

# **Swarm Prevention (& Control?)**

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For the

Prince William Regional Beekeepers  
Association (PWRBA)

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# What's a Swarm?



photos- karla eisen, R. Wright- bottom left

# Bee Swarm Coming Home



# Why do honeybees swarm?

- **REPRODUCTION-** natural process
- Brood box is crowded
- No room for eggs
- Too much nectar in brood area
- Queen pheromone not well dispersed

# Signs of Swarm Preparations

- Drone Brood
- Drones Flying
- Queen Cells
- After a Swarm?
  - No eggs
  - Little to no larvae
  - Many frames of nectar for weeks



photo- n. fletcher

# What Can You Do About It?

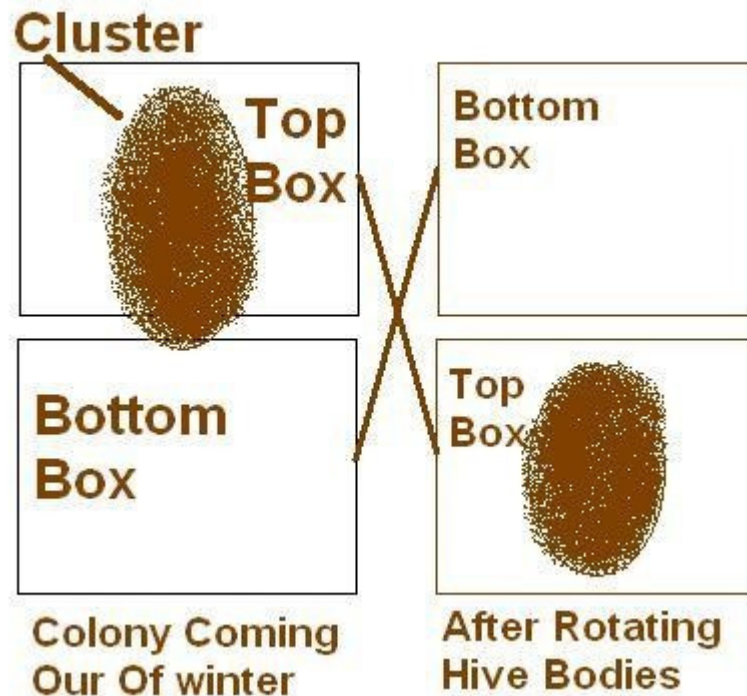
- **Work with the bees natural instincts – Be 1 step AHEAD of colony**
- **DELAY & REDIRECT**
- **Give More Space**
  - Early Supering
  - Reverse Hive Bodies
  - Pull out some frames and replace (comb is best)
- **Change Queen Dynamics**
  - Take out Queen Cells &/or Queen
  - Give them a New Mom (Re Queen)
  - Clip Queen Wing
- **Really Mix Up their Space & Change Queen Dynamics (Chris, Tim)**
  - Artificial Swarm and Snellgrove Method

