



## The Scottish Beekeepers' Association

Registered Charity No. SCO 09345

### SBA Technical Data Sheet no. 23

#### Queen Introduction

##### Introduction notes & Cages

For successful introduction both queen and colony need to be in a suitable condition, colony queenless but not excited and queen hungry but not excited or disturbed.

Introduction is always easiest in the earliest or later part of the season i.e May and late August/September.

In mid-season the bees may be excitable in the swarming season or when confined in poor weather conditions.

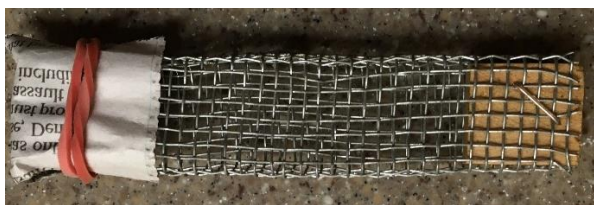
Best results are obtained by first introducing the queen to a Nucleus and then introducing the Nucleus to the full colony.

Introduction is always most successful when introducing queens to colonies of the same strain. Introducing yellow queens to black colonies is especially difficult.

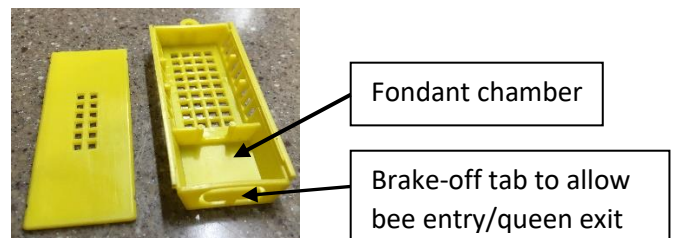
Use a queen introduction cage such as the Butler wire cage or plastic flat introduction/transport cage. These cages have sufficient openings to allow the queen to solicit food and the bees to feed her through the openings.

The queen should be put in the cage on her own. If attendant bees are included, they could start fighting with the colony workers and the queen could be killed in the ensuing fracas.

The butler cage open-end is sealed with a small piece of paper held in place by an elastic band - prick the paper with a pin to allow the bees to get a start chewing it. In the case of the plastic cage the end opening tab is broken off and a small piece of fondant placed inside to block the opening until the bees chew through it.



Butler type Queen introduction cage with newspaper closing open end (the bees chew through the paper)



Queen introduction/transport cage with slide top

##### Introducing the Queen to a Main Colony

If uniting directly to a main colony, the hive is opened gently, and the old queen found and removed. If you want to keep her, put her into a matchbox or plastic introduction/transport cage with some workers for temporary storage. If you do not want to kill the old queen, you will have to create a small, 2 or 3 frame Nucleus hive for her.

If the colony has been queenless for some time, check for queen cells and remove.

It is often the case that apparently queenless colonies have in fact got a young queen, especially after swarming, young queens can take an inordinately long time to start laying, six weeks after swarming not being uncommon. This seems especially the case in a well-funded colony. So, check that the colony is in fact queenless before going to the expense of acquiring a new queen. The classic check for queenlessness is to insert a frame containing eggs or young (less than 3 days hatched) larvae. If the bees do not draw queen cells, they are almost definitely queenright.

The introduction cage is then suspended in the brood nest between two frames containing sealed brood and young nurse bees. Use long pins to suspend the cages securely with the top of the cages about 3 or 4 cm below the top of the frames. When the bees chew through the paper or fondant and release the queen, she will emerge out onto brood, which is exactly where they expect to find her.

### **Introducing via a Nucleus Hive**

If using the Nucleus method, remove a frame of emerging brood from the main colony and after gently shaking it to get rid of the older bees, put it in the Nucleus hive. Put in a second frame containing mainly stores, again, after gently shaking. If the colony was queenright, leave the queen in the main colony.

Shake a further 3 frames of bees into the Nucleus hive, again, after having gently shaken them over the main colony to get rid of the older bees. Return these 3 frames to the main colony.

Place the Nucleus hive close beside the full colony hive with its entrance facing the same way as the colony. Place the new queen in her introduction cage between the two frames in the Nucleus hive. Put two dummy boards either side of the two frames in the Nucleus. and close up.

Slide the main colony frames together to close the gap left by the removal of the 2 frames. Mark where the frames were removed. Close up and leave both colonies for a week.

After about a week, open the Nucleus hive and check that the queen is all right and has been laying. Remove the empty cage. Open the main colony, find the queen and remove her and put her in a plastic cage or matchbox.

If the main colony was not queenright e.g. had swarmed, check for queen cells and remove. Even if the main colony was queenright, after removing the queen, check for queen cells in case the colony was thinking of swarming.

Now make space in the main colony for the two frames in the Nucleus hive (in the same position as they were located originally). Spray both the main colony and the Nucleus with a fine mist of water to stop the bees running about. Carefully lift the two frames from the Nucleus hive into the main colony (the queen will be sheltering in the dark between the two frames. Close the hive and leave for a week. Check after a week that the queen is well and laying.

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