

The "S" Word

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It is still a little early up here I hope but before we know it the the season will be upon us. By season, I mean swarming season! The weather in the last few weeks has been really kind to us here and the colonies have really picked up and laying well and are busy busy. I have started a Bailey comb change on the rescued colony. We have mentioned it a few times before about being prepared and it won't be long before the club starts taking calls about possible swarms appearing. We have previously talked about bait hives and now is the time to putting them out.

The bees will be plotting already! Inspections should now be every 7 days unless your queen is clipped. You need to be checking to see if they are making preparations to swarm and take action. The flying bees will now hopefully be bringing in plenty of nectar and as this takes anything up to four times as much space as honey until the water content has been reduced, you need to make sure the bees have somewhere to store it so now is the time to think about putting supers on.

If your brood box is really full and there are no queen cells, consider perhaps adding a second brood box if you have it. You can make use of dummy boards in both boxes so you end up with perhaps eight in one box and seven or eight in the other. Not only does this give your bees room to expand the brood nest but it also produces lots of extra drawn comb in brood frames which can be used when splitting colonies.

Box management is a preventative measure that can be done before signs of queen cells appear. If the queen has plenty of space she may not even think about swarming

The first thing to do if you discover queen cells in your colony is **"DON'T PANIC"**. Swarming is a natural occurrence and we should work with the bees and use it to ours and their advantage.

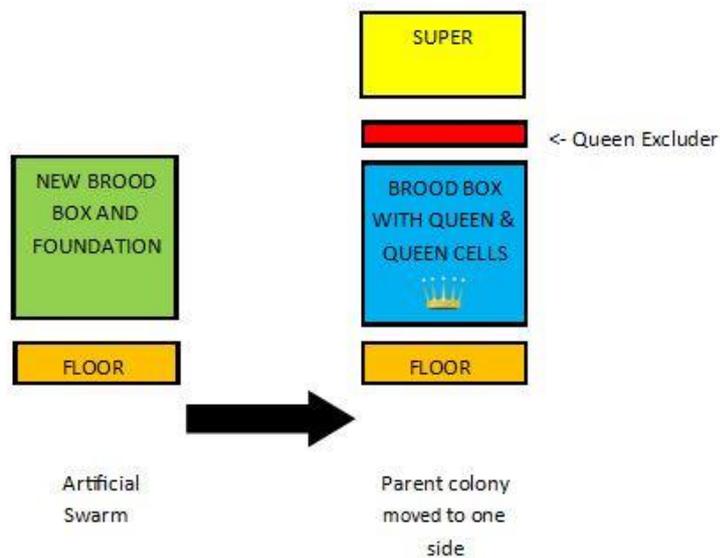
Do not start tearing down queen cells in the first instance. This does not deter them from swarming and ultimately, they will end up using older eggs past the optimum age for rearing the best queens, so work with the bees...the bees know best! Step back and take a breath.

As in most things in beekeeping there is more than one method of swarm control, so choose one you are comfortable with. Make a plan, even rehearse with empty boxes and be familiar with the method you are going to use. Have your kit ready and take your time.

On our introduction to beekeeping courses we generally go through the Pagden/Heddon method and so I have put the method below as a starting reference.

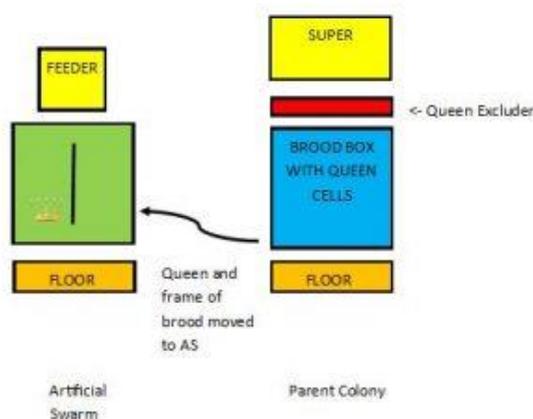
On finding queen cells in the colony....

1. Place the new stand 1-3m to the side. Then move the whole hive with queen, house bees and swarm cells to the new stand.
2. Place a new Brood Box with frames of foundation on the old stand, take out a central frame. Foragers will return to the New Brood Box on the old stand, that leaves fewer bees in the old brood box.



- Find the queen in the parent colony. Transfer her along with a frame of brood in all stages of development and the bees covering it into the centre of the new brood box. I try not to use a frame with eggs in it and make sure there are no queen cells on the frame. I tend to shake a couple more frames of bees into the new brood box, to increase the number of nurse bees that would be there in a swarm.

Cover the brood box with a crown board and feed with 1:1 syrup if there is no nectar flow, so the bees can draw out the foundation. Finally add the roof. The flying bees will return here and form the artificial swarm. You may wish to put a queen excluder between floor and brood box for 3 or 4 days to prevent them from absconding.



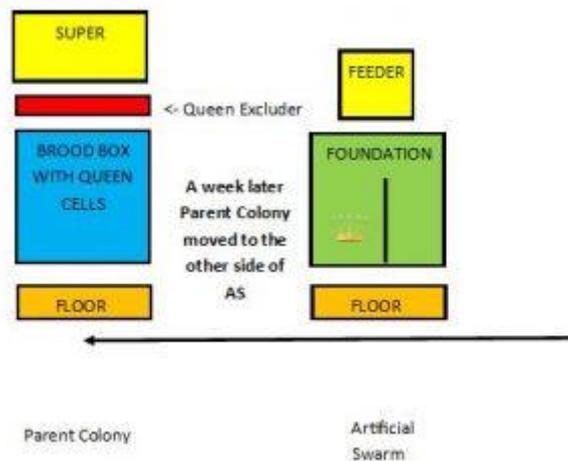
- Go through the parent hive and select one or two large open queen cells with larvae and lots of royal jelly in. Mark the frame with a drawing pin on the top bar above them. The reason we choose open queen cells is that we at least know something is in them. Destroy any sealed queen cells. You may need to shake or brush the bees off the frames but do not shake frames with your selected cells.

Close up the frames and replace the missing frame with a frame of foundation at the side, but do not split up the brood area. If there were supers on the hive then these should be placed on the parent hive, over a queen excluder, as they will have lost all their foraging bees to the swarm on the original location. Finally add a crown board and roof.

- Four to six days later, go through the frames in the parent hive. From your previously marked queen cells choose the largest dimpled one, or at this point you could make up 2 nucs and make further increase, otherwise remove all the rest made in the meantime. Make sure they have enough stores or add supers if needed.

Make sure the old queen is laying in the New Brood Box. Over the next week or two, she should be re-establishing the colony. The swarm should be drawing out foundation. Continue to feed if there is no nectar flow. When they have drawn out at least 9 or 10 frames you can start adding supers as required and stop feeding.

- A week later, move the whole colony in the Old Brood Box to the other side (Heddon variation) of the artificial swarm. Foragers again migrate to the New Brood Box and reduce the chance of a cast swarm.



- It may be as long as four weeks after the artificial swarm was made for the new queen to be mated and to see signs of laying, so don't disturb during this time.

If you are unsure of what to do either in swarm control or treating, contact a member of the committee for advice. Also make sure you come to the next zoom meeting at on Wednesday 19th May @8pm where the discussion will be swarm control and you can ask any questions. Let's hope the 'S' word has not started before then!