

August Comment by Ian Jamieson.

This month is a busy one for the beekeeper. The honey crop is generally taken off this month and then has to be extracted, strained and bottled, which in a good year is, hopefully, a major task! Unfortunately this year has turned out badly after great hopes in June – July has been a “wash-out” and the forecast for August is not too promising. This is the month to check your hives to make sure you have a laying queen, adequate stores for the winter and if your hives need treatment for varroa. Any treatment should be done after the honey is off the hive, if you are using chemical treatments – it is generally better to do this whatever treatment you are using, although icing sugar dusting should be fairly safe at any time.

If you find you have a queen-less hive or a weak colony, now is a good time to think about uniting colonies. For those who are beginners, I have attached a copy of my method. Last month, the instructions for raising a queen, did not come out too well – the instructions were somewhat divorced from the diagrams, due to changes in computer formats between me and the editor – hopefully it will be better this time!

Finally make sure that your hives have plenty of food for the winter – feed if necessary and remember sugar syrup or Ambrosia is not honey, it is only “bread and water” and your bees deserve better food – so don’t rob them of all their honey. They have worked themselves to death for it and they deserve to have enough for their needs!

1

U N I T I N G C O L O N I E S

Colonies should be united in the evening after the bees are all inside. Getting the colonies ready for uniting should be done in the afternoon when the bees are flying. It does not seem to matter which way colonies are united, although I prefer to unite the queen-right colony onto the queen-less colony.

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- Likewise it is often the only solution for dealing with a queen-less colony, it is certainly easier than introducing a new queen directly. If you have a drone layer or laying workers, you must first get rid of her/them before uniting the queen-right colony onto it. (see foot-note for dealing with this problem) If you have a weak colony, it is often easier and quicker to kill the queen and unite a strong colony onto it, especially late in the season. Which way you unite (A onto B or B onto A) is determined by which is the better site.

Preparation

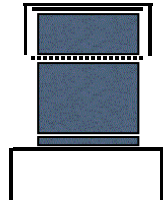
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1. In the afternoon when the bees are flying, check the colonies which are to be united. Clean brace comb off the tops of the frames of the "receiving" box. Clean the bottoms of the frames in the brood box which is to be put on top of them -- bees usually build brace comb on the bottoms of the frames in the brood box -- failure to remove this causes the frames to lift up when the brood box of the uniting colony is placed on top with potentially disastrous results -- (bursting the paper or forcing up the crown board and letting the bees escape).
2. Remove any supers which can be taken off and shake the bees back into their hives. It makes the job easier if the colony to be "united on" can be reduced to a single brood box, but this may not be possible if there are too many bees. If the receiving colony has only a single super, it is possible to put it under a queen excluder under the brood box, but remember you need to clean any brace comb off the bottoms of the brood box first. The super can be put back on top after the uniting is complete.
3. Most books on beekeeping suggest that the colonies to be united should be gradually moved closer together over a number of days, to avoid bees going back to their old site, but because this is impractical in many cases, I prefer to use two sheets of paper (Glasgow Herald) instead of one. I also remove the stand on the old site.

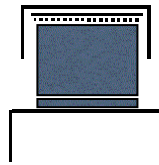
Step 1

A method for uniting two colonies

Prepare the colonies in the afternoon, ready for uniting in the evening.



