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The Cause and Control of Swarming in Bees

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THE SNELGROVE METHOD OF SWARM PREVENTION

By L. E. SNELGROVE, M.A., M.Sc.

It is impossible in the brief time allotted to me to deal fully with my method of swarm prevention and I shall therefore confine my descriptions to its application to a stock of bees which has not made preparations for swarming and which is housed in a "Simplicity" or "National Single-walled hive." As I proceed I shall illustrate my points by means of the hive placed at my disposal to-day by the officials of this station. For the important modifications necessary in the case of a stock which is building queen-cells preparatory to swarming, for the application of the method to other types of hives, for its use in queen-rearing, preparations for the heather season, and detailed working instructions, I must refer my listeners to the book I have recently published on the subject.*

A good method of swarm control should conform to the following conditions:—

(1) It should be applicable in all circumstances and certain in its result when properly carried out.

(2) It should require little time and labour.

(3) It should not involve the breaking down of queen-cells or (if not desired) searching for the queen.

(4) It should provide for annual re-queening, selection of stock, and increase or limitation of stocks as desired.

(5) It should ensure immediate occupation of supers and no interruption of honey-gathering or the laying of the queen.

(6) Above all it should not involve cruelty such as is occasioned by the forcible confinement of queen or drones by means of queen excluders.

The methods I have devised fulfil all these conditions. In particular the amount of time necessary to prevent a stock from swarming throughout the season should be considerably less than one hour.

The success of a stock of bees in respect of honey-gathering depends on the number of field bees it contains during the period of the main honey flow. Every effort must therefore be made to stimulate the queen to lay plentifully during the spring, and with this end in view the stock must be provided with additional brood boxes as necessary until the last week in May. It is easy to prevent swarming until this time by judicious increase of the brood nest and by supering in the ordinary way.

* "Swarming: its control and prevention." (Snelgrove) 1935.

When a new brood chamber is added some precautions are necessary. It is often useless merely to place it *under* the brood nest, for in unfavourable weather the bees will confine themselves to their original combs, prepare queen cells, and swarm. The new brood chamber should be placed *above* the original one, and to ensure that the bees will occupy it two frames of brood with bees should be lifted from the lower to the upper chamber and placed on either side of a central empty comb, their places below being filled by two empty combs or foundation. The same procedure should be followed if it becomes necessary to add further additional brood boxes.

A stock occupying fairly fully a double brood chamber, and possibly to some extent a super, at the beginning of the last week in May is in ideal condition for successful treatment. Better results will naturally be obtained from a stock which has needed a third brood box.

Let us now assume that towards the end of May our typical stock occupies twenty brood frames and that above these there is a shallow frame or section rack, the hive having been well ventilated below by a wide entrance and the queen not having been at any time restricted for room to lay.

On a convenient day the brood combs of the stock, with adhering bees are separated into two groups—those containing brood, which are placed in what we shall call Box A, and others which are broodless, or nearly so, and which are placed in Box B. With the latter are placed the queen and one comb containing a little young brood.

Box B is then placed under the excluder and will become the future brood nest of the stock. Box A containing the brood is placed above the excluder and the super.

If it is desired to avoid the task of finding the queen it is only necessary to shake the bees gently off the combs of Box A and let them run into the hive at the main entrance. The queen will then be in Box B and under the excluder.

The bees in A, separated from the queen by an excluder and the super, begin to raise queen-cells. On the fourth day, when the feeding of the young queens is practically completed, Box A is separated from the rest of the stock by means of a screen-board. This is similar to a clearer-board, the clearer hole being covered by perforated zinc or wire gauze. Wedges are cut from the upper and lower rims of the board so as to provide small entrances or exits about $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide. They are cut on three sides of the board and serve to deprive the stock in A of flying bees and at the same time to re-inforce the stock in B which occupies the supers.

When the screen board is placed under Box A, one of the upper small entrances is opened and the flying bees from this box return to the hive by the main entrance, thus re-inforcing the stock in Box B. By suitable manipulation of the wedges the lower stock is still further re-inforced on two specific dates so that young queens

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emerging in Box A cannot possibly lead off swarms because there are no flying bees to accompany them.

The whole force of field bees is concentrated in Box B and the supers. As this stock is deficient in nurse bees, which cannot increase to excess for four or five weeks, and as by that time the queen's laying power will have declined, there will be no tendency on the part of these bees to swarm.

The bees in both boxes retain the same odour because of the wire gauze between them. The stock in B establishes and maintains a column of bees reaching through the super to the gauze in the screen-board, and the super is therefore immediately occupied after the insertion of the board.

By simple modification of Box B it is possible to rear several young queens at one time. Selection of stock is made easy by the application of the method to the best stocks three or four days earlier than to the others.

