

THE HIVE TOOL

Volume XXXIII

June 2007

**PUBLISHED BY
THE CENTRAL MARYLAND
BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
FOUNDED 1973**

President Frame

If beekeepers have a season, this is it! Bountiful nature is in full bloom. The colonies are full of bees, brood-rearing is at its peak, supers are filled with honey. . . and colonies swarm. I've had a fair number of swarms this year; fortunately, the folks near my out apiaries call when they see or hear a swarm. Many of them like to stick around and watch - who doesn't like a good show! And catching a swarm is, if nothing else, always a good show (especially for the uninitiated). Dropping a huge mass of bees into a box with a swift jerk is a dramatic moment to be sure.

One time back in my Belizean Peace Corps days I tried to catch a swarm for a new beekeeper. It had settled on an overhanging limb about twenty feet up in the air. There was no way I could cut the branch or get a box directly under the swarm, so I tied a frame of comb to a long pole which I hoped the bees would gather on as I slowly eased the frame into the cluster. This was in a small Mayan village and it didn't take long as I made my preparations for the entire village to gather around this unusual scene. Great! Now I had an audience! Everyone was quite interested (from a distance) to see what was going to happen. I could sense the anticipation. I slowly raised the frame on the pole straight up into the cluster. Everything seemed to be working well (did I hear the oo's and ah's?); if only I could nudge a few more bees onto the comb I would have them. I tried giving the pole a little shake, ever so slightly. I was feeling pretty confident - big mistake! - just one more little nudge was all it took to dislodge the entire swarm which fell directly on my head! All I had time to do was duck my head and hunch my shoulders and listen to the howls of surprise and laughter from the assembled audience. What could I do but laugh as well? I don't remember any/many stings. The swarm returned to its place on the limb and I left it there. To this day there are some swarms I just let go - they're not worth the trouble or the embarrassment.

This year I have a colony that keeps issuing afterswarms. I got the call about the primary swarm, a nice large swarm on a low branch which was easy to hive. A week later the same colony swarmed three times in three days, each swarm smaller than the last, each swarm carrying one or more virgin queens. It doesn't happen often, but sometimes a colony will continue swarming, even with virgin queens, each

swarm with fewer and fewer young bees. These afterswarms are of little use to the beekeeper; they are usually too small and with a virgin queen they rarely establish a colony strong enough or with sufficient stores to survive the winter. I used these afterswarms to boost some weak colonies I had by combining them. Afterswarms are frustrating and a bit of a mystery. Hopefully, one catches the primary swarm (mine is doing well) because what comes after rarely thrives. Another management alternative would be to recombine the afterswarm with the parent colony, eliminating all but one virgin queen. Good luck! That's a lot of work without any guarantee of success. Bring your swarm stories to June's meeting; I'd like to hear some of them!

We'll be doing something a little different to begin our June meeting. At 6:00pm we'll be gathering in the field below the Nature Center where we have four colonies of bees, a couple of them new packages. We'll go through the colonies, evaluating and talking about what we see/discover. If you are a new beekeeper and would like to observe an experienced beekeeper working bees or if you'd like to connect with a beekeeping mentor, this is a good opportunity. It's also a good opportunity to compare your bees in relation to these colonies. Bring whatever protective gear you like to wear. We will begin our regular meeting as usual at 7:30pm. Our mentor sign-up list will be on the stump if you are looking for a mentor or if you'd like to volunteer as a mentor (we need more mentors - don't be shy. you don't have to be an expert, just willing to share what you have learned from your experience).

Speaking of sign-up lists - it's that time to sign up to work at the Maryland State Fair. This is one of the most fun and rewarding activities we sponsor. To volunteer to work at the beekeeping exhibit at the fair means this: You work a four hour shift (10am-2pm; 2pm-6pm; 6pm-10pm) selling honey and talking to the public about your bees and beekeeping. Five to seven people work each shift. You are given an admission pass to the fair and, as a thank you, a one pound jar of honey (choose your variety). If you have not experienced the fine beekeeping exhibit we help create at the state fair then you're really missing something special. If you have not volunteered, you're missing out on a fun and rewarding beekeeping experience; this is something many of our members do year after year. We will be signing up for shifts Friday through Monday, August 24th through the 27th and August 31st through September 3rd. Don't forget we also need volunteers to talk about bees at the observation hive during these shifts and to demonstrate extracting honey each

evening at 8pm. If you have honey to sell, you may consign it to be sold at the fair (more about that next issue).