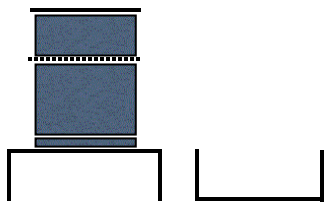
Queen-right colony



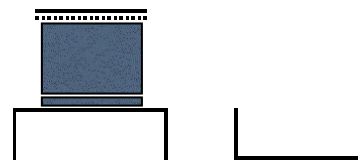
Queen-less colony

Step 2

Remove the roofs and set them to the side



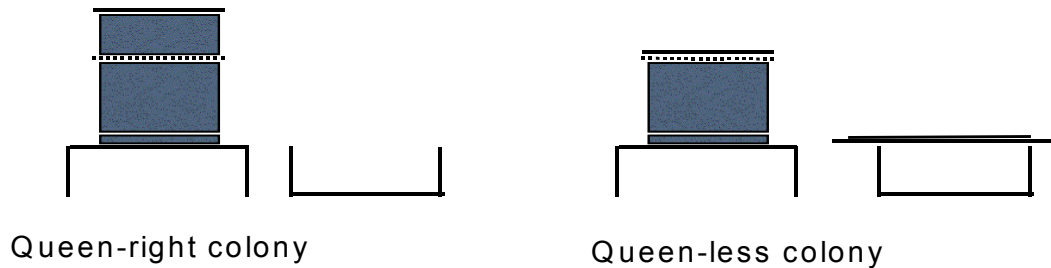
Queen-right colony



Queen-less colony

Step 3

Place a board on the roof of the queen-less colony which is a good bit larger than a brood box, then tack down a large sheet of newspaper on it. Prick a few holes in the paper. Lift the brood box off its floor and place it on the paper and tack the paper up the sides of the brood box.

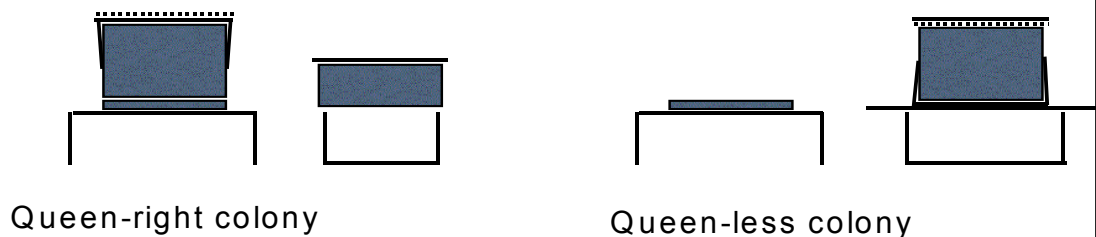


Queen-right colony

Queen-less colony

Step 4

Lift the super off the queen-right colony and place it across the upturned roof then lift off the queen excluder. Place a large sheet of newspaper on top of the brood box and place the queen excluder on top to hold the paper down, then tack the paper down the sides of the brood box. Prick a few holes in the paper through the queen excluder.

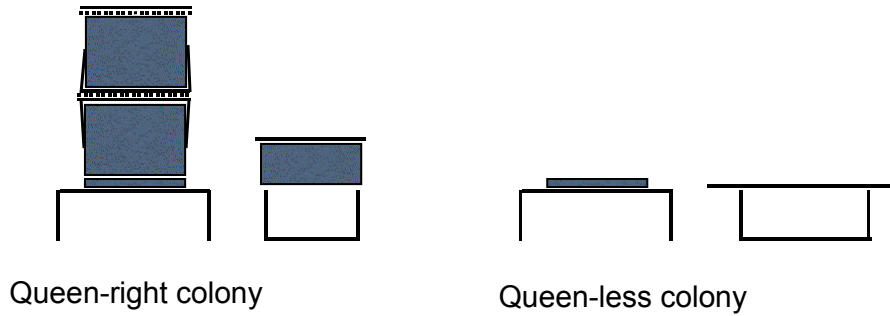


Queen-right colony

Queen-less colony

Step 5

Carefully lift the queen-less colony and place it on top of the queen-right colony.

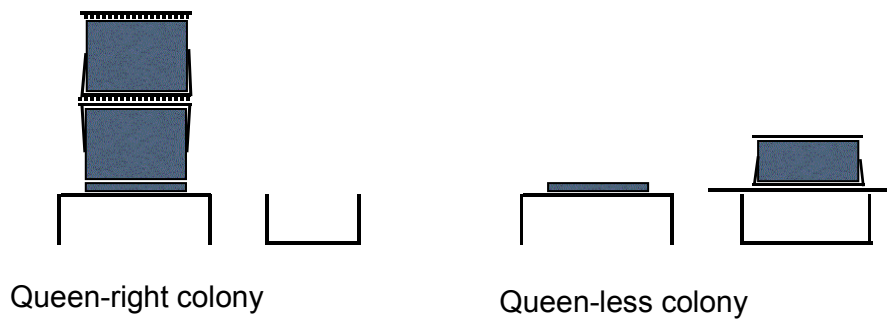


Queen-right colony

Queen-less colony

Step 6

Tack a second sheet of paper on the board, prick a few holes in it and lift the super onto it, then tack the paper up the sides.

