

FINDING, MARKING AND CLIPPING THE QUEEN.

For beginners, finding the queen can prove to be quite difficult and is rarely as easily found as the one in the picture, so here are a few tips.

- Use minimal smoke, 1 – 2 puffs, take off the honey super and queen excluder;
- Take out the 2/3 outer frames at either end of the brood as these will usually just contain honey or pollen and hence unlikely to have the queen on them. However check each one as you lay them against the hive or put them in an empty brood box.
- You can now space the remaining frames sufficiently wide apart to reduce the risk of the queen moving from frame to frame.
- Carefully lift one frame out of the middle, taking care not to squash the bees; this is chosen because it is the most likely place to find her, at the centre of the brood nest, on a frame with eggs and freshly polished cells by the nurse bees. Briefly scan over each side of this frame, starting at the outside to reduce the risk of the queen going over to the darker side of the frame.
- Having scanned both sides, place this frame in a spare box and continue with the remaining frames, placing them all in the same spare brood box, close together to retain the temperature of the brood.
- If you fail to find the queen at this first attempt, check the walls & floor of the now empty brood chamber.
- If you still have not found the queen; resort to the '**Divide & Conquer Method**'.
- Take out half the frames from brood box next to the hive and place them in the original brood chamber. Having fewer frames with a lesser number of bees, should make it much easier to repeat the operation again.

Marking & Clipping the Queen

If you do not plan to replace the queen when you have located her it is a good idea to mark her thorax with a bright colour so that she is more easily located in the future.

There are various queen bee traps available that are used to constrain the queen while you mark her thorax. Use a non-toxic marker, in the appropriate colour according to the year she is born:

Year ending in 0 or 5 (e.g. 2000 or 2005): blue

Year ending in 1 or 6 (e.g. 2001 or 2006): white or grey

Year ending in 2 or 7 (e.g. 2002 or 2007): yellow

Year ending in 3 or 8 (e.g. 2003 or 2008): red

Year ending in 4 or 9 (e.g. 2004 or 2009): green.

For ease, I use a 'Tipex' type white marker, which comes with its own brush and then use the appropriate coloured drawing pin somewhere on the outside of the brood box to designate the year according to the above codes. The queen should not be released into the hive until the mark is dry, as they will either remove the mark or worse not accept her and supersede her with a new queen.

You could also clip one of her wings. This does not prevent swarming but if they do swarm the queen will drop into the grass and the 'swarm' will eventually return to the hive. This will only give you a few days extra time to carry out your favoured swarm prevention measure, because undoubtedly they will still be in swarming mode and are most likely to swarm as soon as the first virgin queen is mated.

There is however divided opinion on clipping queens, as it is argued that the colony can see her as being damaged and can supersede her. The choice is yours.

Download our video on Queen catching, marking & clipping, taken at Sarah Rapley's Apiary in late spring 2012: <http://youtu.be/1pUDgCtIxPc>

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