This is our busiest time of the year - both with our bees and with association activities. As a result, there will be no regular meetings in July and August; however, MSBA meets June 16th at Harford Community College, our annual picnic will be Saturday, July 21st (more about that next issue), EAS meets in Wilmington, Delaware August 6th-10th (consider taking the beginner's or intermediate/advanced beekeeper's short course), the Maryland Sate Fair runs August 24th-Sept 3rd (consider entering honey or other hive products in the competition - more about that next issue), and then come to our regular meeting on Tuesday, September 4th.

Replacing The Colony's Queen

A little philosophy and a lot of practice

By Jim Tew

Reprinted from Bee Culture May 2007

Seeing ourselves in our colonies

The beekeeping craft is filled with numerous instance of "humanized" bees. As humans, we just can't help it. Though they never asked for the attribute, we try to give human values to our bees. Beehives are painted white, historically, a common house paint color, to ostensibly reflect heat, but I have never been sure that heat needed reflecting. That white hive has a landing board comparable to our front porch. Our bees sting us when they are "angry" or they buzz "happily" during a spring nectar flow. Drones are the goofy boys of the hive, and we smirk when discussing the primary function drones serve. Worker bees are the conscientious laborers within the hive and we marvel at their "intelligence" and "skills." But above all, the queen is the most humanized - more often vilified - member of the colony. She is our colony's "president" - the leader of the group. We expect great things from our colony, so we demand that the queen provide the genetic stock to get the job done. Relating to our colonies, we tend to allocate all blame and all goodness of the colony to the queen. For her, it is ultimately a lost cause. Even the very best queen in the yard one day soon will be a bad queen. Her reign is short, controversial, and violent. It follows that human feelings and attributes will play a part in our decision to requeen our colonies.

Why requeen at all?

"Bees know what's best for them. I let them raise their own queen." That would be a true statement if our bees were not kept in artificial white domiciles. The beeyard is a very unnatural environment for our bees. Our white hives, sitting in neat, straight rows, contain combs that are too straight. None of this is how the bees would have done it themselves. The beeyard, and the frames of comb contained in the hives, are of

human design. In this mostly unnatural world, it becomes somewhat unfair to expect bees to continue to act naturally. Regular requeening helps us continue to keep bees our way, year round. Yes, the bees can and will provide for their own queen, but it is frequently not to our human advantage to have them do so.

If your goal is productive, overwinterable colonies, you should requeen regularly - at least every other year. If your goal is watch biology in action, as an uninvolved bystander, you can let them raise their own. The recommendation to regularly requeen is a common one, but that does not make it an automatic process. The requeening process should be taken seriously and with preparation.

Obtaining queens

Numerous detailed books and articles have been written on the subject of raising, shipping, and introducing queens into colonies. My intent here is to discuss the reasons for requeening, including some suggestions and recommendations on the task.

Raising or buying?

Yes, you can somewhat easily raise your own queens if that is how you choose to obtain queens, but most of us will simply buy them (and then later complain about them). Prices for purchased queens are like gasoline prices, they are only going to go up. The selling price of a replacement queen has reached a level where requeening must be taken seriously.

From whom to buy?

Sorry, but that is your call. The bee journals are replete with advertisements for queens. Queens are given as door prizes at state bee meetings. Beekeepers talk amongst themselves about queen sources. Sometimes, local beekeepers grow a few local queens and offer them for sale. Spring is the season when most beekeepers want new queens so spring queens are the most difficult to get. Summer queens and fall queens are more readily available, but introduction will be a bit more difficult. Ultimately, you the beekeeper, will have to find a source for queens that is satisfactory for you.



Contented worker bees on a queen cage.

What kind to buy?

I can't think of a single beekeeper who ever set out to buy a bad queen. We all want *good* queens, but the question is - how good? Queens of various color and behavioral strains are there for you. Queens with varying claims for resistance to mites are now commonly offered. Most large-scale queen producers give their queens unique names that actually have little to do with the quality of the queen. Some of you like yellow queens while others are supporters of darker Carniolan queens. In years past, Caucasian queens were marketed, but that strain has fallen from grace and are not now readily available.

I normally try for the standard "good" queen, but there are plenty of you out there who want the very best queen available and are willing to pay for her. Certainly, no harm done there. When you make your decision on where to buy your queens, you will secondarily decide how much you are willing to pay.

When to complain?

Need I say that the queens must arrive alive? If they come to you dead, contact the producer immediately. But what if she comes in alive, but she dies while in the cage on your dining room table waiting for the rain to stop so you can release her? There is not as clear an answer to this question. Or, how about you pay \$20 for her and then find her corpse in front of the hive the day after her release? Again, no clear answer. What if you successfully introduce the queen and she is a low producer? Not a lot of recourse there - buy from someone else the next time. In all areas of queen purchasing, be fair to the producer and to yourself. But before you call with a sad story, you should know that experienced queen producers have heard it all before.

