

Apis m. Esoteria 15

Nucs as Repair Parts

The better you are at beekeeping the more different your problems. Your first major problem comes in the late spring before the big nectar flow.

Your hives are doing great! You are ready to go! So, you take a quick 3-day vacation before work begins anew. When you get home 3 hives have swarmed. You should have seen it coming but did not.

You did everything correct. The signs of swarming preparation by the bees are hives full of brood, full of food stores, and crowded with bees. There is no work to be done. The foragers have to slow down for lack of storage area for nectar and pollen. In the evening there are clusters of bees hanging off the landing board for lack of room inside the hive. It is just too hot inside the hive, unless it is raining.

The easiest way to stop swarming is to divide the hive. But you really don't want more hives, and a late division might hamper your honey collection.

By pulling frames out of the hive and replacing them with foundation frames you will increase the work requirement of the hive, slowing the desire to swarm. If you just pull frames out and leave the bees, the hive will still be close to swarming. If you pull frames from the center of the brood area (with older brood and queen cells) the queen will be encouraged to lay more eggs.

Ideally you will want to interrupt bee population growth before the queen stops laying eggs in preparation to swarming. Replace these frames with pulled comb frames. The queen needs the empty cells to lay eggs in.

An easy way to make a small split is to remove the Queen and 2 frames with capped brood and some food. You won't get many foragers. Place them in a nuc box or the center of a normal brood box. Leave the brood frames with all the nurse bees and any queen cells. Move the new hive some distance from the old hive. Fifty feet is fine. Ten feet can work. Reduce the entrance to about 1 inch. Orient the entrance in another direction from the parent box. Jostle the nuc when you move it. Bounce it lightly when you set it down. This will disturb the bees

enough so they will reorient instead of flying home. Close the nuc for one day and put a feeder on it. You did not move many foragers so there are little chance many bees will return to the old location. You are feeding so the nurse bees don't need foragers for food. Put a small chunk of pollen patty on the colony.

Move at least 2 frames with bees to put a real dent in the old hive population. You might also put one empty comb frame in the nuc so the bees can store honey and pollen. You want to leave queen cells in the old hive. If you have more than one frame with queen cells you can make more nucs. Be sure and leave behind one frame with just 2 queen cells. It only takes about 2 cups of bees to tend to the queen. It takes enough bees to cover the brood area to raise the brood.

If you are early enough in the swarming cycle and you don't have queen cells yet (this is good) make sure one of your frames has eggs. You want the old hive to grow their own queen just to retard the rate of growth in the colony. You want the frames you pull from the parent hive to have some nectar and pollen around the edges to provide food for any uncapped brood.

You will also increase your honey collection from the upcoming nectar flow. Having removed the queen there will be no more eggs laid. Hence, you will have a steady decrease in larvae requiring to be fed as they mature out. As the growing larvae mature and emerge from their cells there will be less larvae to feed until the new queen emerges, gets mated, and lays eggs. So, the honey not used for food will go into honey supers.

The old hive will not swarm without a queen. The foragers will continue to collect and store honey as if the queen were there. By the time the nectar flow is over there will be a new queen to continue building up the colony for the rest of the year. A side benefit is, there were 35 plus days without any eggs being laid which will break the mite cycle a little bit (a brood break).

Out there about 35 days the new larvae will emerge as bees. This is after the nectar flow and replenishes the population which has died during the heavy work period of nectar flow. You will hardly notice the lesser number of bees in the colony.

Sometimes if queen cells are evident, you cannot stop the old queen from swarming. Make sure you close the entrance on the nuc with a ventilated closure for up to 10 days to make sure the queen goes back to her egg laying mode. You are providing food and syrup, so the bees are okay except for purging flights.

Now what to do with all the nuc boxes that an excellent beekeeper will create?

One: Sell them. Your neighbors might need late season replacement hives.

Two: Use them as repair parts for your established hives. The queen you raise in the nuc can be a replacement queen for one that “goes bad” in your working hive. You can sell the queen to your neighbor who squished his queen. The bees that grow in the nuc can be added to a weak hive to increase its population. The comb that the nuc makes can be used as rotational comb for hives that need old comb rotated out.

The nucs that aren’t used can be expanded to 8 or 10 frame hives. While expanding the hives you can draw out new comb frames. Then rotate the frames into your working hives later. If the hives make it until fall intact, let them fill up with winter stored food and lots of bees.

Go into winter with extra hives. One “rule of thumb” is to have one nuc for every hive you have. If your apiary is like mine, some will die. Your extra hives will allow you to come out of the winter in better shape than “normal”. If you still have too many hives next spring, sell some!

These new fall queens (August hatching) will become prolific brood queens filling frames quickly. This gives your over wintering colony the maximum number of young bees in the population.

This is called sustainable beekeeping!