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BEEKEEPING NOTES FOR

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A Summer Problem – Does a hive have a queen?

An issue that bothers me is individuals who must see a queen in their hive every time the hive is opened. I understand beginning beekeepers wanting to see their queen bee. I can remember the days when I was involved with field days. I was often given the task of showing beekeepers how to find the queen.

It gave me a chance to show off a bit. I knew the queen would usually be found where the brood in the hive was located. Not just capped brood but on frames with uncapped brood. If I could not find the queen, I could show evidence that the hive had a queen and it was not necessary to find the queen in the hive at all.

Let me point out that when frames are removed from the hive, bees can be crushed and rolled as a frame is removed. The same is true when frames are placed back into the hive body. I have taught that the first frame removed should be one against a side wall. Normally, bees store honey in outside frames and brood is usually not found in outside frames but more toward the center of the colony.

Bee populations are important. Honeybees depend upon replacing those bees that normally die and only a laying queen can assure a colony of a future. If a queen is accidentally killed, the bees can quickly determine they have no queen and begin to raise a replacement.

First, if you are trying to locate a queen every time you open a hive, you are actually causing a lot of stress to the colony. Normally a hive is dark inside. Opening the hive admits light -- disturbing the bees. Smoke is used to control the bees reaction to being disturbed. Too much smoke can cause another reaction –

the bees including the queen begin to run on the comb. Thus, it will be much harder to find the queen. The queen can move to the sidewalls or the inner cover of the hive to escape the smoke. The best action if that happens is to close the hive and wait until they settle down and return to their normal routine.

Rule # 1 -- If you are looking for the queen – **use as little smoke as possible to control the bees.** The queen will usually be laying eggs where cells are available near comb areas with eggs and larva. I have seen queens on capped brood but I think that is because she has been disturbed or bees are emerging from cells giving her the opportunity to start the brood cycle over in that area of the brood nest.

Rule # 2 – locate the brood nest. It is an oval shaped area where brood is found. This area is occupied with young worker bees feeding larvae, and cleaning cells. To the outside of the brood nest is usually a number of cells containing pollen.

Rule # 3 If the queen is not located, understand what you are seeing.



Are eggs present? If eggs are present, one knows that a queen has been in the hive at least 3 days earlier. Check again at least 5 days later to see what the situation is. If eggs are present – no

problem the colony has a queen.



- If only capped cells are present this indicates the colony has been without a queen for at least 9 days or more.
- If a colony has no capped brood at all, it indicates that the colony has been queen-less for at least 21 to 24 days.



If a colony has been queen-less for 20 or more days, a few worker bees can become laying workers. In that case, it will be very difficult to requeen the colony because new introduced queens will most likely be rejected. See the photo on the title page 1 – it shows drone brood in worker cells – not a good sign at all.

What can be done early if one suspects the bees are queen-less?

- **Place a frame with young larva and eggs into the hive. If the bees are queen-less they will begin to build queen cells. That is a sure sign that the colony does not have a queen. The frame with queen cells can be removed and a new queen can be introduced with some assurance she will be accepted. Or one can allow the bees to raise a new queen from the cells they build.**

What can be done if too much time has passed and an introduced queen is likely to be rejected?

I don't buy into the idea that one can take the queen-less bees out and dump them some distance away and then a new queen can be introduced. Those laying worker bees have wings and can return to their old hive as well as the other bees dumped.

I have always bought into the idea that if one has a much stronger queenright colony, it is possible to combine the two colonies into one. Once the laying worker bees have been removed by the bees with a queen, it is then possible to take the queen-less hive body with bees and sit it in a new location. At that time a new queen can be introduced.