the information that can be gleaned from photographing what you see at the hive.

Unless it is for a specific purpose, when inspecting colonies of bees I usually only have a smoker, hive tool, marking pen, scissors, queen cages and my camera with me. My bees are close to the house or car, so if I need anything else I can soon get it.

My camera is used a lot, which is why it is covered in propolis, but it is one of the most useful pieces of kit I have. There is so much to see when beekeeping and if you have a camera with you it is surprising how much you will use it. I am not a good photographer, I am more interested in recording what I see than in worrying about composing a shot or whether the background is in focus or not. Much of what you see, especially the behaviour of bees, is gone quickly, so it is a case of point and shoot, even though you can sometimes be out of focus, or have shallow depth of field.



The camera tells me the photo above was taken at 8.43 am on 3 October, so why the moisture on the alighting board? The floor is solid with a narrow, shallow entrance. There was a tremendous nectar flow from ivy. Much of this moisture is what has been driven off the nectar overnight by the bees. This would probably not show with an open mesh floor. If you are interested you could research how bees evaporate water off nectar.

Right: Here you can see bees fanning at an entrance after a hive has been inspected. It is always worth looking at the hive entrance, both before and after an inspection, to see the difference in the bees' behaviour. Bees expose their Nasanov glands and fan for some time until they settle down. This can confuse a queen from another hive that is returning from a mating flight, so she may go into the wrong hive and be killed. This is not mentioned in many books. If you know you have queens about to be mated, then inspect adjacent colonies in the evening. Watching an entrance at different times and photographing them will teach you how fanning bees behave differently, depending on whether they are attracting flying bees back to the entrance or ventilating the hive.



Many cameras are available that are capable of taking good beekeeping photographs; at little cost many can be purchased online, including second-hand cameras. I have also seen some very good images taken with phones. [Editors' note: David Wootton wrote a helpful article giving us tips on how to best take photographs of honey bees in *BBKA News*, April 2014, p129–30, which readers might like to read again.]

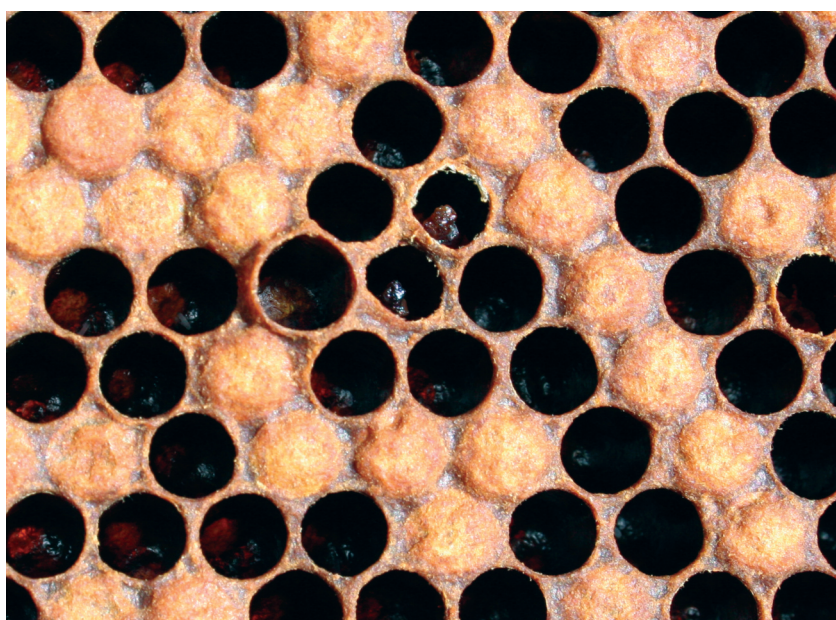
I set out below some photographs that, although not great quality, are examples of what can be recorded. There are many reasons for taking images, one of which could be as an aid to records, where the date of the photograph can tell you how a colony, swarm or nucleus has progressed better than the written word can. If you see something and you do not know what it is you can take an image and research it later.



This swarm that was hived the day before had intended to abscond, but they were prevented from doing so because I had clipped the queen's wing. The garden table top was used to dump the swarm on. Swarms are always likely to abscond, so I prefer to clip the queen's wing rather than the often advised placing of a queen excluder (includer) under the brood box. All photos are by Roger Patterson.



When inspecting a colony look closely at what the bees are doing. If you do not know what they are doing, then take a photo and find out later. These bees are probably transferring food between themselves, either from a forager to a house bee or as part of food transfer (trophallaxis). Just a simple thing like this can lead you to learn much more about the workings of a colony, so understanding it more. You must be aware that when smoking a colony the bees will disperse, so you will not see many of these things.



I visit a lot of beekeepers and I see a lot of different things. Very often I see something that I have not seen before or that jogs my memory. This is a very simple clearer board that can easily be made from recycled materials. A photo is far better than relying on memory. If you need an idea of size, then place something like a coin, hive tool or mobile phone in the picture.

An important part of beekeeping is the recognition of healthy sealed and unsealed brood. The brood shown in the photo above is clearly unhealthy, but what is it? It is sac brood, which has become much more of a problem in my area of Sussex in the last five to ten years. I have been called out on several occasions recently because the beekeepers thought it might be AFB. A photo like this can easily be emailed to the Bee Inspector very quickly and could save them a journey.

In this departure from the usual format of my articles I hope I have encouraged you to include a camera in your beekeeping kit, but one word of warning – if it is used as much as mine and in similar conditions it will need to be tough. Treat photography as another aspect of beekeeping in the same way as you might microscopy, making candles, polish or cakes.