

A Locker-Land Hive Inspection

Now that the bees are settled into the hive, as a proactive beekeeper you will want to inspect your hives on a regular basis. Typically, this is going to involve observing and opening each hive at least every couple of weeks if not more frequently (like weekly). Do you know what to do? Do you know what you want to see?

We here at Locker-Land created a sort of check sheet that helps guide you through an inspection. Perhaps this can help you to take notes and maintain records on your hives as well.

Date:

Time:

Weather: Breezy? Cloudy? Sunny?

Temperature:

This basic information is helpful so you can get to know the demeanor of your bees and the way they react to changing conditions.

Upon approaching the hive, what do you see?

Are bees coming and going?

If there is no activity, this could be a sign that something is wrong.

Are they bringing in pollen?

If they are bringing in pollen, it typically means there are larvae that need to be fed. This is a positive sign.

Do you see brown spots of fecal matter on the hive itself?

If you happen to see a lot of smudges and smears, this could be a sign of nosema. Argh. If so, you'll need to look to see if this is evident in the hive as well.

Ok, let's open the hive.

Do you smell anything funky?

A dirty sock or gym locker smell may be a sign of foulbrood.

Are the bees spread throughout the frames?

This could mean the bees are busy creating new places for the queen to lay eggs, storing honey, etc. They are busy maintaining their home.

How many frames of bees are there?

When the top box of the brood chamber is 75% full (meaning there are bees covering 75% of the frames in that box), then you should add another box on top of it. A “normal” brood box size is 2 deeps or 3 mediums. Additional boxes will be added on top of that for the stored honey (known as honey supers).

If you remove one of the center frames, are you able to see eggs? Larvae?

Capped brood?

The brood rearing typically takes place in the center of the brood chamber/box. If you are able to see all stages of development (egg, larvae, capped brood), then you know the queen is likely in the hive.

Did you see the queen?

New beekeepers frequently make the mistake in assuming they need to see the queen. Trying to find her can be quite disruptive to the hive itself. If you see signs that she is there, that is sufficient.

Do you see any drone cells?

While this is not a requirement, you need to be aware of how a drone cell differs from other capped brood. It sticks out further, and this is perfectly normal. If you are randomly checking for mites, you can often uncap a few drone cells just to see if mites are present on the developing pupa. Due to the longer development time, you are more likely to see mites there than in any other cell.

Do you see actual drones?

In the event the hive decides to supercede the queen, you need to know that drones are present. Remember, a drone’s primary reason for existence is to mate with a queen and find new places for the hive to reside.

Are you able to see mites on the bees?

If a mite infestation is heavy, you may be able to see mites on the bees themselves. If you see mites, how many bees are you able to see with mites on them?

Are there a lot of hive beetles?

A strong hive will typically be able to corral the bees to a certain area and keep them from being destructive to the hive. Does that appear to be the case? Do you see any signs of destruction?

Do you see anything that resembles a spider web in the hive?

If you do not manage the space in the hive, a wax moth can wreak havoc on a hive. If the bees are small in number compared to the amount of empty space provided, this is an opportunity for a wax moth to move in. If it occurs, you will likely see spider web material across several frames.

Depending on the strength of the hive and the time of year, do you need to add additional sugar syrup to feed?

This is a personal choice as to how often you feed the bees. If you are going to feed, a beekeeper would typically use a 1:1 mixture of sugar and water in the spring, and a 2:1 mixture of sugar and water in the fall.

Does any of the equipment need replaced? Damaged frames or corners of boxes?

Since the bees will often move up to the top box over the winter months, spring is a perfect opportunity to replace older or damaged frames or boxes when you are reversing the order of boxes making up the brood chamber. Often the bottom boxes are already empty which makes this much less disruptive to the bees.

Once you have looked at a frame or two in the center of the brood box, you do not have to look for the queen. If there are signs that she is present, that is sufficient. You can close the hive back up. Done! While it may take longer to do this as a beginner, you will soon find that you become more proficient over time. With a little practice, you will soon be able to inspect a single hive in about five minutes. Really!

Are you ready? On your mark, get set,...go!