

Tips for Finding the Queen

- **The Best Time**

- Early spring. This has several benefits:
 - It is the time when there are the fewest bees in the hive.
 - The brood is still relatively small, so there are fewer frames on which the queen is most likely to be found.
- Having the queen marked at the start of the season makes life so much easier when performing subsequent tasks. e.g. Creating an artificial swarm or a nucleus.

Do not be tempted to go looking for the queen too soon after performing an artificial swarm or creating a nucleus. She may not have mated yet or she may be on a mating flight during your visit! **Wait until you see eggs or young brood.**

- **Physical Attributes**

- Her abdomen is significantly longer and often has a different colour and banding to that of her workers.
- Her folded wings do not reach the tip of the abdomen.
- The weight of her abdomen makes her movement more of a waddle than a straight walk.
- Her thorax has fewer hairs and therefore tends to be shinier than her workers.
- Her legs are generally a lighter colour than her workers and her hind legs which do not have pollen baskets tend to stick out more.

- **Likely Hiding Places**

- In the dark – behind or under exposed frames.
- On one of the frames with the youngest brood.
- Directly on the surface of the comb – i.e not on the top of workers.
- Surrounded by her retinue of attendant workers.

Although these maybe the most likely hiding places, they can also be found on:

- the underside of the crown board
- the underside of the queen excluder
- dummy boards
- frames of foundation

Get into the habit of systematically checking all these items as you remove them.

- **Good Search Practise**

- Perform an inspection, the main or only purpose of which is to find and mark the queen.
- Have your preferred marking kit immediately to hand before commencing the inspection
- Use minimal smoke – too much can drive the queen off the comb she is laying on.

- Make some work space, such that there is always a “light gap” between the last frame inspected and the next frame to be inspected – received wisdom suggests queens are unlikely to cross this gap.
This gap is created by inspecting and removing the first 2 or 3 frames and placing them on hangars for the purpose, or in a nucleus box (with the entrance closed). The use of a nucleus box for this purpose is a good option, and then if you do fail to see her on one of these frames there is less chance of her dropping off into the grass!
- Confirm that a queen is present by checking for eggs.
- Proceed methodically through the colony, paying particular attention to the combs containing eggs and young brood.
- As each frame is removed, check the back (or dark side) first; scanning the comb in a quick circular motion starting on the bottom edge, ending at the centre. Then turn over and repeat the scan. Always taking care to hold the frames over the brood box whilst scanning.
- Replace each inspected frame, being careful to maintain the light gap.
- If a frame has more than a single layer of bees, it can be helpful to perform a controlled shake (within the confines of the brood box) to reduce the bees to a single layer. This is because queens are usually to be found directly on the surface of the comb.

If after following all these guidelines, you have still not found her; don't worry, because as long as you did find eggs, she is still there!

- **A More Drastic Method**

e.g. If it is required to find the queen in colony A for the purpose of killing her prior to uniting with colony B, a stronger queen right colony, then using a queen excluder as a sieve can be a useful technique.

- Place a sheet of newspaper on top of the queen right hive (colony B).
- Place a brood box populated with empty frames on top of the newspaper.
- Place a queen excluder on top of the brood box.
- Place an empty super or brood box on top of the queen excluder to form a funnel.
- Systematically shake / brush the bees from all the brood frames and any other surfaces in the colony B brood box into the funnel.
- Progressively smoke the bees down through the funnel;

Then depending on the time of year, when all the workers have been driven through the queen excluder into the brood box below, all that will be left in the funnel will be a number of drones and the queen. Voila!

- Despatch the queen.
- Complete the uniting activity in the recognised manner.

This method is not recommended for the purpose of finding the queen in a productive healthy colony.

