



Southampton & District Beekeepers Association

www.southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk

How Do I? Information Sheet #4 Shook Swarming Author Tony Mabey - Jan 2009

The benefits of using the process of shook swarming have been discussed at recent out-apiary meetings. A shook swarm will invigorate the bees, which are shaken, and, perhaps more importantly, compliment the process of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) by providing fresh disease free comb and the removal of sealed brood with an associated reduction in Varroa levels. This should only be attempted with a strong or medium strength colony. Weak colonies should be united together before attempting a shook swarm.

The last couple of seasons seem to have re-written some of the rules around the bee keeping calendar but for the purpose of controlling Varroa levels at the start of the season and invigorating the colony, shook swarming should be considered in March / April, but can be done at any time.

The process itself is straight forward, you will require a freshly sterilised or new hive including floor, brood box with a full set of frames each with foundation, (the use of one or more shallow frames can make drone culling easier later on), crown board and queen excluder. A replacement roof is recommended but the existing one can be scorched at the out-apiary if required by using a blow torch. A second queen excluder can be used to reduce the risk of the colony absconding.

1. Move the hive to be shaken to one side, at least one metre away
2. Put the clean floor on the original stand
3. Place a queen excluder on the floor
4. The new brood box sits on the queen excluder
5. Remove a few of the new frames from the centre of the brood box to create a space into which you can shake the bees
6. Open the original hive
7. If possible but highly recommended, find the queen and cage her temporarily
8. Remove each brood frame; lower it approximately halfway into the space between the new frames in the new brood box. Shake the frame sharply to move the bees onto the queen excluder surface at the bottom of the brood box
9. One frame of open brood/eggs can be moved over into the new hive. This is then removed one week later once it is capped – so removing even more varroa that were not in the capped cells at the time of the shook swarm.
10. Place the old frame, free of bees, into a large dustbin liner or box
11. Continue the process for all the remaining frames
12. Replace the spare new frames gently in the central space in the new brood box

13. Release the queen into the new brood chamber if she had been previously caged and close the hive
14. The colony will need to be fed with sugar syrup (or reclaimed honey from the old frames, see below) until all (most) of the foundation has been drawn.
15. Remove the lower Queen Excluder once new eggs and brood are found.

In a healthy colony, wax can be harvested from the old frames for exchange using a solar or steam wax extractor. Before this though, any stores can be extracted and boiled with the same volume of water and then fed back to the bees when cooled, or filtered and jarred if of a suitably high enough quality.

Frames can be sterilised and re-used if in good condition, but, if not done properly can re-introduce disease. Best use for old brood frames is as firelighters.

If the shook swarm is being used to remove a colony from diseased comb, brood frames and super frames should be destroyed along with any stores. Other equipment will need to be sterilised before re-use.

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