



Rural Action

Administration Building, Loughry Campus,
76 Dungannon Road,
Cookstown, Co Tyrone,
(028) 8648 0900



January 2021

Pomeroy Woollen Woods Event – Crafters Newsletter 7 – Bees in Winter

Thank you for your interest and participation in producing artwork for the Woollen Woods event, which has been postponed until Spring 2021 (subject to Covid -19 restrictions). We would however encourage crafters to keep producing items so we have an even better display at the event.

Our theme of Bees, Butterflies and Blooms, will be used to create items for the Woollen Woods event. In this newsletter we look at how our honeybees survive the winter.

For the honeybees they huddle together in the hive to retain warmth. The aim is to keep the queen snug in the centre. Being hive – bound, their honey stores provide a crucial food supply during the winter months, to keep up their energy levels. However, since they are awake, they are ready to go and seek out fresh nectar on warmer winter days.

The optimum condition for a colony going into winter is:

1. The colony should have a young queen and plenty of bees



2. Stores should be sufficient to last until the spring flowers arrive
3. It should be disease free and protected from pests and predators, and
4. The bees should be in a sound, waterproof hive so that they are dry, preferably on stands with good air circulation around them, and situated in a dry, warm, unexposed apiary.

During winter, the honeybee colony adopts 3 mechanisms to ensure its survival during



periods of very low temperatures. These are,

1. Clustering
2. Generating metabolic heat by micro vibration of indirect flight muscles
3. Ensuring the nest is draught free by use of propolis

The old adage that ‘bees never freeze to death, they only starve to death’, is very true, so it is vitally important that they have sufficient stores for them to last until spring. Bee – keepers may provide their colonies with feeders of sugar syrup to keep them going throughout these lean months . But this may not be sufficient to sustain them all winter, especially if honey has been taken that year. To check the weight of the hive the beekeeper can gently lift the hive, as the heavier the hive the more food stored inside. Local beekeeper Boyd Willis uses Perspex crown boards on his hives, so he can monitor how strong and healthy the bees are when feeding, if there aren’t sufficient weight bees are fed candy or bakers fondant.

Other activities that Boyd is involved in during the winter months include, monitoring the hive entrance for build – up of dead bees and blockages, wedging up the back slight so the floor slopes gently forward, repairing any damage to the hive to stop wind / rain getting in. Boyd’s hives use mesh floors so there is a flow of air rather than a draught. He advises that the hive / roof should be secured with either blocks or a strap to anchor it to the ground in more windy conditions.

In very cold weather Beekeepers may also provide insulation for their hives, as cold temperatures can kill, when the numbers are reduced and there are not enough bees in

the hive to generate heat. The bees will huddle together and not feed even if the stores for food are nearby. Boyd also recommends double wrapping hives in industrial fleece and then covering them with a large plastic bag, ensuring that they will be kept snug and warm all winter.

Other wildlife such as mice, badgers and wasps can be a problem during the winter months as they will eat the precious supply of honey, so protecting the hive from these species is important. Again, Boyd recommends the use of slides on hives which will stop mice getting into the hive.



Given our recent weather conditions and especially with Snow as it lay in Pomeroy in recent days, this too can be a problem for bees as it gives a false sense of brightness which can cause them to leave the hive on a cleansing flight. This can provide fatal at low temperatures, so if

snow is forecast, place a block over the entrance so the hive is kept dark and this will prevent the bees from flying.

So with all these measures in place, Boyd finds that he has very little winter losses.

As part of this Newsletter, I have also included a few patterns to give you some ideas of how you can combine the various smaller pieces into larger items to display in the woods either as mobile or stringing together to make a garland or bunting or to create baskets and containers to group the items.

As always, thanks to Phyllis at Pomeroy Resource Centre and Caroline at The Rowan Tree Centre as they continue to support the collection of your items for use at the future Woollen Woods event planned.

Please continue to send me photos of your wonderful items that you all have been crafting so I can feature them in future Crafters Newsletter. Also, please feel free to contact me

if you require any additional materials – wool, felt etc. or indeed require any further help or support.

Kind Regards

Rosemary Hunter

Programme Officer

Connecting Pomeroy - Community Engagement Programme

Email: rosemary@ruralaction.co

Rural Action office (028) 8648 0900