

Looking after your nucleus

Having sourced your nucleus according to the advice in the section on Nucleus – Specification, your nucleus may arrive in a Nucleus hive, in a temporary transportation box (usually plywood with ventilation strips) or you may have collected the five frames in your own hive. If you have collected in a full size hive, insert dummies either side of the frames of bees and put foundation frames outside the dummies to prevent the whole lot from sliding about during transportation.

Your nucleus may be on 3, 4 or 5 BS frames (2 or 3 of the larger frames (Langstroth, 16 x 10, Dadant)). A 3 BS frame nucleus should only be sourced up to the end of June, a 4 frame perhaps until mid-July. After this time the nucleus should be on 5 fully drawn frames in order to allow it time to build up sufficiently for winter. The FERA Best Practice Factsheet Number 5 “Advice for Obtaining Honeybees” (see Beebase) advises that you obtain a 5 frame Nucleus.

Actions:

- 1) The nucleus, transport box or hive should be put in the position the bees are going to occupy in the apiary and allow them to fly immediately. They may have an urgent need to collect water to nurse brood.
- 2) Leave them alone to settle until the next day when they may be transferred into their final container if necessary. If you are transferring them into a full size hive then insert a frame of foundation between frames 3 and 4 and a dummy on either side of the six frame grouping. Keeping them hemmed in with dummies as this will prevent them from expending energy exploring a whole box filled with chilly foundation.
- 3) Place the brood box on a varroa floor and insert a tray. Put in a restricted entrance block with an entrance of about 6 cm x 8 mm. Feed them generously with 1:1 sugar syrup during build up as they may have a shortage of foragers to begin with. The feed may be given in a rapid or contact feeder set over the feed hole on the crown board. You will need a spare super or brood box to give clearance for the feeder (a rapid feeder is easier to check for sufficient content and is easier to replenish).
- 4) Examine them about once per week giving another frame of foundation as they require more room. The aim is to get them sufficient frames of drawn comb by autumn feeding time, in order that they can store sufficient food for winter (generally bee-feeding should be finished by the end of the 3rd week in September). As you get to the end of July, change the feed to winter strength (0.55litre water to 1 kg sugar)
- 5) Move out the dummies gradually as they draw out the frames of foundation. Check that storage of food is not restricting space for the queen to lay. If by the middle of September they have stopped drawing out the foundation, say at 8 or 9 frames, then leave the dummies close to either side of the group of drawn frames over winter.

Check that the queen is laying well and that there is no sign of disease.

- 6) Keep a record in a notebook of the actions you perform on the colony and of the things you observe.
- 7) Ask your supplier whether the nucleus has had any varroa treatment. Take regular counts of varroa mite drop and if the drop is above the levels requiring treatment (check the FERA documents on Beebase), then plan a treatment. Check with your local association as to which varroa treatments are still viable -e.g. many mite populations are now resistant to pyrethroid treatments such as Apistan & Bayvarol.
- 8) If your local association provides mentoring for beginners, take advantage of this and contact the mentor(s) if you are in any doubt.
- 9) Wintering - Provided your bees have been well fed for winter and the varroa population is under control and a mouse guard has been put in place, your bees should survive winter without incident. They will not use much food from November through to February. By February however they will start to increase their production of brood and consequentially will consume much more food. Check regularly (3 weekly) at this time that they have sufficient stores and as a precaution place a wetted sugar bag or some candy over the feed hole on the crown-board in late January (this may need a spacer "eke" or a super to provide enough space). Place a porous piece of material over this extra feed and over the rest of the crown-board to conserve heat, making it more inviting to visit the feed - a folded hessian sack or thick piece of felting is ideal. Their rate of consumption of this extra food source will give you a good indication of whether they are short of food.

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