

17th May Branch Apiary Swarm Control Demonstration *Martin Gate*

This was a must attend event demonstrating some of the more novel methods for swarm control and hive management comprising 90 minutes of intense management.

Tom Salter started by declaring that we were going to witness two methods of swarm control that do not need the queen to be seen throughout the manipulations. The first colony to be manipulated obliged by presenting Tom with a tidy group of bees near the entrance indicating that the clipped queen had attempted to swarm. Sure enough on inspection, the colony had a ripe queen cell and an open queen cell. Tom kept the open cell and handed the ripe cell to Helen Brice who came prepared with a plastic box padded with a tissue ready for a spare ripe queen cell. Since there was evidently no queen to head the colony the hive was closed up and Tom moved on to another colony to demonstrate the modified Pagden method which needs open queen cells and at least a hint of a colony with a queen.

Tom started by moving the second colony to one side and preparing a new brood box and floor for the queen and flying bees in place of the old colony box. The idea is to place a comb of some young bees in the fresh box to keep the queen happy and brush all the bees into this new box so that the queen goes in as well this leaves a box with brood and queen cells to be dealt with. Tom kept an eye on the state of the original colony; the colony had several frames of brood and on lifting up a frame he was confronted with a very dry queen cup indicating that the colony was not about to create queen cells for swarming. This meant a change of plan, which was confirmed when there were no queen cells to be found.

Tom then declared that he was now going to demonstrate the Wilson method of colony management. To do this the colony to one side was prepared to provide good quality queen cells. This box must start off with no bees in it and as the combs are placed in this box from the original brood box Tom ensured the queen was not accidentally placed in the side box by brushing off all bees with a large feather before placing a comb into the side box. To produce queen cells two combs of eggs and young brood are placed in the centre of the side box to provide eggs and this is surrounded by two combs of capped and emerging brood to provide nursery bees to help produce royal jelly and construction of health queen cells. Ideally two frames of stores are placed on either side to provide ample food. At this point the side box has no bees. It needs a balanced collection of mainly nursery bees to provide an ideal mix to produce healthy queen cells. Tom achieved this by placing the side box on top of the old colony separated by the queen excluder followed by supers and crown board. This was left for 30 minutes while the nursery bees migrated into the new box.



Next Tom prepared a colony for the Taranov method. A sacking was placed under the Taranov board which was placed about 10cm from the hive entrance with a sheet pinned with two drawing pins to the board to provide an upward inclined sheet for the bees to instinctively climb up towards the mouth of the hive entrance. Tom proceeded to dispose of the bees on to the sheet ensuring that frames with queen cells were not shaken and only the best queen cell retained. The



hive was then closed and the bees left to sort themselves out. During this process the bees were remarkably quiet and the bees walked towards the entrance apart from the queen that from time to time tended to wander down but eventually followed the relentless march up the sheet. Only the flying bees jump the gap while the queen forms a cluster under the Taranov board.

Tom then returned to the previous colony and on inspection the nurse bees had covered the combs in the upper chamber as planned. The chamber below was placed to one side and given a crown board and roof. This forms a colony with Queen and plenty of brood. The flying



bees return to the original hive position which is now populated by nursery bees ready to produce queen cells. In this case the supers are placed on top of the queen cell producing colony. After about 10 to 12 days, the colonies are swapped again after checking everything is as it should be with developed queen cells and laying queen in their respective hives. After the final swap the queen is rejoined with the majority of flying bees while the new queen cells produce new

queens without swarming casts due to the reduction of flying bees.

A small digression happened: a small swarm was found under a neighbouring hive and housed in a nuke.

Finally the Taranov swarm was housed in a separate hive and given a syrup feed. This swarm can now be placed in any location in the apiary since it is a very strange swarm that has no flying bees to want to fly back to their original colony.

Well it can be said that this was an instructive and eventful afternoon in the Blagdon apiary all enacted in front of a backdrop of dark and menacing clouds by Tom Salter, his many aids, and the bees.

