

# **NORTH LONDON BEEKEEPERS**

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## **Information Sheet No.10**

### **Queen/Comb Trapping**

(This is an appendix to Information Sheet no 6 on Integrated Varroa Management.)

#### **Introduction**

This method is time consuming and requires some skill, but its efficacy can be **90%**. Very good at removing mites early in the season, with no use of chemicals and when the supers are on the hive.

The whole process takes about 36 days and allows bees to forage and to build back up for the winter; the window of opportunity is small, between the end of May and beginning of July. It involves restricting the queen to single brood combs for 27 days and destroying the brood produced.

#### **How it is done**

Brood is restricted for a period to a sequence of comb traps. Mites attempting to breed, enter the brood cells in these combs and when capped are removed along with the brood. A special cage encasing the frame within a queen excluder is needed for each colony. A hole must be made in the comb for the queen to be able to access both sides of the frame when in the cage. The queen (well marked) is trapped within the cage and the attendant bees are able to carry out their duties. These cages are available to buy (£21.20 each - 2006) or you can make one by copying a borrowed one (not easy!). Have ready the comb trap, some empty clean drawn combs and two elastic bands to hold the comb cage shut when the frame is inside. Note the comb cage takes the place of two brood combs; one inside the cage and one has to be removed so use of a dummy board in the brood is recommended. The dummy is then the spare comb that is removed.

#### **Method**

1. Confine queen to a worker brood comb "A" and place this frame in purpose-made comb cage also remove dummy board or unused comb to make space.
2. After 9 days, confine her to a new, empty drawn comb "B" within the comb cage and leave comb "A" in the brood chamber next to the comb cage to become infested with mites.
3. After a further 9 days, remove comb "A" (now sealed) and destroy. Confine the queen to a new drawn comb "C" within the comb cage, leaving comb "B" in the brood chamber next to the comb cage.
4. After 9 more days remove comb "B" and destroy. Release the queen (or re-queen by introducing another queen) leaving comb "C" in the brood chamber.
5. After 9 more days, remove comb "C" and destroy

Trapped comb is to be placed centrally in the brood chamber. Use elastic bands on lugs of comb trap to keep trapped frame securely inside comb trap. If comb trap opens QUEEN CAN ESCAPE. At each visit take care to locate the queen and cage her while preparing the next comb. The correct interval is 9 days but in practice this will work on a seven-day cycle. For example it could be done each Saturday for four weeks thus making a far easier timetable.

When each comb is removed, destroy the brood and mites by freezing. Can be rewaxed for further use.

#### **Main features**

1. +Can be very effective.
2. +No varroacide is used during honey flows.
3. +More bees recruited to foraging (less work on brood rearing).
4. -Time consuming.
5. -Requires good beekeeping skill.
6. -Can harm/weaken the colony if used without regard to time of season.

7. Beware: queen cells may be started when the queen is first trapped, and subsequently within the trapped comb.

Prepared by John Hauxwell (November 2006) Reference from the CSL of the National Bee Unit, fact sheet 17 and "Managing Varroa" (June 2005)