# Give More Space– Add Supers Early

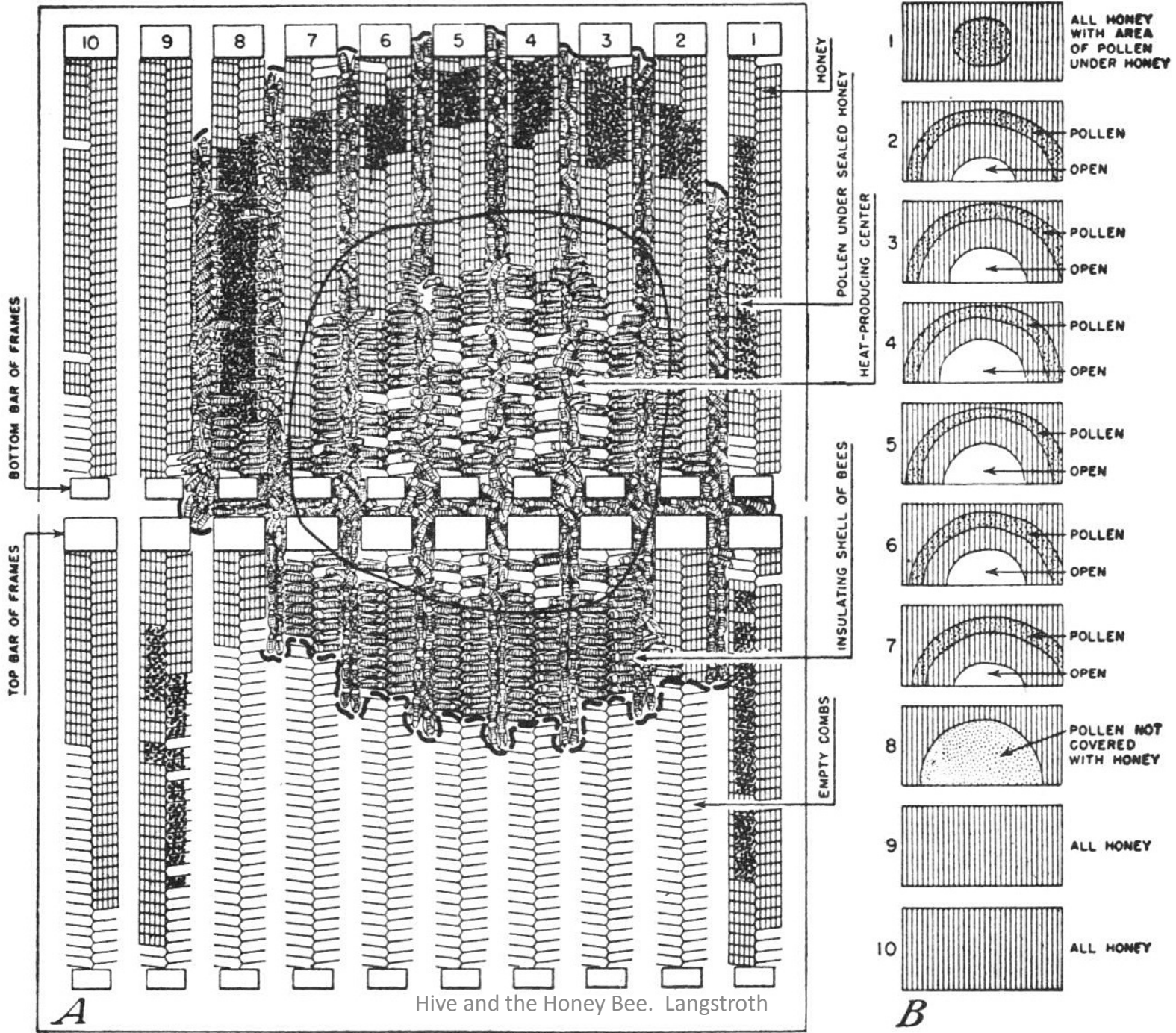
- Provides room for the bees to expand upward & store nectar
- Similar to reversing, but no danger of breaking up brood nest
- Timing?
- Drawn Comb or Foundation?
- Put new super underneath full ones

