

In Defense of Warre Hives

Jerry Hayes writes that Warré hives look like a pain in the neck (ABJ 150(12), Dec 2010, p. 1113). Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. 'Warréors' love their hives. Warré's 'People's Hive' is almost as aesthetically pleasing as a WBC hive.

How do we administer pest, parasite and disease control in Warrés? Such control is far less necessary in the extensive beekeeping that Warré beekeepers practice. Contrast this with intensive beekeeping that has shown its spectacular failure in recent years. When required individual Warré combs are inspected after simply freeing them from the walls with a comb knife and resting them on a holder for close examination. Some Warré beekeepers do treat their colonies for Varroa, but as far as I know most don't, as they find it unnecessary. Their bees do fine without pesticides.

Hayes says that horizontally expanded (Kenyan) top-bar hives (hTBH) are better for comb manipulation than Warré's vertically expanded top-bar hive. In truth both require a comb cutter to free the comb from the sides, whereas the smaller comb format of the Warré makes it easier to handle than hTBH combs. Furthermore, having kept Warrés for five seasons I have never found the few connections of the combs to the top-bars of the box below to be a problem. Boxes so connected are easily freed with a slight rotation. Rarely is a cheesewire needed to separate them. Adhesion is almost eliminated by using smooth top-bars treated on the top surface with raw linseed oil.

Hayes says 'under supering is a pain'. Warré beekeepers rarely use supers, i.e. boxes placed on top of the nest. Instead, they allow the colony to extend naturally downwards by *nadiring* new boxes *under* the brood nest and harvesting from the top the boxes that have filled with honey as the brood hatches. This has a huge health benefit for colonies because old comb, which may harbour disease, as Hayes acknowledges, is automatically removed and rendered as the colony expands. If there's no assistance available for nadiring, we use a Gatineau lift. Mine cost \$30 and will pick up five Warré broods without difficulty.

Hayes statement, 'you kill a lot of bees', may reflect his own experience with Warrés, but I don't kill bees with mine. I have not come across any Warréors who do. I and many others have also noticed that Warré bees are generally more docile than those in frame hives.

We concur with Hayes: Warrés are not honey factories. Those who use them are not primarily seeking honey money. Instead they want as bee-friendly a habitation for their bees as they can find, and yet still get some honey while complying with state bee disease inspection regimes.

Hayes writes: " 'bee space' ... allowed beekeeping to become easier, more efficient and enjoyable. It is the basis of all successful beekeeping. Are you sure you want to go back over 150 years into beekeeping history and re-invent the wheel?" We answer 'yes' and for sound scientific reasons detailed elsewhere. Bee space was invented to suit beekeepers. It is not present in a natural bee nest, nor is the pile of sticks that is needed to maintain it. Bees build holes through and round combs but know of no 'bee space'.

Towards the end of his comments on Warrés, Hayes implies that ugly words come out of his mouth when working with the hive. Let's face it: some personalities are just not suited to slow, sustainable, near-natural beekeeping. So let's have diversity of hive type and management as part

of efforts to reduce the massive losses of honey bees that we in the UK often hear about from the USA.

In his 1887 book, British Beekeepers' Association co-founder Frank Cheshire classified hives for bees and hives for beekeepers. The Warré hive is a hive for bees par excellence.

For more on the Warré hive itself see www.warre.biobees.com, and on the scientific basis of bee-friendly beekeeping see www.bee-friendly.co.uk .

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