

Apis m. Estoteria 33

“Balancing the Colony Population”

You will always have a super colony and a weaker colony with others in between.

By balancing the populations at critical times of the year you create a situation where your aggregate total work product is greater. That means you raise more honeybees and collect more honey. Reducing the population in a strong hive can break the stimuli to swarm.

You are always extra proud of the large industrious colony. And then, it swarms.

You do not quite know why the queen in your weak hive is acting puny. The first cause can be that she does not lay lots of eggs fast enough. To evaluate if it is the queen's fault or just a lack of population to do the work, add more bees to the colony. This is called "balancing the population".

The queen will only lay eggs at a rate that the nurse bees can tend to. If you add more bees, it can accelerate the queen.

A package queen can suffer from this condition of not enough bees and be slow due to lack of workers.

My preferred method for balancing a population is to physically relocate the weak hive, moving it to the location of the strong hive. Then place the strong hive at the location of the weak hive. I do this in the middle of the day when the foragers are out working. The foragers will return to their "home" location. The weak colony ones returning to the strong colony and the strong colony foragers returning to the weak colony boosting the population there. To make this switch you will probably have to disassemble both hives to be able to lift the components. This just makes the balancing better. All the disturbed bees left flying around will come back to their home location.

Foragers returning to the hive with pollen or nectar are accepted in. Robber bees act differently than bees bearing gifts.

Another easier way to move bees to the weak hive is to take a hive body or super with foundation or comb in it. Spray the frames and inside the box with syrup. Place it on the strong hive. It will fill up with bees within an hour. Pick it up, carry it to the weak hive, and place it under the inner cover. Four thousand bees added. These are young "in hive" bees which are not very aggressive. With the syrup they are accepted easily. Sometimes I smoke the weak hive a little to dampen the queen pheromone. Sometimes I spray syrup on the top bars of the weak hive before adding the honey super.

You can also play the switch the frame game. Moving frames of brood with or without the nurse bees. When doing this I spray syrup on the frame being moved to hold the bees during transit. I also spray down into the slot where I will place the frame in the weak hive. This gets the bees close to the activity more excited about the sugar water than about the new frame of bees. Each frame has 2400 cell holes. Hence, you can move up to 2-3000 bees on a really full frame. Less if not 100% brood covered with workers.

If you have "replacement part" nucs, you can remove frames from them and add them to the weak hive. You can remove frames from several different strong hives and add them to the same weak hive. This works because the bees are "in hive" bees. A little smoke and or syrup help dampen the Queen Mandibular Pheromone (QMP) of the different hives. It also helps the bees stick to the frame being manipulated.