

Colony Management



Simple Swarm Control (artificial swarming)

Note: This assumes queen cells and normal brood / egg conditions have been found during inspections. Choose a decent day if possible that ensures adult bees are out flying, leaving mostly young bees in hive. Normal beekeeping best practice should always be observed.

What's needed:

An extra brood box with frames and foundation or drawn comb; cover board; roof; and enough space around the original hive to carry this procedure out.

Step 1.

Subdue the bees with smoke and remove the roof, cover board, and super from the original hive. Replace the cover board directly on the brood box to calm the bees. Now move the original brood box and floor about a meter to a side of the original location. Next position the extra floor and extra brood box with frames and foundation on the site of the original hive and take out the centre two frames, keep these handy for later use.

Step 2.

Go through the frames in the original hive carefully and find the queen. Take the frame with the queen on it, check it for queen cells, remove any found, and place the frame with queen and young bees into space in extra brood box on the original site. Select another frame from the original hive that has sealed brood and a good quantity of young bees, check it for queen cells and remove any found, then place this in the remaining space in the extra brood box. Put the original queen excluder, super, cover board and roof on to close up this 'artificial swarm'.

Step 3.

Move the frames in the original hive together and fill the end gaps with the two frames put aside earlier. Close up this hive with a cover board and roof and either relocate it or turn the whole hive 180 degrees with the entrance facing way from the artificial swarm hive.

Ok, a quick recap on what we've done. We have taken the queen along with young bees and sealed brood and put them in a new hive on the original location, creating an 'artificial swarm'. The remaining original frames, brood and young bees will emulate a hive that has just swarmed, but on a new location. It may have queen cells but if not young bees will create new emergency queen cells where necessary. The adult flying bees will return to the original location and boost the numbers in the 'artificial swarm' to what it would normally be. Both hives will be busy from here on.

Step 4-A.

If there were no queen cells in the original hive, after about five days go through the newly created hive and check for the presence of emergency queen cells that the young bees should have created. Select the cell with the fattest looking grub and destroy the rest. Or...

Step 4-B.

If there were queen cells left from the original hive, select the best and destroy any others. Leave both hives now to do what comes naturally.

This whole procedure leaves you with a couple of choices depending on your ultimate aims:

- To allow both hives to develop into full colonies over the summer and thereby increase your stocks or;
- To or to assess both colonies later and remove the weaker queen and unite the colonies to produce a strong hive with a new queen.

The latter may be a good option if you want to maximise on nectar flows, or in the autumn if colony build up has not been as good and strong colonies are needed for wintering.



Swarming Do's

- Keep a check on hives at 7 day intervals from May onwards
- Ensure you have enough equipment to deal with swarming behaviour
- Take immediate steps to prevent swarming
- Remember to check caught swarms for disease
- Feed swarms to encourage comb building
- Always carry out best apiary housekeeping practices

Swarming Dont's

- Don't delay in taking anti-swarm action
- Don't leave it more than 7 days between inspections during swarm season
- Don't hesitate to contact a member of the association if you need help

Best Practice - Apiary Housekeeping:

- Always maintain a high level of hygiene in all your beekeeping practices
- Carry out methodical health inspections on a regular basis, checking for brood disease particularly in spring and autumn.
- Never transfer combs between colonies without checking for brood diseases
- Systematically replace old brood combs in your hives melting down the old comb to maintain clean and healthy brood.
- Never bring colonies or equipment into your apiary without establishing their origin, condition, and disease status.
- Sterilise any second-hand equipment or hive components before introducing them into your apiary
- Discourage drifting and robbing in the apiary
- Suspect stray swarm health until you know otherwise
- Report any incidence of disease or suspicious conditions immediately to your local association