

Queenless Colony: What to Do?

By John Johnson

Packages of bees, nucs or overwintered colonies occasionally become queenless. Here are several options for dealing with the situation.

Best choice

Unite with a queenright colony. This practice is successful most of the time. Do not unite a queenless laying worker colony with a queenright unit as the laying workers will usually kill the queen.

Proceed this way: Remove the queenright colony from the bottom board and set it aside. Set the queenless unit on the bottom board previously occupied by the queenright colony. Unite the two units with a single sheet of newspaper separating them. This usually results in a single queenright colony which is strengthened by worker bees from the queenless unit. When bees are mixed by uniting colonies, introducing queens, etc there is some risk the queen will be destroyed. But, there is much to be gained by these practices. So, it is a calculated risk which most beekeepers take as needed,

2nd best choice

Queenless from Mid-June to about August 1st

From mid-June to about August 1st, there is one additional choice the writer of this paper has successfully employed many times. It is the well-known practice of taking a comb of newly laid eggs, about the size of the palm of your hand or a little larger, from a strong colony and giving it to the queenless unit.

Proceed this way: Take a comb with newly laid eggs from a strong colony and shake the adhering bees back into the colony from which they came. Place this comb into the center of the queenless unit. The bees now can rear their own queen. If successful, it takes about 15 days for the new queen to emerge. Allow another 8-10 days for her to get mated and start laying. Twenty-five days after giving the comb with eggs, check to see if there is a new queen. If so, let her head the colony through the winter. Next spring one can decide whether to destroy her and requeen the colony or let her remain as hive queen.

The quality of queens reared in this manner range from good to poor. That is what one can expect from queens supplied by queen breeders. Even if a home-raised queen is mediocre, she will usually keep the colony functioning through the winter and can then be replaced by a new queen in the spring.

3rd choice

Obtain a new queen as soon as possible and introduce her to the queenless unit. This sometimes works, but is a bit risky. Note: It usually takes considerable time to get a new queen from a queen breeder to the beekeeper in need of a queen.

Last resort

If other choices fail or are not practical, remove the bees from the queenless colony by shaking them from the combs into the grass and store the combs in a safe place for future use.

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