

West Kootenays
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Generally most beekeepers in West Kootenays reported good winter survival and a strong start to the spring in March and April. We had cool, wet conditions right up to the beginning of July and then a 2-3 month very dry and sometimes hot period until the end of September. Brood and hive build up was strong and we saw more and later swarms than usual - some beekeepers were having swarms right through the end of July and into the middle of August.

The low nectar flow in the cool spring and the dry months hit honey production - many of our members are reporting significantly lower honey amounts. An exception seems to be a producer running single box hives - maybe less bees to eat the honey that was brought in in June-July before the drying off happened in July-August?

Hives that did have nectar flow available in August and September or which were fed earlier seem to have done okay for buildup for winter bees and weight, and look good right now going into winter. Some members have commented on issues with brood production in late summer where feeding started a little later and maybe queen productivity had been shut down to some extent.

Between COVID-19 this year and maybe a trend towards a July to September drying period we all have to be adaptive in our approach to beekeeping. Here are a few examples we have noticed in the West Kootenays:

- Some bee yards are being located in areas which stay wetter longer or bees are moved to higher elevations sooner (more moisture, better dew recovery at night).
- With challenges in getting out of country packages this year we saw a continuing trend with more local nucs and suppliers being available. Some of these are from providers within the area itself, and some are tied to a local distributor working with a supplier elsewhere in province - either way we are seeing more in-country sourcing of bees.
- With limited personal contact the club Facebook site has worked well for communications between members, the sharing of supplier information, and has seen an uptick in new and old keepers asking questions and looking for help. Our beginners course was cancelled, and doesn't look good for 2021 so we have pointed new enquiries to online courses already available. We definitely need to get better at virtual communication and contact.
- With the potential lack of replacement bee sources and the high cost of bees, winter survival is more important than ever. We have wetter winters here, especially in valley bottoms which can move back and forth between snow and rain and have lots of foggy days. A key is keeping the hives dry - one of our members has moved all his winter yards higher in a side valley to get well above the fog line. His approach is to get into areas with more winter sun, to have greater difference between the higher relative humidity within the hive and outside and the temperatures within the hive and outside - this should create better moisture flow out of the hive and drier, healthier hive conditions.