



South Tipperary Beekeepers' Association

Fact Sheet no. 11

Vince Cooke Nuc Production Method

Vince Cooke Nuc production method works very well if the beekeeper is willing to sacrifice the whole colony at the loss of the honey crop. If interested in maximizing the number of nucs to be produced this method will suit.

As with all nuc production the basic rules apply, adequate bees, brood, food and either a laying or virgin queen or a mature queen cell. When splitting it is always better to go for one less nuc than one more, better to have four good instead of five mediocre colonies.

The Vince Cooke principle is to split the full brood nest between a number of nucs. The bigger the hive means the greater the number of splits and the greater the success. The chosen colony can be one that is preparing for swarming and therefore has queen cells or it can be built up with splitting in mind. If the latter method is the preferred method spring feeding should be commenced in early March with fondant. Toward the end of March a 1:1 liquid feed can be given in small quantities, approx. 200 mls every few days. This is enough to stimulate the colony into laying resulting in an early build up. Continue feeding during April watching for room and when needed place a second brood box on top. By the end of April/early May the colony should be well into the top box. This will depend on the season and the laying ability of the queen. A heavy flow from the dandelion or OSR will aid the development. Supers may be necessary but if you are relying on the colony to produce its own queen cell it should be restricted to overcrowd both brood boxes. Of course queens should only be reared from a strain that satisfy your criteria. The other option is to have a queen rearing program and when cells are ready divide your selected colony giving each a mature cell. Another option is to start a queen cell production in the colony to be split by either grafting or splitting the two brood boxes confining the queen to the bottom box with a queen excluder on top and then a super followed by the other brood box. Have all the eggs young brood in the top box. Separating the queen from the young brood will encourage the bees to start queen cells. When cells are started select 6-8 open cells preferably on different combs. Calculate when the cells will be sealed and then wait. Split the hive two days before the cells are expected to hatch. The queen with two frames of brood and bees can be removed when the cells are selected. With a very strong colony six nucs could be produced from the one parent hive. The method is summarized below:

1. Start simulative feeding early spring.
2. Add 2nd brood box when needed.
3. Continue feeding.
4. Super if needed but better to restrict space a little.
5. When queen cells are sealed and ready split the colony.

6. Remove queen on a two frame nuc and transfer to outside apiary.
7. Divide the colony into four or five nuclei, distributing the brood, food and bees evenly
8. Make sure each nuc has a sealed queen cell.
9. Divide the brood out evenly eggs and sealed to each colony.
10. Remove the old brood box and hive stand.
11. Position all the Nucs around where the stand was with the entrances facing inwards.
12. Flying bees will distribute evenly to each.
13. Leave until following evening and check that they are adequate bees in each nuc. If some have more than other swap nucs around.
14. Feed after four days.
15. Check for queen cells hatched 9 days.
16. Move to out apiary or leave in situ
17. Check for queen laying
18. Continue to feed and add extra brood if available.
19. Six week after starting to lay check the queens brood viability.
20. If below your expected standard replace
21. If split early in the season the nuc will need a full brood chamber before the end of the season.
22. Treat in Autumn for varroa checking for all other diseases
23. Final check on queen laying
24. Feed and close down for over wintering

Below is the layout of nucs after splitting. Parent hive is removed. Nucs can be placed on the ground or better to have on a low stand. All entrances to face inwards

