

National Bee Unit

FAQ 24



The Food and Environment
Research Agency

Care of Colonies after shook swarm

European foulbrood (EFB) has been confirmed in your apiary and 'Shook Swarm' for disease control has been carried out. Shook swarming is, by its very nature, an invasive technique and beekeepers have a duty of care to ensure that colonies are given all possible assistance. So what do you do now? This fact sheet advises you of the husbandry required in order that your colony may return to full strength.

Condition of colony after the shook swarm.

During the shook swarming process, your colony would have been re-built with a queen excluder under the brood chamber to stop the bees absconding. A full box of new frames and foundation was used and you would have been asked to provide 5 litres (1gallon) of sugar syrup. The hive will have been topped off with a feeder and this filled with the sugar syrup provided.

What next?

The colony will require checking at the end of the first week and you will need to look for three things:

- 1. Is there any brood? - If Yes,** then remove the queen excluder from under the brood chamber.
If No, then check again in a further week and remove when brood is present.
- 2. What is the state of the new foundation/combs?**

You will need to ensure that the new foundation is being drawn into comb. If this is not complete and there is not a substantial nectar flow you must feed with more sugar syrup. The colony should be regularly checked and fed as required until the majority of the comb is drawn. If there is a nectar flow in progress then your work and your sugar syrup feeding will be light.

P.T.O.

National Bee Unit

Food and Environment Research Agency

Sand Hutton, York. YO41 1 LZ

Telephone 01 904 462 510 e mail nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk

NBU Web Site: www.nationalbeeunit.com

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If, however, there is no flow then regular checking and feeding will be the order of the day. It cannot be stressed too greatly that getting a full box of comb drawn is the most important lesson in bringing the colony back to full strength. It will then have space in which to raise brood and store pollen and honey.

3. How much stores does the colony have?

All the honey stores of the colony were removed when the shook swarm was carried out. If there are no stores in the colony now (at the end of the first week) then it will require feeding. It will require checking at regular intervals and feeding if necessary, until it has sufficient stores to be self-supporting. Remember, a colony will require about 5 kg of stores to survive a week, if the weather is poor or there is no honey flow.

When do you put supers on the colony?

Firstly any super boxes placed on the colony must be sterilised and consist of either:

- A. New frames and foundation
- Or B. Old honey-combs that have been sterilised using Acetic acid (See FAQ 9 Fumigating Comb)

Supers should **ONLY** be placed on the colony when the majority of the brood chamber combs have been drawn out. If supers are added before brood combs are drawn out, the bees will go into the supers and work them – especially if they are old comb. This may well result in a small honey crop but, it will very likely be that, if for example 4 brood combs were drawn out when supers were added, then only 4 brood combs will be drawn when they are removed. This will mean two things; the brood nest and therefore the colony, will have remained small, only being on 4 combs instead of 11, and now, at the end of the season, the colony has to draw the comb using bees that will carry the colony into the winter - a rather tall order.

Be Aware:

Shook swarming is not a method of swarm control. This means that colonies that have been shook swarmed should be checked in the usual manner for swarming preparations, i.e. the presence of queen cells, and appropriate action taken.

Remember –

Your colony has had EFB so be vigilant and check the brood regularly for signs of disease. Of course, the Bee Inspector will return to carry out a follow-up inspection and remove the standstill, if no disease is present. Your responsibility for maintaining the colony in the best possible condition is on-going – you have taken the best possible option for control of EFB, it is up to you to ensure that the colony is fed with nutritious feed and maximise its condition to enter the winter.