It will be realised that by this method the full force of field bees is kept at work in the supers, which may be added at suitable intervals and that the young queens are reared under the best possible conditions.

The method should not be applied before the queen has reached the peak period of her laying—that is, usually about the end of May. If it be used earlier the stock may need some relief of its brood nest after three weeks in order that there be no late swarming. Such relief can be given by exchanging two combs of brood in Box B for two broodless ones in A.

At the end of the honey season the two stocks may be united, or they may be wintered separately.

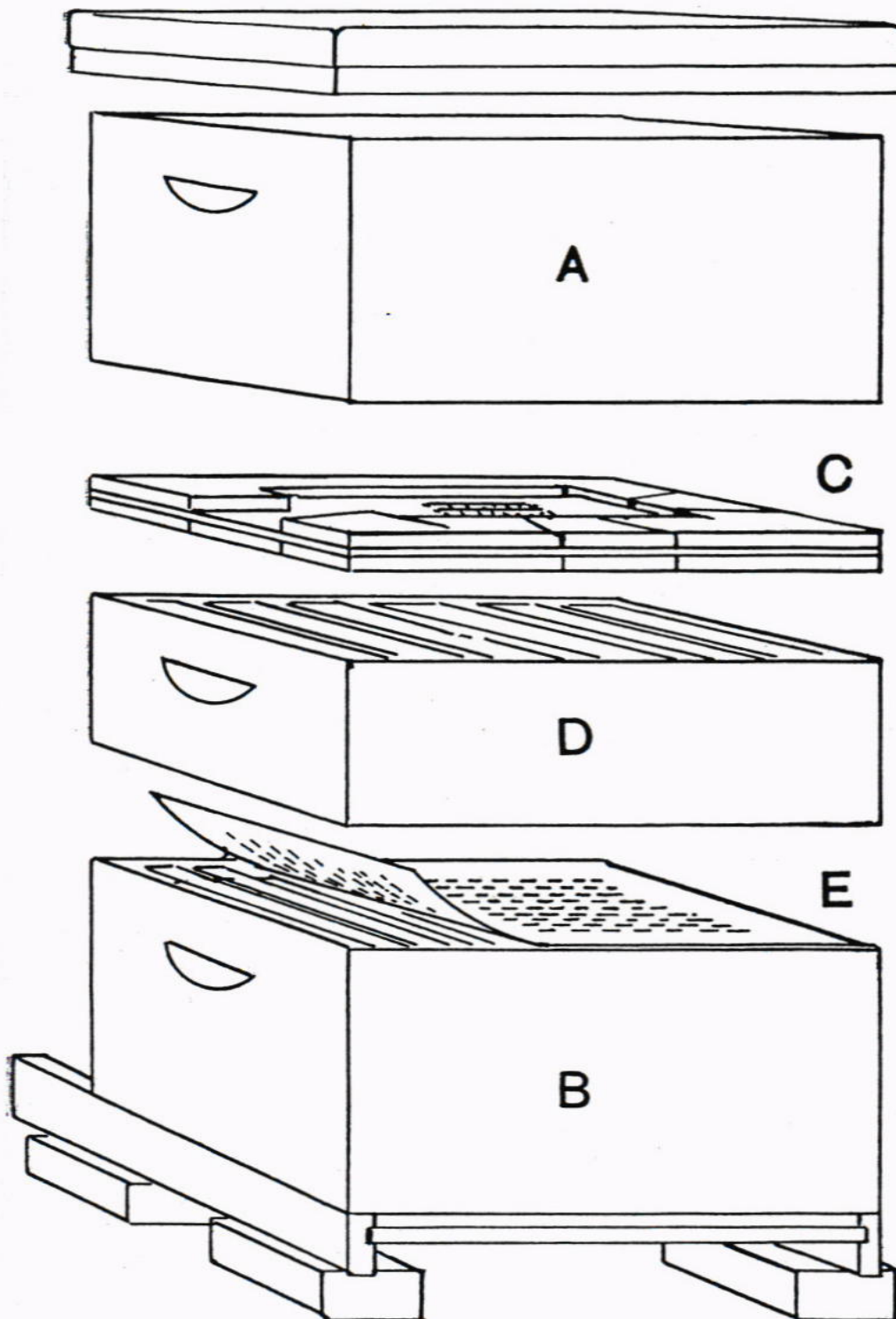


PLATE I. SNELGROVE METHOD.

- A. "Box A" containing brood and young bees, in which queen cells are raised.
- B. "Box B" containing broodless combs and laying queen on one comb of brood, to which the flying bees return.
- C. The special screen boards having three pairs of removable entrance blocks and a ventilation hole in the centre covered with wire gauze.
- D. The supers.
- E. Queen excluder placed between queen chamber and super.