

## FINDING, MARKING AND CLIPPING THE QUEEN.

Looking at the picture below one wonders why finding the queen can be difficult. However the queen is very good at hiding among a cluster of bees and if she is constantly laying eggs her long abdomen is less obvious.



Picture courtesy of Sarah Rapley.

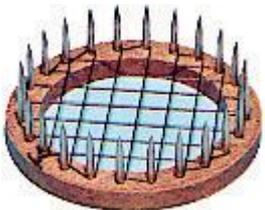
So here are a few tips.

- Use minimal smoke, 1 – 2 puffs, take off the honey super and queen excluder;
- Take out the 2/3 outer frames at either end of the brood as these will usually just contain honey or pollen and hence unlikely to have the queen on them. However check each one as you lay them against the hive or put them in an empty brood box.
- You can now space the remaining frames sufficiently wide apart to reduce the risk of the queen moving from frame to frame.
- Carefully lift one frame out of the middle, taking care not to squash the bees; this is chosen because it is the most likely place to find her, at the centre of the brood nest, on a frame with eggs and freshly polished cells by the nurse bees. Briefly scan over each side of this frame, starting at the outside to reduce the risk of the queen going over to the darker side of the frame.
- Having scanned both sides, place this frame in a spare box and continue with the remaining frames, placing them all in the same spare brood box, close together to retain the temperature of the brood.
- If you fail to find the queen at this first attempt, check the walls & floor of the now empty brood chamber.
- If you still have not found the queen; resort to the **‘Divide & Conquer Method’**.

Take out half the frames from brood box next to the hive and place them in the original brood chamber. Having fewer frames with a lesser number of bees, should make it much easier to repeat the operation again.

If you do not plan to replace the queen when you have located her, it is a good idea to mark her thorax with a bright colour so that she is more easily located in the future.

There are various queen bee traps available that are used to constrain the queen while you mark her thorax, the ones shown below are two types of cage.



Press in cage



Alternatively:

Marker cage with plunger.

- Place the press in cage gently over the queen and when she is centrally positioned press carefully into the wax comb.
- Place the comb horizontally trying not to crush bees
- Remove any workers from the cage by blowing on them.
- Get your marker pen ready by testing on any suitable surface.
- Gently press the cage down until the queen is immobilised and dot her back (thorax) between her wings.
- When the mark is dry, lift the cage quickly so that the queen's movement does not smudge the paint.

Use a non-toxic marker, in the appropriate colour according to the year she is born:

Year ending	Marking colour
1 or 6	White
2 or 7	Yellow
3 or 8	Red
4 or 9	Green
5 or 0	Blue

If you have just a white marker pen, you can use the appropriate coloured drawing pin as an alternative, somewhere on the outside of the brood box to designate the year according to the above codes. This has the disadvantage that if the queen is superseded by a new queen the colour may not get changed.

It is important not to release the queen into the hive until the mark is dry, as the bees will either remove the mark or worse, not accept her and supersede her with a new queen.

### **Marked queen released back onto the frame.**



You could also clip one of her wings. This does not prevent swarming but if they do swarm, the queen will drop into the grass and the 'swarm' will eventually return to the hive. This will only give you a few days extra time to carry out your favoured swarm prevention measure, because undoubtedly they will still be in swarming mode and are most likely to swarm as soon as the first virgin queen is mated.

There is however divided opinion on clipping queens, as it is argued that the colony can see her as being damaged and can supersede her. The choice is yours.

Picture courtesy John Farrow.

Download our video on Queen catching, marking & clipping, taken at Sarah Rapley's Apiary in late spring 2012: <http://youtu.be/1pUDgCtIxPc>

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