

# Swarming - and what to do about it

By Nick Withers

# A Welcome Sight?



Most beekeepers don't spot signs of  
swarming

**In one recent season:**

**Had swarmed  
50 - 60%**

**Beekeeper knew  
~ 20%**

**Beekeeper caught  
~ 20%**

**Important to expect it to happen & be  
prepared.**

# The effect of swarms on surplus honey yield

No swarm – expect, say 100lbs Honey	4 supers?
Prime swarm (if caught)	2 supers?
Cast (if caught)	1 super?
Parent hive	? zilch

Actions:

Prevent	Control	Catch & unite
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Priority: keep all the worker bees at home!

## Actions: Prevention (if you're lucky!)

- Young queen
- Give plenty of room
- 'Non swarming' strain of bee
- Shook swarm?
- Set up a 2 queen hive

## Actions: Prevention (Non 'U'!)

- Kill queen
- Disease (e.g. chalkbrood)

## Actions: Catch and Unite

- Catch the swarm (if you're lucky!) and hive it
- Control QCs in old hive to ensure no casts
- Unite swarm hive to old hive when a new queen is laying, retaining the new queen
- Or keep the two (make increase)



# Catching a Swarm





# Catching a Swarm with a Bait Hive



Bait hive swarms are frequently not from your own hives

# What you see in the hive during swarming

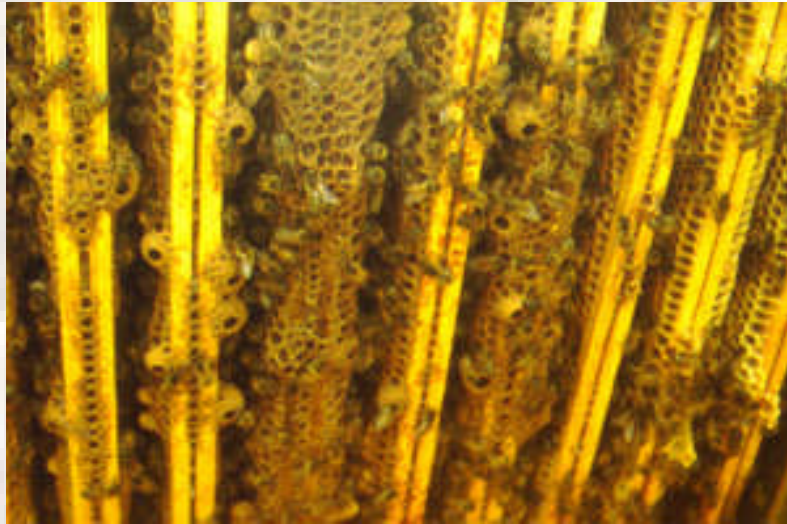
<u>In the Hive</u>	<u>The Bees</u>	<u>Other</u>
Cups		
Cups with eggs		
Cups with young larvae + RJ		
Queen cells with larvae	bees lazy (swarmy)	less foraging
Sealed queen cells	swarm issues	no eggs from now on
VQ emerged	cast issues	then another etc.
All VQs emerged		little brood left
New Q mated	large nuc	eggs (3wks after swarm)

Where is the point of no return?

What is the best course of action starting at each stage?



# Cups, cells & sealed cells



# What do you do when you see:

- Cups:- check carefully no eggs in any cup
- Cups with eggs:- destroy & look again soon (max 7 days)
- Cups with young larvae control procedure
- Queen cells with larvae check none sealed, control procedure
- Some sealed queen cells has Q gone? – No – control procedure  
Yes – destroy sealed cells & leave 1 week
- Sealed queen cells, no young brood VQ emerged? – No – leave 1 cell. Yes – pull other VQs, destroy all remaining cells
- Sealed queen cells, some young brood destroy sealed cells & leave 1 week then leave 1 cell

# Actions: Control

## Cell cutting

??

Once swarm preparation has started, control needs drastic action.

## Proper Control

Adrian Waring's thesis:

Flying bees	)	
Brood & young bees	)	Remove any 1, stop or delay swarming
Queen	)	

e.g. Remove:

Flying bees	Move colony (in apiary with other hives)
Brood & young bees	Artificial swarm
Queen	Take Q away in a nuc or cage her over the supers



# Actions: more about control

## Other methods:

### Shook swarm

All bees & queen shaken into parent hive,  
(Q excluder under box to stop absconding)  
brood given to another colony (minus QCs!).

### Taranov swarm

Cage queen under a board in front of hive and  
shake all bees onto it.  
Many bees will form a swarm cluster around the queen  
which can be hived.