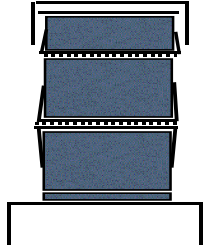


Queen-right colony

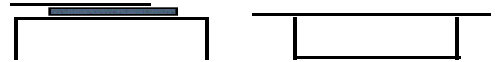
Queen-less colony

Step 7

Remove the crown board from the top brood box and place the super on top. Then replace the roof. A few days later shredded paper should appear at the front of the hive and the colonies will have united. It is then possible to re-arrange the brood nest and remove any paper which the bees have not yet removed.



Queen-right colony



Queen-less colony

And Finally

As mentioned earlier if the super is put under the brood box in the afternoon, then this makes uniting simpler in the evening as there is no need to put it above over another sheet of newspaper.

If the queen-right colony is a small colony or a nucleus colony it may be preferable to unite it on top of the queen-less colony. In this case the super/s can be left on the queen-less colony and the sheet of newspaper put on top, but a queen excluder must be put on top of the paper to prevent the queen going down into the super/s. She can be put down into the bottom brood box after the bees have united.

Foot Note

If you have laying workers, lift the hive off its stance and set it down several metres away, put a new floor and brood box on the old stance then put a cloth on the ground in front of the hive and shake all the bees off the frames and out of the boxes onto the cloth. Place the bee-less frames in the new brood box, covering them as you do so with a cover cloth. The flying bees will return to the hive but the laying workers are unlikely to return.

If you have a drone layer (i.e. a queen which has failed to get mated) then you must ensure that she is killed or she will probably kill your new queen. The procedure is the same as above except that before you shake the bees off the frames, you need to pin a strip of queen excluder across the entrance of the new brood box to prevent her getting back into the hive. Also make sure that the top is kept covered so that she cannot enter that way. She should fail to get through the excluder, but sometimes she is small enough to do so. If she is not found on the sheet or on the front of the excluder she may have got through. In this case you have to decide whether to risk losing a valuable queen or simply accepting the loss of a colony. Better to lose one colony than two!

Ayr Flower Show

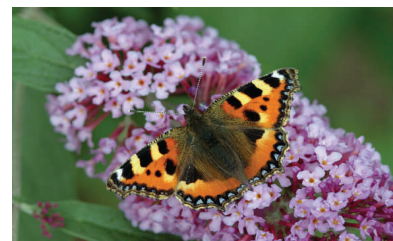
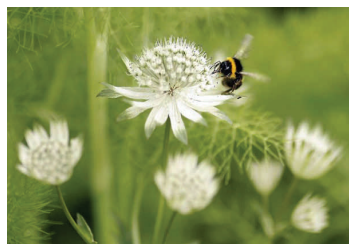
Another successful year for the Flower Show, with record numbers attending due to the, for once, pleasant summer weather. The attendance of BBC Scotland and subsequent showing of the Flower Show on the Beechgrove Garden, is excellent publicity for the Show.

A big thanks to all who contributed to setting up our excellent stall, and to all those who gave of their time over the weekend to serve in the honey shop, roll candles, assist with the Open Hive Demonstrations, and talk to the members of the public. A special thanks to that species of helper generally known as “Dogs Bodies” without whom most things wouldn’t run so smoothly. The open hive demonstrations were particularly popular this year, with most sessions oversubscribed, and a larger than normal audience at each demonstration.

