

Horsley Board method of combating swarming and raising an additional queen

The Horsley Board method of swarm control and re queening is probably best used when the colony is well advanced, covering at least nine B.S. frames of brood. It is also helpful to have a good nectar flow. It should only be used on colonies that you are happy to propagate from, if you have bees that are less than good you should use another method the first year so that you can re-queen with good stock. The method forms a circular pattern that can be repeated year on year.

In spring the hive is first reduced to one brood box during normal spring management.

When the colony is strong with most frames full of brood, usually late May or early June this method may be employed whether queen cells have been started or not.

Stage one

Fill an empty brood box with frames of comb and foundation; take out the centre comb leaving a space. Lift the roof from the hive, and place to one side. Lift the hive off the floorboard and place on the roof, cover the empty brood box and place it on the now vacant floorboard. Put the supers to one side whilst you find the frame with the queen on, this is often easier said than done, however, If you do not find her at first, cover the brood box and leave it for a short while so that most of the flying bees can find their way into the new, empty brood box, this will relieve the congestion and make queen finding much easier. Having found the frame with the queen inspect it for queen cells and destroy any that may be found, place this frame in the space left in the brood box on the original hive site. Put on the queen excluder and the supers that were removed earlier.

Then place the Horsley Board on with the wedge uppermost and at the back of the hive. Close up the frames in the brood box from which you have taken the queen, and insert the spare frame at the outside, lift the brood box on to the Horsley Board and replace crown board and roof.

Open out the wedge to its fullest extent and leave the hive alone for three or four days. This enables the flying bees to return to the lower brood box and the bees that are left consider themselves queenless.

Stage two

Partly close the wedge leaving only just sufficient space for the bees to leave or enter, this will partially uncover the excluder panel and allow the bee's free access.

Stage three

Examine the top box again after ten days and queen cells should be evident, and fairly advanced. As soon as, at least, one is seen... Open the wedge to its fullest extent closing off the excluder panel totally.

Examine the top box again after another seven to ten days and look for a queen or eggs. If no eggs are observed indicating that the queen has either not yet mated or if she has she has not yet come into lay, close up and look again in another few days.

Stage four

As soon as eggs are seen, lift the box off the Horsley Board and reverse the board itself so that the wedge is at the front of the hive. Partly close the wedge allowing only a small entrance as in stage two, the excluder panel will now be partially open and the two colonies will be able to work together and can be left in this configuration for the rest of the season.

At the end of the season, when the honey has been removed, the top box is placed onto the bottom box and the Horsley Board removed, No newspaper is required as the two boxes are actually the same colony the two queens will sort out if they wish to lay together or one may depose the other. 90% of the time it will be the young queen that remains for next season, but it is not a certainty.

If you wish to take your bees to the heather, there are some different preparations to make for the moors...

Having removed the honey supers that have been in place all summer. Re-build the hive so that it has stand, floor, the top brood box which contains the young queen, the Horsley Board with the wedge fully open towards the back of the hive, what was the bottom brood box with the old queen, crown board and roof.

When moving day arrives... Take off the top box and Horsley Board and add the excluder and the empty supers to the box on the stand. The stack, which now has all the flying bees from both groups, can then be transferred onto your heather floor for transport. Place the box with the old queen onto the original hive stand and they will be ready for uniting when the other group return from the heather, newspaper or some other method should be used as the bees will have lost any sense of being "one colony".

If queen cells are actually being raised at the time of your initial inspection, when you are first looking for the queen, do not examine any further... Place the box with the full compliment of empty combs on the floor board, put the queen excluder and supers on this, then place the Horsley board on top, with the fully open wedge to the back of the hive, the original brood chamber and all frames are placed on this and crown board and roof completes the set up. The Horsley Board excluder panel will be fully closed; the flying bees will find their way to the original entrance and thus enter the bottom brood box. The depleted bees in the top box will tear down the queen cells. After a few days the frame with the queen on is placed in the centre of the bottom box and the top box with the brood and bees is left on the Horsley board and we are effectively at stage one again, but a few days later than planned