When to requeen?

You need to requeen your colonies *before* they need it. In my idyllic beeyard, I order queens based on the calendar - without even opening the colony. In reality, I and many of you are already standing by the colony looking at a failing queen before we rush to our phone to call for ~ new queen. With luck, we get our new queens two weeks later. Valuable time has been lost. Alas, better this desperate way of ordering queens than not to requeen at all.

As indicated above, the Spring season is the easiest time to requeen. During a good nectar flow, the bees are more amenable to accepting a new queen. Having said that, autumn requeening is certainly possible and having said that so is Summer requeening. Winter requeening is obviously not an option. New queens are not available and breaking clusters to find and replace queens would no doubt cause great harm to the dormant colony.

How to requeen?

How to requeen? Let me count the ways. Techniques range from installing a complete nuc to rolling the replacement queen in sputum in your hand

before dropping her in the colony are in the bee literature. That said, the most common techniques require the colony's reigning queen be removed and a caged queen put in the colony. Everything else is details. A discussion of some of those details follows.

Kill the old queen?

It matters little if you kill the reigning queen and leave her in the colony (humanism again). The bees don't pine in agony and eagerly accept the new queen in awareness that the old queen is dead. Apparently, and strange to us, a colony is nuts about avoiding parasitism and will kill a perfectly good queen - even when no other is available. Killing (or removing) the old queen and leaving the colony queenless for a day or so gives the colony the pheromonal opportunity to "realize" that they are without queen.

How to manage the caged queen?

Though techniques exist for direct introduction, those techniques were developed during beekeeping times when queens were plentiful and cheap. Not now. Unless you really know what you are doing and unless you have backup queens available, use the slow release procedure.

After the old queen is removed, the caged queen is put into the colony. The type of queen cage being used will dictate where the cage should go. In any case, the caged queen should be near the colony's brood nest. Just a few years ago, I would have confidently told you to expose the candy plug in order for the bees to slowly eat the candy plug; thereby slowly releasing the queen. Candy plug up or candy plug down? I don't care. That is a detail for beekeepers to argue at meetings. Just be sure that the nurse bees have access to the caged queen in order to feed her. Now, I more cautiously recommend that the queen cage candy plug stay plugged and you, the beekeeper, actually return to the colony for a second time to evaluate how well the introduction process is proceeding. For the past two to three years, I have been directly releasing the queen onto the brood comb.

What do with the attendant bees?

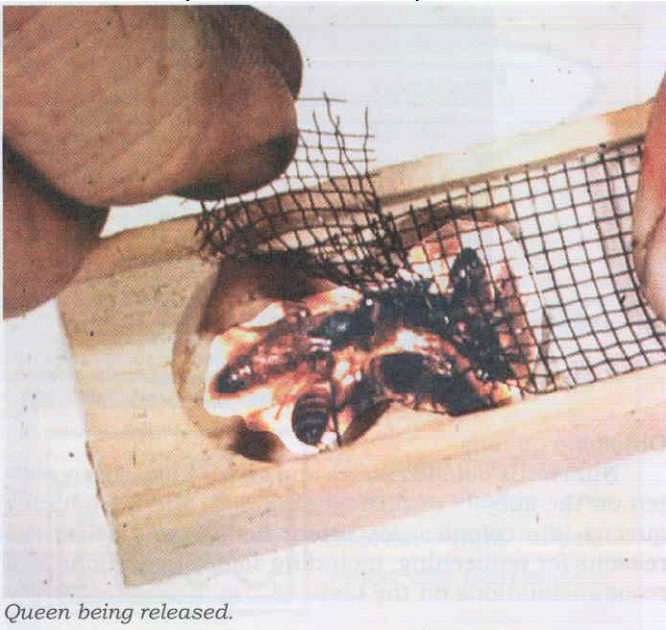
If you can, get them out. If you are uncomfortable doing that, leave them in. Caged attendants will undergo the same introduction process as the queen. If the caged queen is to be held outside the hive for a long time, be prepared to replace the attendants, with young nurse bees, as the older attendants die.

How to release the caged queen?

Historically, the recommendation was to allow about three days for the caged queen to become familiar to the colony. I don't mind doubling that time now. Upon returning to the colony on a bright, sunny day when bees are readily flying, using minimal smoke, gently open the colony and observe the cage. No doubt it is covered with bees. Remove the cage and gently brush the bees away. In fact, did they gently brush away? If not, and if they cling to the cage while

showing a sting response, do not release the queen 1• The bees are treating the cage the same way they will treat the queen. If all looks well, release the queen onto a frame of open brood if available or capped brood if unavailable. If the bees readily show hostility, recage the queen and try again a few days later.

