

Planning a queenrearing training day

Objectives

The main objectives are

- (a) to get a few new queen rearing groups established,
- (b) transfer queen rearing skills to participating beekeepers.

Background

Hundreds of Irish beekeepers have attended queen rearing events and workshops over the years yet very few are actively queenrearing? There are workshops in places like Gormanston every summer and regular lectures on queenrearing are given via local associations.

The current model is not working as there are hardly any queenrearing groups in operation and there are still hundreds of queens being imported into Ireland.

Make a list

Using local knowledge draw up a list of local beekeepers who have expressed an interest in rearing queens and who are supporters of our native bee. If you are not proactive about selecting participants you will almost certainly get the wrong people attending. With regard to the objective of getting new groups established in the future, think about inviting beekeepers who are enthusiastic and who are also good communicators. A group only needs a couple of more experienced beekeepers within its ranks to organise activities such as grafting. A relative beginner could benefit greatly from a training day and could even be the person with the enthusiasm to get a new group up and running.

Define the activities/skills to be taught

Split the training day into 4 discrete activities, each one to be led by a demonstrator and a helper. Each group will have no more than five or six beekeepers who will spend an hour at each activity. This will be a lot of work for the demonstrator as each one has to do his routine 4 times.

Suggested group activities are:

- Grafting, selecting queens, and record keeping
- Setting up a cell raiser colony, importance of drone production, incubators
- Apidea general management
- Handling and introducing queens, marking and clipping

Choosing the demonstrators

It is important to select a beekeeper demonstrator who is a good communicator and who has the necessary handling skills. Think about asking a beekeeper who can do the stuff, as opposed to people who may have passed all the exams but could be quite inexperienced at practical beekeeping such as handling queens or working with apideas.

Find a venue

You will need to use an apiary with sufficient space, colonies, and apideas to allow 4 groups to run simultaneously.

An indoor venue/room and toilet facilities close by will also be needed. The grafting can be done indoors.

This will involve a lot of preparation in the week before the event as at least 4 nucs with unmarked and unclipped queens have to be made available, as well as boxes of spare comb to allow colonies to be rearranged as queenright cell raisers. A good number of apideas at all stages of development will also be needed, ie, queenright, waiting for cells, with virgin queen, with laying queen etc. It would also be useful to have grafted queen cells in a cell raiser colony or an incubator.

After the event

As a follow up, ask course guests for feedback and distribute a fact sheet summarising the course content.

The summary should also include the name and e-mail of the demonstrators and helpers and all those in attendance - to facilitate future contact and mutual support with regard to establishing new groups.

A Powerpoint presentation titled how to set up a queenrearing group from scratch should also be sent to those on the course. This covers why to do it, how to do it and the basic equipment needed.

Keep in touch with participants. Offer follow up support no later than April of the following year to those interested in starting up a group. The most difficult part of getting a group going is getting it started in the first place.

Jonathan Getty, December 2013