

# Spring Reversal Not Good Management for All Areas?

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*The literature is full of references to hive body reversal as a inducement to accelerate spring buildup. It may be appropriate in some areas, but it has the opposite effect in middle Tennessee. It is possible that this is a side effect of the presence of parasitic mites or it could be that reversal was never advantageous for this area.*

Spring buildup progresses much better when the bees are operating into their honey overhead. When cut off from their honey dome, expansion of brood area stops completely for two to three weeks. We had been convinced in prior years that this was true and had not reversed in several years. This year we tried it again under controlled conditions. Only the strongest were reversed. Knowing that separation from the honey dome retards expansion, only the hives that we felt had enough bees to span the empty hive body

were reversed. We guessed wrong. The hives that were reversed were uniformly retarded.

The retardation was conspicuous in a small outyard of six hives. In late winter, three were too strong and three were moderate in population. In mid March, the three that were too strong were reversed and the three of moderate strength were not. Checking weekly, for two weeks, those reversed showed no improvement and the moderates advanced normally. On the third week, we were prepared to back

out of the reversal and unreverse, but we found that the reversed hives had overcome the setback and were progressing on a par with their formerly weaker cousins. All six then performed fairly equally through the honey season. Reversing had not helped the spring buildup, but had been a rather lefthanded way to equalize.

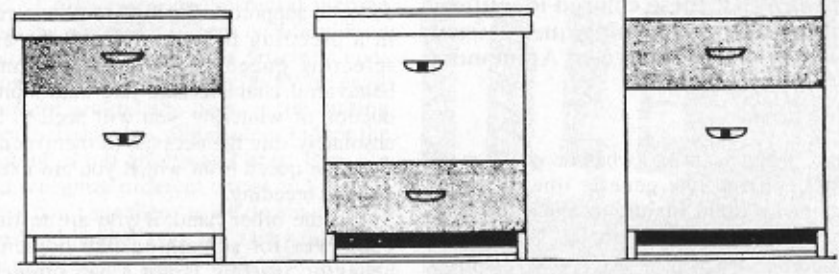
In rereading old magazines, we found one reference to hive body reversal as a swarm prevention technique. Putting on the brakes to brood area expansion would very likely be some help to swarm control. But other aspects, or effects, would seem to offset the advantages.

An interesting side effect of the reversal was that most of the hives that suffered the retardation, started supersedure cells. The bees apparently interpreted the slowdown in brood expansion as a problem with Mama. Some came out of the slowdown without completing the supersedure process, but others raised replacement queens. Supersedure could produce another break in brood production.

With the bees and the Tracheal Mite in a population race, it does not seem prudent to introduce a double break in the bees' normal population acceleration. We conclude that reversing hive bodies is counterproductive (in this area) because it gives the Tracheal Mite an advantage in the race.

It should be noted that the bees in this area do not normally move upward during the spring buildup leaving empty comb below. When two hive bodies are properly filled in the fall, the bees will winter in the lower and fill it with brood in the late winter. As stores are consumed in the upper, the brood nest is expanded into the bottom of the upper, while maintaining brood in the lower hive body. The expansion con-

## Spring Colony Reversal



Although two full depth brood chambers are most often used, this diagram shows simple reversing for spring swarm control. The management idea is to put the queen and brood down below and put the bottom empty hive body on top to give the queen more laying room since bees normally move up as the brood nest expands. Mr. Wright challenges this often quoted management technique in his article.

tinues until both are full of brood. We suspect that the availability of both pollen and nectar on most flying days after early February is the primary factor. Stores are replaceable in late winter and early spring, and the availability supports a stable and expanding brood nest. It is not necessary to move up into stores. If this premise were confirmed, it would be possible to conclude that reversing hive bodies was never appropriate for this area. The primary reason we would have an empty hive body on the bottom is that it was not filled

and occupied in the late fall.

The reader is in a better position to evaluate the pros and cons of reversing for his location. But keep in mind that the bees do much better when operating into overhead honey stores. For lack of a better description, we will call it honeydome management. If there is any way to avoid it, do not separate brood from their honey dome.

We can move an empty hive body to the top because we winter in two hive bodies and a feed box (shallow or Illinois). If the

brood is in the top hive body, the band of open cell feed honey is located in the feed box. Placing the empty hive body above the feed box does not separate them from their honey dome, but then, that is not literally "hive body reversal."

In all the references we've seen on reversal, no cautions were included. The problem described above would not be applicable if the bees had been wintered in two hive bodies only, but we have not seen any restrictions on the universally recommended reversal of hive bodies.