The actual releasing phase can be dicey. The queen has been in that cage now for weeks and will frequently be reticent about leaving it. When using wooden cages, pry the staple from one end and pull the screen wire back. It is imperative that you carefully watch the queen. She will occasionally abruptly flyaway. Gently open the cage on the comb and entice the queen out. Again watch her. Even if she doesn't flyaway, she will nearly always run upwardly. Once you get her turned around and headed into the brood nest, things should be okay. I can't lie. This is a tense moment in the queen introduction process.



Queen being released.

Then what?

After releasing the queen and deciding that she is being properly accepted, leave her alone for a week or so. You will want to check the front of the hive each day per chance she is rejected. If nothing else in this article stays with you, it should be this: Queen introduction is not an exact procedure. Different colonies, different caged queens, different seasons and different beekeepers will all result in different outcomes. Sometimes bad things happen to good queens. Does this story end with the new queen producing a brood nest and becoming the reigning monarch (there's that human thing again)? Most of the time - yes - but sometimes the queen will be superceded long after she has established a brood nest. That is just one of the mysteries of the bees. Ultimately, they are the ones who must decide if the queen is right for them.

Requeening - a necessary but iffy task.

As with any other aspect of keeping bees, the beekeeper's ability to assist a colony in requeening itself is an acquired skill. However, you should know that even experienced beekeepers profit from having a high degree of good luck when undertaking this task. So much of our bee management could be made so much better if we consistently requeened. For a host of good reasons, most of us won't.

For related Archived *Bee Culture*2 reading on the subject of queen introduction, look at:

- Tew, James E. 1996. *The Mysterious Case of the Disappearing Queen*. Bee Culture. August, 1996.
- Tew, James E. 1997. *101 Reasons a Queen Gets Replaced*. Bee Culture. February, 1997.
- Tew, James E. 2002. *Banking Queens*. Bee Culture. December, 2002.
- Tew, James E. 2002. *Queens, Queens, Queens*. July, 2002.
- Latshaw, Joseph. 2002. *Queen Introduction*. March, 2002.
- Tew, James E. 2003. *A Queen Cage Introduction Frame*. September, 2003 .•

Starting Over With Bees

By Gwen Rosenberg

Reprinted from *Bee Culture* May 2007

After we moved to this area I really poured it on thick with my neighbors about how great beekeeping was and how as my neighbors they were in store for a lot of free honey. Recently, one of them took me up on my offer and asked if I had any honey "Uhhh ... no." I said.

"That's alright," she said, "the bees should be flying soon and making you some more."

I really have these people well trained. "Well, we'll be seeing some activity out by the hives for sure once the snow melts," I cryptically uttered. She's a real animal lover so there's no tactful way to say that last Fall my bees were really light on Fall honey and I tried to feed, but then the holidays, and then the kids' birthday parties, and then mice, I think, or maybe bears, or maybe colony collapse, but anyhow they're all as good as dead. Ouch. Gwen Rosenberg's dead bee farm just does not have a feel good happy ring to it. I know the weather broke a month ago, for 15 minutes, and I should have gone out there to feed my little charges, but I was sick and cold - I could have died venturing all the way to the backyard with buckets of sugar syrup. I know my doctor would have insisted I stay inside, so I did

Now the snow really is melting for good. I put my green plastic derby hat back on mothballs and the Easter bunny is going to be hopping across the plains of death out back if I don't take some action fast. Oh, what is this sick feeling in my stomach? Eggs and

kegs? No, this is more of a dreadful, , dark, morbid feeling with shades of "Telltale Heart", like the time I forgot to feed the neighbor's hamster for the two weeks they were on vacation when I was 10.

I could be wrong. Maybe the little gals pulled through. There could have been more honey in the hive than I thought. Bees can be very resourceful, you know. Stranger things have happened than a couple hives surviving on nothing more than mouse droppings and rock hard pollen nuggets. Is that 20,000 little tiny heartbeats I hear coming from the back yard? Uh, oh.

Alright, I've procrastinated enough, it's time to re cite the eulogy, with a hive tool and a bucket. But first I need to make sure none of those "How are the bees?" friendly neighbor types are out snooping around. Is there anything more embarrassing than literally killing your entire hobby. Non-beekeepers just do not understand this possibility. They ask too many difficult questions. Sure, like cold weather and starvation coupled with rampant disease has never killed your champion golden retriever before- sheesh, give me a break.

