



PYGMY SHREW (SCIENTIFIC NAME – SOREX MINUTUS)

The pygmy shrew is a very common problem for overwintering honeybee colonies. Most beekeepers are unaware of the potential hazard their presence may be or mistake them for the much less harmful common yard mouse.

A pygmy shrew is a very small mammal with a markedly pointed snout. They average 40mm body length with a 32mm tail. Their average weight is 3 grams. They are able to go through a hole less than 1cm.

Shrews are insectivores feeding on insects, arachnids, woodlice, and in cold climates like Canada they specialize feeding on honey bees during winter.

Shrews are as fast as they are small. Their heart rate and respiratory rate of 800 beats per minute is maintained by consuming 125% of their own body weight daily.

The method of feeding on wintering colonies is by grabbing a cold sluggish bee from the outside of the cluster and then taking it to a feeding place either in the back of the hive away from the cluster or in the wrapping material.

Shrews target the thorax by removing the head or entering through the top making a large hole hollowing out the thorax. They may also consume some of the exoskeleton leaving what looks like dirt (wings, legs and bit of the abdomen).



With shrews weighing about 3 grams and requiring 125% of their body weight in food per day, they may consume over 450 grams of bees in 120 days of winter.

In the Maritimes we see a lot of colonies, in the spring, that have died as a result of obvious shrew predation

For the first 4 years, I struggled with shrew damage before developing a shrew tight entrance system. This entrance system stays in place from December first till the first natural pollen flow begins. The ¼' hole causes the pollen to fall off the bees so I turn it up putting the ½" holes down for the spring entrance reducer. This has prevented shrew damage in our hives for 30 years.

