

## Bait Hives

We wouldn't normally mention bait hives in the beginners' courses but, during the pandemic we did receive a few calls from people who had researched bait hives. Possibly through an interest in starting beekeeping and being unable to get on a course or 'pandemic boredom googling', either way they seemed generally surprised, and one person terrified, when a prime swarm landed in their garden to take up residence on a Sunday afternoon! So, I have started mentioning them on the beginner's course now 😊

I usually leave a couple of empty boxes in likely spots to act as bait hives, primarily to catch swarms from my own colonies if my swarm control fails, but possibly to attract a swarm from someone else. Losing a swarm in an urban or semi-urban environment is something I don't want to bother my neighbours with if I can help it.



Some people keep an empty hive or nucleus box in their apiary, are they hopeful that their bees will move into it should they swarm? While this is possible, swarms moving into empty hives in your apiary are most likely to have come from elsewhere. The danger of placing bait hives in your apiary is that you could be inviting someone else's diseased or undesirable bees to come and stay very close to your own.

Evidence suggests that swarming bees tend to move some distance from home when looking for somewhere new to live. This makes evolutionary sense – if you want to spread your genes, or try to find new foraging opportunities, it would be better to establish your new colony a considerable distance away from home.

If you have not read *Honeybee Democracy* by Tom Seeley, he writes some great stuff on swarming and nest location and is well worth looking up. Tom recommends a distance of at least 100 metres saying that he had had poor success with bait hives in trees adjacent to apiaries. He suspects that scout bees fly some distance from the home base before starting to look for cavities to ensure any new home is a healthy distance from the old one.



So, bait hives are probably best sited not in your apiary but some distance from it. This could mean placing boxes in neighbours' gardens or in nearby parks, woods, or churchyards (with permission). If you have out-apiaries, you could have a bait hive in your garden. It is fascinating to watch scout bees examining bait hives and thrilling to watch a swarm arrive and move in. Try to place boxes so that they face south and are visible.



They can be summarised as a south-facing, National-sized about 40litres, solid-floored box, small entrance, preferably located high off the ground but remember you do need access to them.

To make them more attractive they should contain a frame or two of old drawn brood (no stores though as this encourages robbing) and have a cotton bud dab or two of pure lemongrass oil (*Cymbopogon citratus*) added to the entrance and the top of a couple of frames. I've previously used

spare National brood boxes containing only two old dark frames. However, if a swarm takes up residence, they can build comb very quickly so you may need to add frames quickly or re-hive once you have assessed for disease.

Second half of April is a good time to put them in location and they may attract some scouts quite quickly, but the swarm may take some weeks to arrive, if at all. But nothing ventured, nothing gained. A top up of the lemongrass oil will be needed every week or so.

