Many Uses of Nucleus Hives.

Frames not supplied

This polystyrene hive is fast becoming the most popular nucleus hive because of its £30 price.
A nucleus hive should be part of every beekeeper's equipment for the following important reasons.

Advantages and many uses of a Nucleus Hive:

- Its insulation makes it a good back up over winter, to cover for any colony losses.
- Open mesh floor for good ventilation and varroa control.
- Can be used to hold surplus bees & brood from congested colonies in the swarming season.
- Swarm control by removing brood from colonies showing signs of swarming.
- Can be used to collect and quarantine swarms for re-housing later.
- Can be used as a bait hive.
- To make increase using frames of brood with some <3 day old eggs.
- Storage of selected breeder queens.
- Used to house emergency brood, bees and queens.
- Insurance against aggressive bees or failing queens
- Storage of queen cells for possible re-queening.
- Stocking of observation hives.
- Easily moved for pollination of greenhouses and poly tunnels.
- Transporting frames of honey.
- Adding an Eke will allow use of 14"x12" frames and also allow feeding.

Disadvantages of this type of nucleus hive:

- Integral feeder prone to fermenting or mould if the bees do not finish the liquid feed.
- It is also difficult to empty it without tipping the hive upside down.
- Wooden float needs waxing to prevent mould discolouring it black.
- Difficult, but not impossible, to sterilise and difficult to remove propolis from surfaces.

Setting up a Nuc.

The best time to set up a nucleus is in June & July. Choose a donor hive which is vigorous and exhibits all the preferred traits of good brood pattern, hygienic behaviour, calmness and good honey production.

Once selected, first find the queen and keep her on the frame with a crown of thorns or in a match box or queen cage with a few workers.

Choose three frames with some sealed & some unsealed brood, one frame with pollen and one with stores, making a total of 5 frames. Lightly shake each frame over the donor hive to dislodge the flying bees leaving mostly nurse bees on the frames to be inserted in the nuc.
Additional nurse bees can be added from a couple of other frames. The few remaining flying bees will return to the donor colony.

There are several ways to make the nucleus queen right:

- Introduce a queen cell from a colony of preferred temperament.
- Leave the bees to raise their own queen.
- Re-introduce the old queen from the donor colony.

Because the nucleus is without foragers, it is considered best not to give all the work to the nucleus, but to let the donor hive raise a new queen. However it surprising how quickly the colony rebalances itself and I have been equally successful letting the nuc. raise its own queen, so the choice is yours.

Do not carry out an inspection for at least 30 days to allow the queen to have mated and hopefully settled into an egg laying routine.

The greatest achievement with our very variable summers is to get the virgin queen to mate successfully as this so dependent on the weather at the time she emerges.

When you have 2 queen right colonies, the preferred option is to see how the new queen performs and then amalgamate at the end of the honey flow, to allow the colony to build up with a new queen before the start of winter. Alternatively you can run both queens through the winter as an insurance against possible losses in a very hard winter.

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