

Information Sheet – Laying Workers

Background:

Laying workers can be quite a problem!

Workers that lay eggs happen when the Queen either stops laying, is dead or has failed to get mated. In all cases there will be no fertilized eggs for the colony to create a new queen. After some time without eggs in the colony, some workers will develop their ovaries and start to lay unfertilized eggs that will become mini drones.

Various authors have discussed laying workers with varying advice; anything from killing the colony to uniting it to a strong colony with newspaper. Below is a method that has proved successful on many occasions.

Indicators:

Observation of eggs laid in cells; often more than one per cell and laid randomly around the cell bottom. Eggs are laid haphazardly resulting in a pepper pot pattern with seals domed shaped.

Method:

1. Prepare a small nucleus with either a mated queen or a queen cell or two, with a frame of brood + a frame of stores as a minimum + a good number of bees. Establish this next to the laying worker colony, a day or two will be fine.
2. Move the original colony/hive to one side and place the nucleus in a new brood box (+ floor etc) in its place.
3. Then shake all (every last one) of the bees from the original colony onto the grass (or flower bed) about 10m away, having first smoked them. This will include bees from the brood box & supers
4. The original brood frames can be used to fill up the new brood box, only if they are reasonable clean/new and not too covered in drone brood. Otherwise fill with new frames + foundation.
5. Add any supers, but if there are no stores, feed the bees sugar syrup.
6. Let the original bees fly back to their original hive position.
7. The idea of this is that the laying workers will not be able to find their way back as they have not been foraging recently, and the others with honey in their tummies will be accepted into the nucleus.
8. Leave colony to its own devices for at least 2 weeks, longer if using a queen cell and hope for the best.