Thanks to Helen for the lovely plants, Phil and Joyce for photographs, films and bees in dome, to say nothing of mannequins in bee-suits, and a lot of hard work. Thanks to Bill for the new staging on which to display the honey for judging, to Tony for his observation hive, and most importantly, presiding over the committee in order for ideas to be aired and agreed. Thanks to Ian J for giving advice and dealing with the innumerable questions from the public. Thanks to Vicki and Elizabeth for help with the honey shop, and Ian S for help with the open hive demonstrations. A big thanks to Lindsay for her calendars, help with candle making, with the open hive demonstrations and much more. Thanks to Joyce D for taking on her new role of commentator at the open hive. Well done Joyce.

Congratulations to all those who entered the competitions and won, or not.

Special congratulations to Ian Maxwell for winning the Ayr and District Beekeepers Association Trophy with the most points in classes 700-716.



Visit by Norwegian Beekeepers.

A contingency of Norwegian Beekeepers and their partners visited us last week.

They attended the Ayr Flower Show on Saturday, and came to our Apiary on the following Tuesday. Unfortunately the weather that afternoon was most unpleasant, so a very big thank you to Elizabeth for her very welcome hospitality. The visitors thoroughly enjoyed the splendid array of home baking and warm tea and coffee on such a cold afternoon, though by all accounts the weather in Norway is very similar to ours, and they were all prepared with raincoats and umbrellas.

A talk was given in the evening on the subject of Beekeeping in Norway which will be detailed in the next edition on Buzzword.

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[www. Ayr and District
Beekeepers Association .co.uk](http://www.AyrandDistrictBeekeepersAssociation.co.uk)

We love Honeybees

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this month's Buzzword. All items gratefully received. Old hands what about sending in memories of beekeeping in the past, or tips for beginners. Please send to bees5@btinternet.com

The Following Hints and Tips were submitted by Joyce Duncan which she gleaned from Old Hands at Ayr Flower Show.

Preparing Wax for Show - Ian Maxwell

Heat mould in oven ?60 deg C. Heat wax to 60 deg C. Pour through finest muslin (Davy Gordon says it's easier to do if you make a frame for the job). After wax in mould put in oven and allow to cool for 48hrs. Take whole thing out of oven (wax still in mould) and put whole lot in freezer for 48hrs. Will come clean out of mould with lovely shiny bottom!!! Cappings wax best.

Frost free jars - Ian Maxwell

Seed 1 good lb. honey with 14 lb of honey, mix, jars will not frost at-all.

Queenless hive - Ian Maxwell

Unite over paper with strong colony but Peter Aird who ran the honey section at Ayr Flower Show before Tony had advice of a more drastic nature! Take the queenless hive after they're in at night, put in boot of car, take them 1 mile away and let them out (I presume he meant just leave the hive not just tip them all out in the dark!) Put a box at the home apiary to collect the flying bees and the laying workers won't be able to fly back.

Thanks Joyce. Very interesting.

Frequently asked Questions.

Beginners often ask—What is Pollen?

Pollen collected by the bees is obtained from most flowers and catkins. It is the fertilizing dust of flowers and is usually found in large quantities on the summits of the anthers. The flowers depend in many cases for their fertilization on the visit of pollinating insects. Nature provides encouragement to the bees by giving the flowers bright colours, perfumes and nectar. When gathering pollen, bees will pass from flower to flower of the same varieties. They will pass over attractive looking flowers to find flowers of the same variety as those they have just visited. The bees gather the pollen in their baskets, which are technically called "corbiculae". The bees pack the pollen in these baskets, which are on their hind legs. They pack in each hind leg the quantity of pollen about the size of a mustard seed. The pollen varies in colour according to the flower visited. Dandelion produces golden yellow pollen, poppy black, apple pale green etc. Although the bees are so particular in selecting the same flowers for collecting the same variety of pollen, yet, when they return to the hive, they pack away the pollen into cells regardless of colour. Pollen is called bee bread, and it is used by the nurse bees to feed the grubs which hatch out of the eggs. They masticate the pollen along with honey and produce a creamy liquid. Pollen provides the protein which provides the bodies of the bees with replacement of tissue. The bees usually store pollen in the outer combs of the brood chamber, usually the one next to the outermost comb. It is important when creating new stocks that stores containing pollen should be provided to ensure that the new stocks are not handicapped for lack of essential foods.