# Give More Space- Reverse Hive Bodies

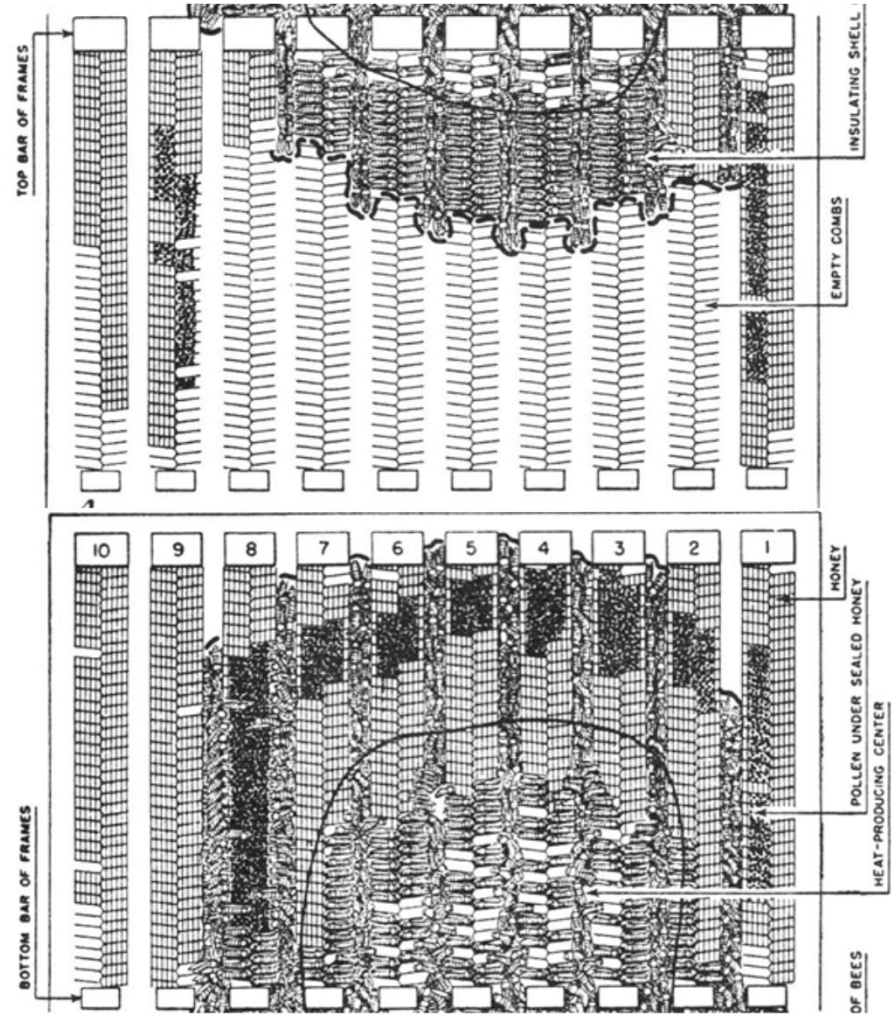
- Provides space for the bees to move up
- DO NOT BREAK UP THE CLUSTER – Especially when cold (March/April)







Breaking up  
the cluster-  
**NOT** what  
you want in  
Spring



# Reversing Hive Bodies

[www.BeeSource.com](http://www.BeeSource.com) wisdom

- **Don't do it before the maples bloom. *If I've seen brood in the bottom box- at all.***

# When Swarm Is Imminent

## Interacting Variables

- **To Stop a FIRE**  
**Remove 1 of 3**
  - Oxygen
  - Fuel
  - Heat
- **To Prevent a Swarm**  
**Remove 1 of 3**
  - Queen
  - Flying Bees (foragers)
  - Brood and Nurse Bees

# **Change Queen Dynamics**

## **A New Mom- Replace Queen**

- Are Queens Available? From Where? When?
- Never take out old queen before you have the new one in hand
- Queens with Support Staff available in that OVERWINTERED NUC!

# Clip Queen Wing

- Clipped wing Queen will swarm, but will not be successful as Queen can't fly
- Usually bees will return to hive
- Delay Tactic- Buys time- Bees should wait for new virgin Queen to emerge from cell before swarming again (+/- 8 days)

# Cut Out Queen Cells

- Can delay swarming significantly or stop it
- **Only truly effective if done every 8 days**
- Consider Timing & What you See
  - Capped Q cells- virtually impossible to stop swarm from issuing
  - Capped Q cells- colony may have already swarmed
  - Swarm cups with eggs – a “little” more time to manage
  - Swarm cups empty- early signs
- **Be Thoughtful about Your Actions (Always)**
  - Destroying swarm cells can result in a queenless colony
  - Do you see Queen or Eggs?
  - Has colony already swarmed & you destroyed all the replacement cells?