The bees are dead. All dead. It looks unfortunately like it was a painful and sordid affair, like some of the bees formed a separate faction and split from the main cluster only to suffer the same fate. That's a lot of bee backsides staring at me. Requisite mouse damage? Check. Thank goodness I let my husband talk me into plastic foundation so at least the cleanup is easier. Luckily, my neighbor didn't seem too suspicious when I fed him that line about not needing a smoker on the vernal equinox.

After an afternoon confronting my limitations as a beekeeper and completing the mass burial of honey bees 2007, it's time for a plan. Springtime is for rebirth. Good thing there are beekeepers across the country that have managed to keep their hives alive long enough to squeeze some nucs out of them. I retire to my library for a little refresher course on beekeeping. It's disappointing to see that although I have "Backyard Beekeeping", "The Beekeepers Handbook" and "Starting Right with Bees" I have no "Starting Over with Bees." There are very few index references to "hive apocalypse" or "complete demise of a colony in three months." I need some bees and I need them quick before the suppliers sell out like they threaten to do every year, or my friends and neighbors discover the dirty little secret I've buried in a shallow grave in the backyard.

Oh, dear lord, I haven't even considered the children! No not baby bees, my own children and their brutally honest commentary on my beekeeping affairs. You know, you put one dog down in your life and all of the sudden you're Attila the Hun. Maybe I can pass this off as a lesson in nature, like the time I explained away the unpleasantness of burial rights by referring to internment of beloved family members as merely

"composting." I could say that they swarmed to heaven or didn't listen to the queen's infinite wisdom and all died as a result.

There is probably some good mother out there who would use this as a learning opportunity, or worse, a science fair project. Well, seeing as she's not in my beeyard right now I'm sticking to what mothers for generations have done when faced with the potential for warranted criticism- dodge and run.

Now that the kiddies are otherwise occupied with their new toys, chocolate milkshakes and afternoon video games, I'm free to explore the issue of new bees with some peace and quiet. The question of where to purchase new bees should be fairly easy, but alas, it's never easy, you see, I am the secretary of my county's bee club. It just wouldn't be prudent for all the club members to catch wind that I've wiped out an entire apiary. Sure you lose a hive or two, that just makes you experienced, but my track record is a little sagging in this regard. What would happen to my credibility if the "newbies" heard my sad news, or worse the old timers who have been keeping bees since the colonists brought them to this continent. Give me 60 or 70 years of beekeeping and then I'll pull out of a Winter with a thriving colony, but for now I'm shopping for bees.

Last year I bought my bees from the president of a neighboring county bee club. I swear he waved his hand in the air above his head and exactly three pounds of Carniolans swarmed into a cage. When he asked me how I planned on installing "his" package of bees my textbook response just got me a big smile and a long slow shake of his head. Even his 12 year-old grandson, who was standing nearby seemed bemused. These seasoned beekeepers have minds like steel traps - nothing escapes them when it comes to beekeeping especially when it comes to beekeepers looking foolish. The fellows in our club can reminisce about a beekeeper, who 30 years ago committed some seemingly mild blunder. Sometimes I don't even get the joke. One might recall to uproarious laughter the beekeeper who nailed but didn't glue his frames. Another may nearly choke on coffee because someone installed a queen excluder upside down. There are times I think the joke is on me completely, like a test to see if I'll laugh along - I always do. Despite the feeling in my gut that has asked me not to venture into certain humiliation, I'm going to get my bees from the same beekeeper I did last year. Sure hell want to know about the four packages I bought last spring, and I'm desperately hoping hell forget all about my ill-fated attempt at requeening, but that's the price I have to pay for good advice for the future. Who knows, maybe I'll even get a frequent customer discount- I better not suggest that when he has a mouth full of coffee.

For now, the snow has turned to mud and the hives are all scraped clean of their dreary past, and I'm starting over with bees.

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Helen Nelson, Secretary 410-833-9535
Bob Crouse, Treasurer 410-265-7999
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Lloyd Snyder, Editor 410-329-6671
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DATES TO REMEMBER

General Meeting – June 5, 2007–There will be a open hive question and answer sessions down by the pond at Oregon Ridge between 6 & 7 PM if you have questions about bees or want to look at a hive, find the queen et. This is the place to be at 6 PM.

Our regular meeting will start at 7:30 PM in the Oregon Ridge Nature Center. Our speaker this month is Ed VandenBosch. The Subject matter is - "Practically Perfect Honey". Ed has many years of experience beekeeping in Maryland.

Board Meeting – June 18, 2007 – 7 PM at Oregon Ridge Nature Center.

Be sure to check out the CMBA website at:
WWW.CMBEEA.ORG