# Management of procedures

Remember you can't have a swarm without a queen (& queen cells)

To be successful you need to predict where the greatest risk of swarming is, for example – the artificial swarm:-

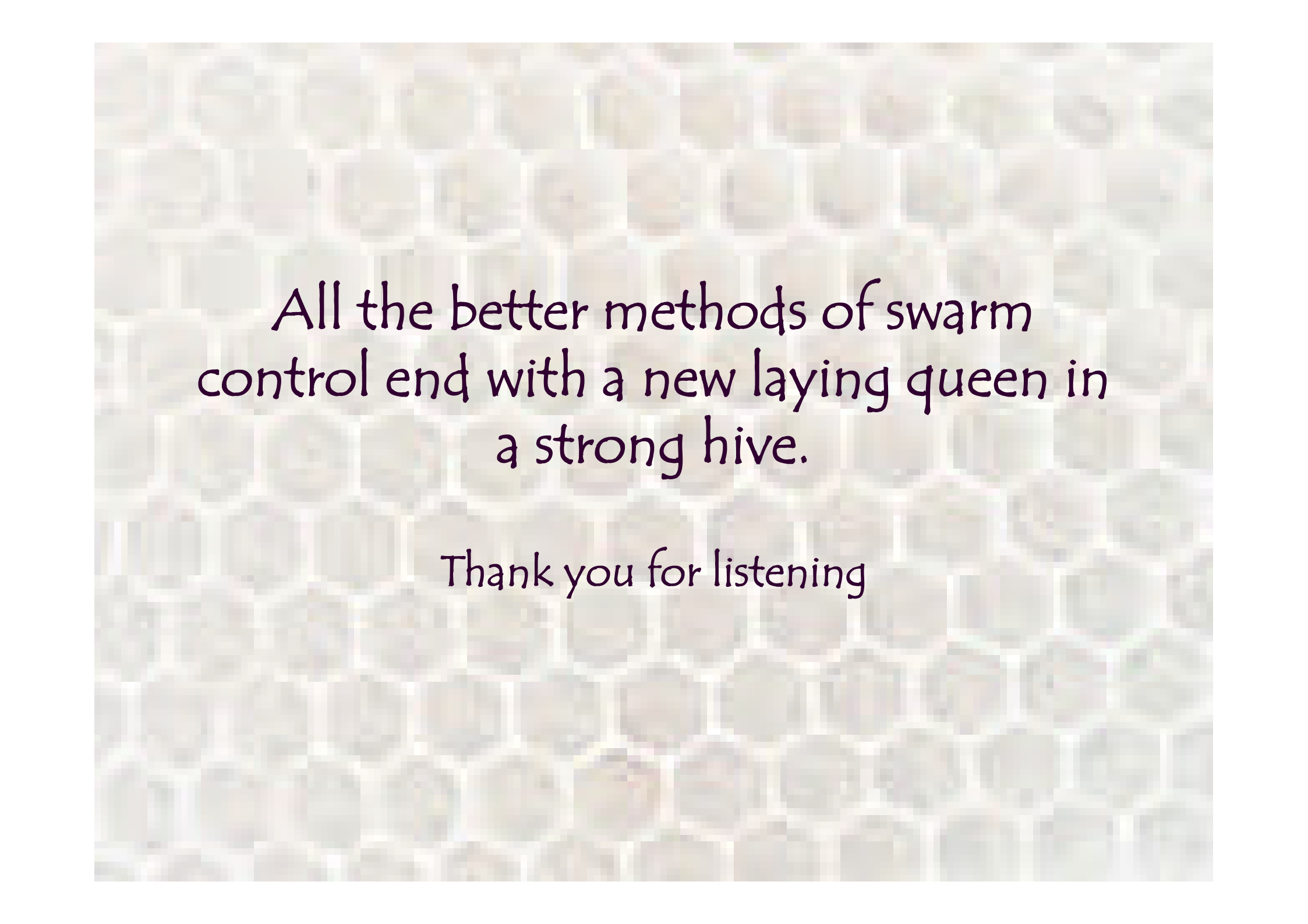
## The Artificial Swarm Procedure (unsealed Q cells & queen present)

- Day 1: Move hive with QCs aside. Replacement hive with Q + 1 brood + broodless combs on old site.  
(flying bees go to old site with queen)
- Day 7: Move hive with QCs to other side of old site.  
(more flying bees join old site)
- Day 7+: VQ emerges in moved hive.
- ~Day 14+: New Q in moved hive mates.
- ~Day 21+: New Q starts laying.
- ~Day 35+: Opportunity to unite, retaining new queen.

# Management of procedures – eg the artificial swarm

	Hive	Contents	Risk of swarming
Stage 1.	Parent site	Queen + flying bees	May swarm
	New site	Brood + young bees + QCs	Can't swarm
Stage 2.	Parent site	Queen + brood + FBs	Low risk
Day 7	New site	Brood + YBs & FBs + QCs	Can't swarm
Stage 3.	Parent site	Queen + brood + FBs	Low risk
V soon	New site	Brood + YBs & FBs + VQs + QCs	High risk
Stage 4	Parent site	Queen + brood + FBs + Ybs	Low risk
Day 21 +	New site	New Q + Fbs + eggs	Won't
Stage 5.	Parent site	Queen + brood + all Bs	Can prepare
Day 35 +	New site	New Q + brood + all Bs	Won't

After stage 5 the best course of action is to unite the parent hive to the new one, retaining the new queen.



All the better methods of swarm  
control end with a new laying queen in  
a strong hive.

Thank you for listening