Photo credit- Karla Eisen





Photo courtesy of Mike Church



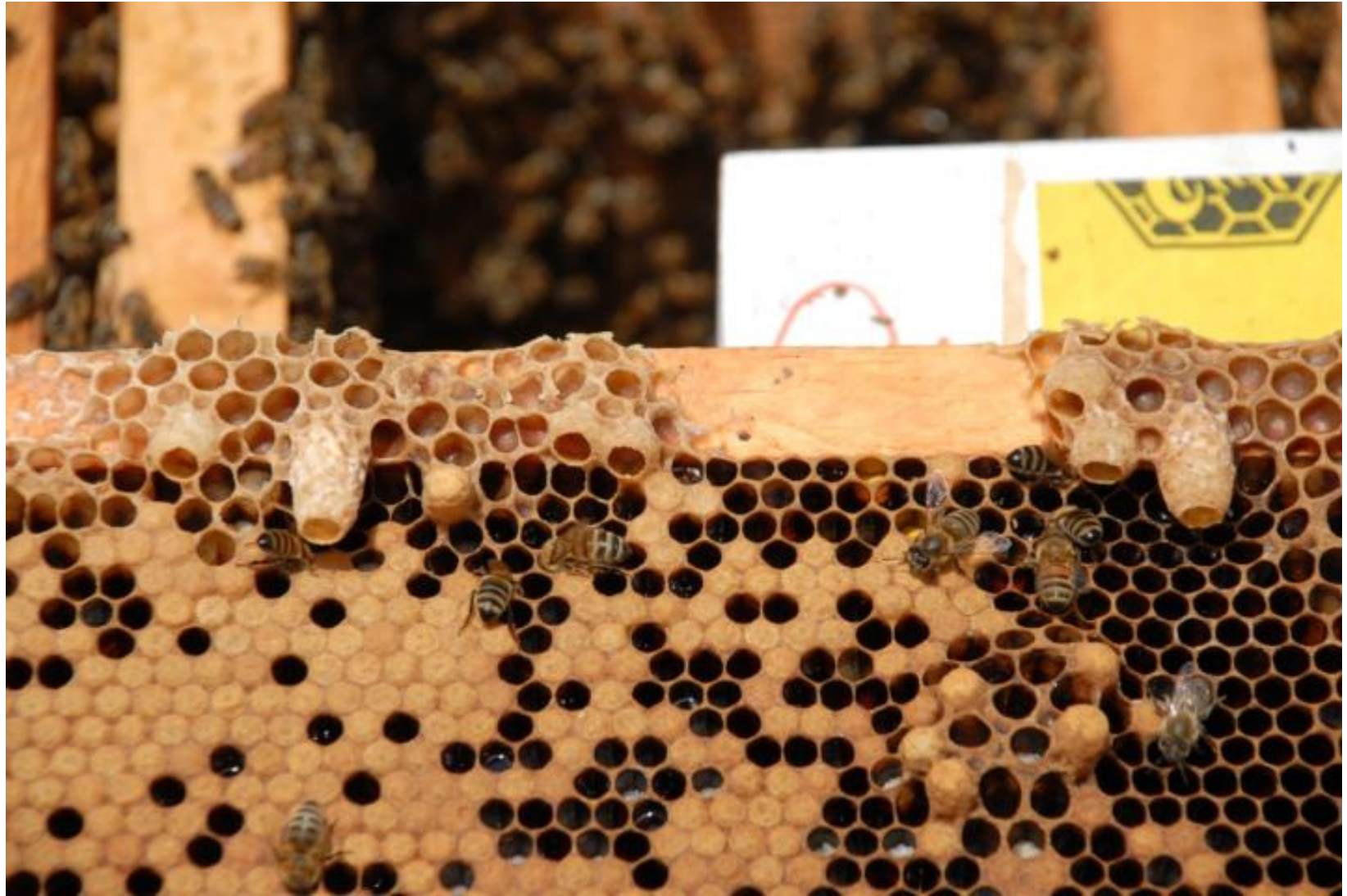
photos- karla eisen



Photo credit-  
Karla Eisen



Photo credit- Chris Hewitt



Photo, Mark Dykes, Univ. of FL

# Swarm or Supercedure? (4/9/2006)

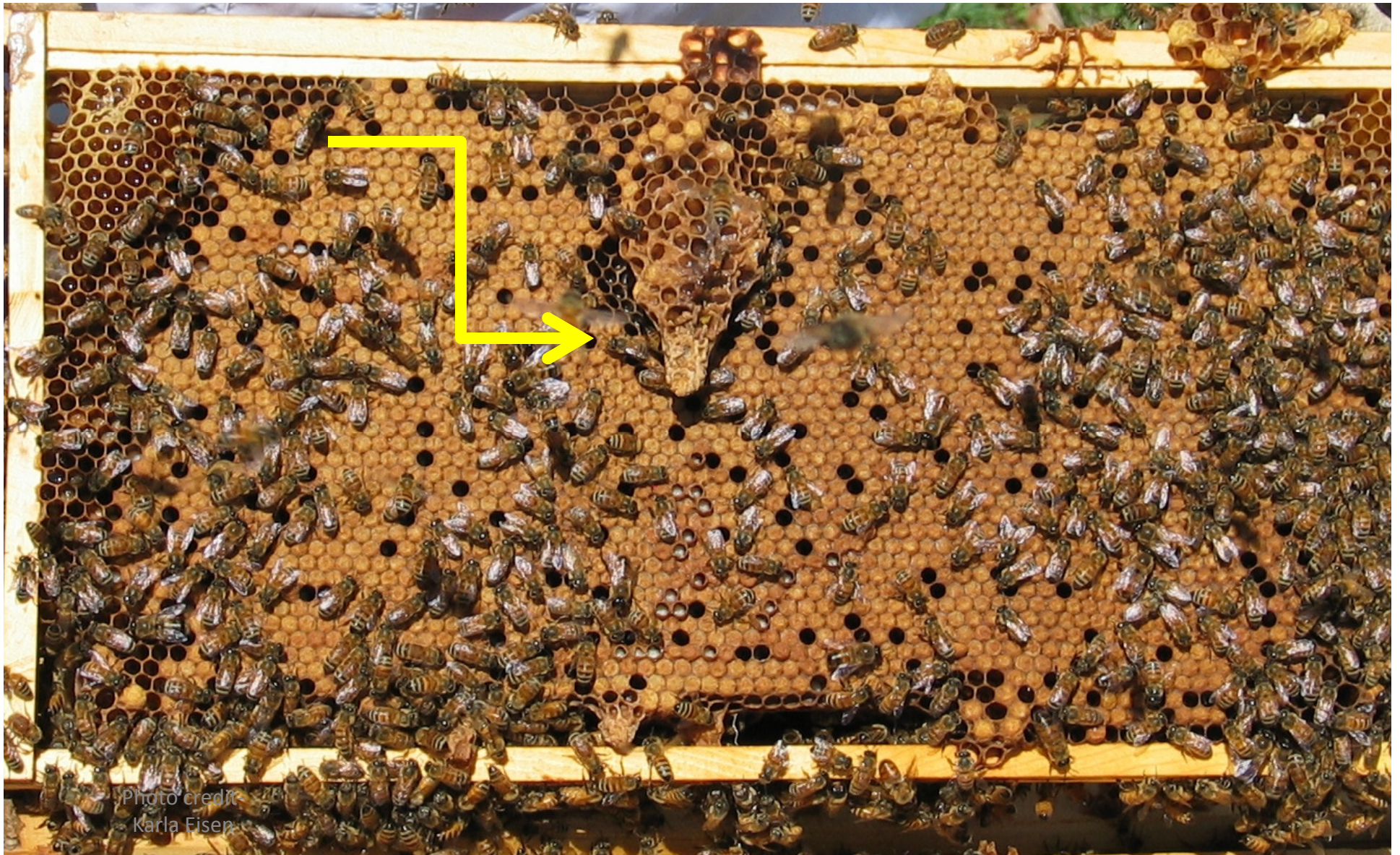


Photo credit  
Karla Eisen

## Put Queen Cells to Use



- Queen Castle or Mating Nuc with 2 or 3 frames in each compartment
- Each compartment needs at least 1 Queen Cell
- Takes about 3-4 weeks to have laying queens
- Best results during nectar flow. FEED when cells are uncapped or if using foundation

