



South Tipperary Beekeepers' Association

Fact Sheet no. 10

Opening a Colony of Honeybees

Firstly, put on the proper protective gear, full bee suit with good face/head protection, wellingtons, make sure ankles are covered and put on gloves. Next light up the smoker making sure it well charged with fuel before opening the hive. Study record Sheet and have any required equipment with you and ready to hand when needed. Bring spare bucket for brace comb and have wet rag/water to clean hive tool and gloves.

With hive tool and smoker in hand,

- Approach the hive quietly and gently – no fast movement or bumping.
- Observe the entrance for normal activity, looking on the ground and up at surrounding bushes/trees.
- Smoke the entrance (approx 6 puffs)
- Wait for 2 minutes – study hive record sheet while waiting and be sure of what has to be done, checking once more if you have all required equipment.
- Standing at the back on the hive, gently remove the roof and place it upturned on the ground beside the hive but not where it will be in the way.
- Using the hive tool prise up the crown board, lift it off and check the underneath side for the queen. Hold it over the hive and shake any remaining bees off and place it on the inverted roof.
- A small puff of smoke will clear the bees from the lugs of the frames (where you want to hold them)
- Using hive tool to lift at lugs, remove the dummy board or first frame, shake off the bees into the top of the hive with a sharp tap and stand it against the side of the hive.
- Withdraw first comb, straight upwards, avoid crushing or rolling bees. Inspect both sides of the comb, making mental note of the condition and significance, knowing its contents, whether eggs, larvae, capped and healthy brood (worker, drone or queen), nectar, honey or pollen. Practice will enable this to be completed in 4 or 5 seconds.
- Repeat the operation with every frame.
- Replace the dummy at the opposite end of the brood chamber and ensure no gaps between the frames. Don't have hive open longer than required and keep the original order of the combs when replacing.
- Smoke the tops of the frames clear of bees and replace the crown-board without crushing any bees.
- Replace the roof
- Fill out Record card (Ref Fact Sheet 9)

If there are supers on the hive, remove roof and crown board as described above, prise up the first super box, lift off and place diagonally on the roof. Remove the remaining boxes and pile on top of the first covering the last one with crown board to keep the bees quiet and warm. Then tend to the brood box as described above.

Generally speaking, around mid-day is best for inspections when bees are flying freely. Temperature should be 15°C or higher.

The beekeeper must maintain full control of the bees. Best way to learn how to do this is to watch an experienced beekeeper handle the hive. Excessive stinging is almost always the result of mismanagement. Also, weather conditions, temperature and time of day are factors which affect the temperament of the hive.

If you feel the colony is getting out of control, then close it down, try another day or get some advice from experienced beekeeper.

SOUTH TIP BEES