



INFORMATION GUIDE NO. 1

Artificial Swarm Control

By carrying out an artificial swarm procedure you can benefit from another colony and hopefully prevent your bees from swarming. There are many methods of doing this but the following method is most probably the easiest and most straightforward. This method can also create another colony.

There are many reasons why bees swarm; this can be due to lack of room in the brood, an old queen which is unable to create enough queen substance for all the bees, a breed of bees that are swarmy by nature and, of course, the main reason, namely that bees swarm in order to multiply colonies i.e. procreate.

This artificial or “false” swarm is probably the most commonly used method of carrying out swarm control. The rule of thumb is to master one method before trying others. Do not try to attempt various methods because you could confuse yourself, or at worst, even lose your bees.

The method described will hopefully maintain the maximum amount of foraging bees with the queen who can continue to lay eggs without interrupting the honey flow. The key to success is to carry out careful inspections and to ensure you don't miss seeing any queen cells.

If during an inspection you see a queen cell (unsealed) containing larva, it's time to carry out an artificial swarm procedure. If you discover sealed queen cells then your bees have possibly already swarmed! When a queen cell is found do not shake any bees off the comb because this is likely to damage or injure the developing queen. Gently push the bees aside with your finger or use a bee brush (brush with very soft bristle) so you can see the whole comb and look to see if there are more queen cells.

After checking each comb in the brood box, note which frame has a queen cell or cells. This can be done with a marker pen, making a mark on the top of the frame directly above the cell, or by using coloured drawing pins.

The roof, supers and queen excluder would have already been removed, so in order to carry out the artificial swarm procedure you will need a brood box and floor, full set of frames preferably with drawn comb, but if not with foundation, crown board and roof.

1. Move the original hive with the brood, bees and queen about one metre to one side of its original location with the entrance facing the same direction.
2. Put the empty new hive in the place where the original hive was. Remove three frames from the centre of the new hive and put them to one side for the time being.
3. Check the colony in the original hive. Take a frame with the queen and brood in various stages, ensure there are no queen cells and put it into the middle of the new hive. Put a frame of drawn comb either side of this frame so the queen can start laying straightaway. Remember the new hive is in the original place of the original hive.

4. Ensure there is food reserves on the combs of the original hive and replace the removed frames with the three removed earlier. This original hive is now left with nursery bees, queen cells and some foraging bees. Replace the crown board and roof. Do not feed straight away, wait a couple of days. Feeding sugar syrup immediately could cause robbing. For brood promotion use a 50/50 mix.
5. All the flying bees will return to the new hive on the original site. The nursery bees will bring on the queen cells in the original hive until one is hatched or selected.
6. Put the queen excluder, supers, crown board and roof back onto the new hive. This procedure has now produced an artificial swarm, giving you another colony and without the loss of honey production.

After seven days, usually one day before the new virgin queen is due to emerge from the cell, follow these guidelines:

7. Move the original hive one metre on the opposite side of the new hive. The flying bees from this original hive will return to find their home missing and will go to the nearest hive, which will be the new hive. This will help build up the loss of bees in the new hive and will encourage the growth of the colony. This procedure also reduces the risk of flying bees leaving the original hive with a new queen, known as a cast swarm, because it leaves fewer flying bees in the original hive.
8. Check the new hive to see if the old queen has continued to lay and there are no queen cells.
9. After approximately twenty-one days check the original hive to see if the new queen has been mated and is laying.
10. If the weather has been bad or there is no sign of eggs or larvae be prepared to re-unite the two hives. This can sometimes happen if the queen cannot fly to mate. Once you know the queen is laying in the original hive you can either unite the two hives and remove the old queen or increase your number of colonies.

Good Luck!