# Make a Nuc

## Use Colony Queen or Queen Cells



Photo credit- Keith Fletcher



# Average Development Time

$$3*5*8*5*3$$

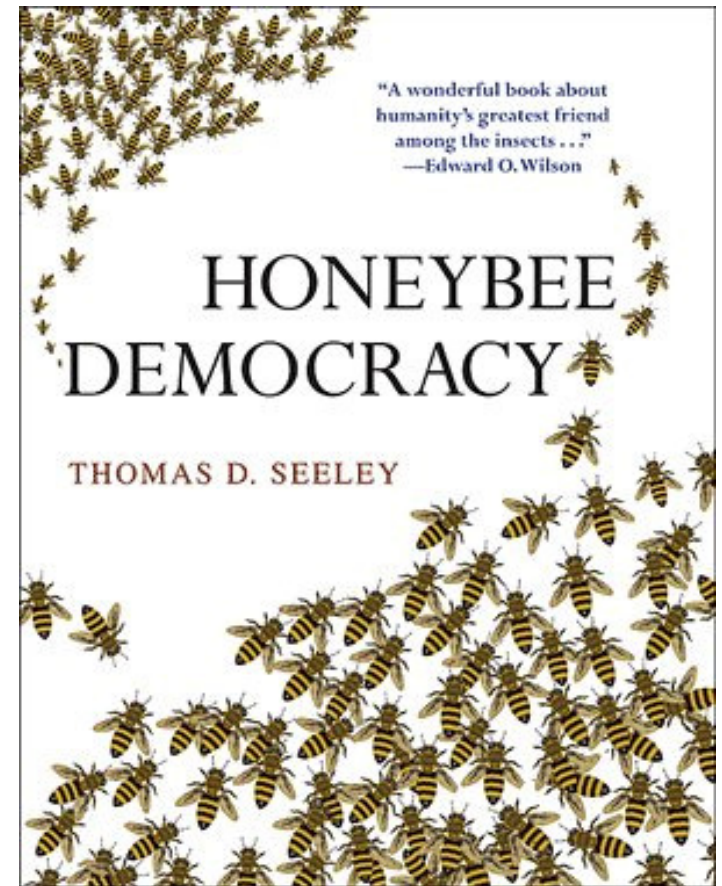
3 days egg + 5 days larva + 8 days sealed = 16 days (queen)  
+ 5 days = 21 (workers) + 3 days = 24 (drones)

|                        | Worker | Queen  | Drone  |
|------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
|                        | Days   |        |        |
| Egg                    | 3      | 3      | 3      |
| Larval Stage           | 5 - 6  | 5      | 6 1/2  |
| Pupal Stage            | 12     | 7 1/2  | 14 1/2 |
| Total Development Time | 21 +/- | 16 +/- | 24 +/- |

# Last Thoughts on Swarm Cells

- If after swarm prevention strategies are exhausted (especially culling out swarm cells continually), swarming preparations continue, especially if more cells are built again & again, then consider looking at those hives with a different eye... Swarming may be the hive's attempt to requeen.

# Dr. Tom Seeley, Cornell University



# Go to Bee Meetings & Hang Around Beeks Smarter Than You



Photo- Karla  
Eisen