



answer is definitely NO. (OK someone is bound to write in to say they have been, but . ). On the first point just do it - but ideally, watch someone first. Your best possible vision is important. If you need reading glasses then you need them for this job too. A stray queen leg can be missed with poor sight but will not be by the scissors. I know!

If you only have a couple of hives in the garden, then clipping is probably not necessary. The weekly swarm check is easy, unless you spend a lot of time away from home. With more hives and out-apiaries then a decision is more essential. Of course, if you are a softie like me, a queen is a beautiful, regal insect and clipping her wings can be an act of violation to you. This conscientious indulgence will mean more work for you. Your checks have to be weekly in every colony from May to the first week in July. Earlier or later swarms I believe are more likely to be the result of routine mismanagement such as overcrowding, poor ventilation etc. The diagram shows that with a clipped Queen you can afford a basic 14 day inspection routine. You will lose your queen but not your bees. Once you find that they have swarmed then action is needed immediately if you are not to lose your bees with the first hatched virgin.

You will see from the chart that I have suggested removing the non-clipped queen with say two or three frames including some stores and brood. This will certainly stop a swarm occurring and not weaken the main stock too much. Leave a nicely developing queen larva and remove every other queen cell. Go back 3 or 4 days later, check your selected cell is OK and then remove any newly started queen cells. After that, you should be able to leave the hive and just pile on the supers. Check about 3 weeks later that there is plenty of new brood from your newly mated young queen. If there isn't be patient. Has there been good mating weather? If you decide the colony is queenless then re-introduce the old queen safely in her now much larger nucleus or introduce a new queen from elsewhere. A selected & protected queen cell would be OK.

If your queen is clipped then, when you return after 14 days and your bees have swarmed, (How will you know?), all you have to do is select a suitable queen cell. Choose an open one if possible and remove every other one. Come back a few days later to ensure there are no new queen cells and then let nature take its course. I am always surprised how long some queens in large colonies take to begin laying. How can you tell if a virgin is present in a large colony?

No space for that I'm afraid, but an interesting question for your local expert!

One further point I have to make is that removing the queen early in the season for swarm control, say up to the end of May, is probably not so good if you want a decent honey crop. Then the basic artificial swarm technique is probably better. From early June onwards, most of the bees to become the foragers in the main honey flow are already in the hive; removing the queen too early in the season, will decimate your available foraging force later, just as an uncontrolled swarm will. Here is a good reason for NOT clipping queens. You could well lose your queen early in the year and your colony will be without a laying queen for those vital laying weeks in May and June.

wish to thank John Yates for the inspiration for this chart. If you look in his Study Notes publication, you will find more detailed technical information on this topic.

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