UNITING BOARD

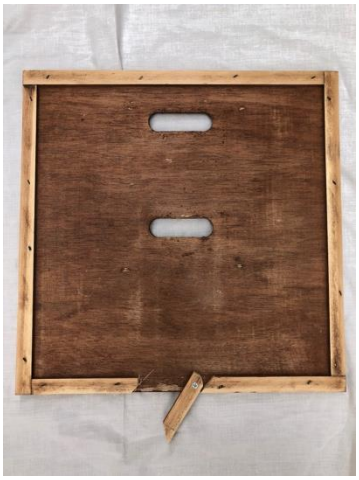
When uniting two colonies close together, the newspaper method is very effective. But what if the hives are far apart or in different apiaries? A good solution is to build a uniting board the will keep the bees secure inside the hive whilst moving.

I cannot take the credit however as Michael Myszyn has been using these for years and introduced me to their benefits. What follows is my interpretation of his design.

Materials:

- Either 5mm plywood cut to the size of the hive box plus relevant lengths of 5mm x 10mm stripwood OR an old crownboard with two feeder holes. I buy second quality crownboards from one of the suppliers during sale days or honey shows usually saving around £5.
- One sheet of varroa metal mesh
- Small amount of 5mm x 10mm stripwood.

Method:
On one side, opposite the feeder holes, make two angled cuts approximately 100mm apart. Remove the off-cut and trim one end slightly and repeat on the edging (see photos for clarity). This will be the entrance and without cutting off the excess, there is the likelihood that you will squash bees. Then screw the off-cut back in position with one 12mm screw. Make sure the screw head is recessed!



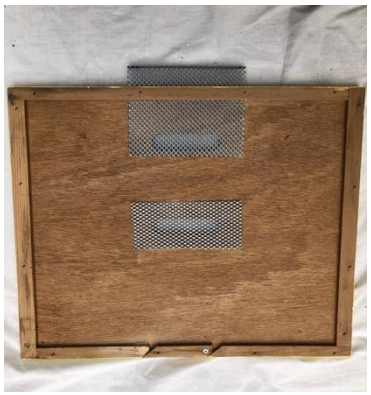
- On the opposite edge of the board, but on the same side, cut a slit approximately 150mm in length. On my first attempts I would remove the relevant piece of stripwood, make the required cuts and then glue and pin it back into place. Now I use an electric multi tool which makes it easier and quicker.

Now on to the metalwork!

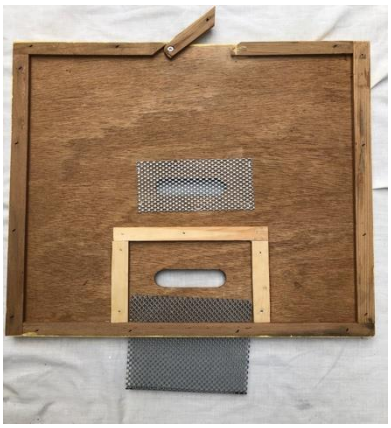
- From the varroa mesh, cut a section 150mm x 150mm and fold back one edge by approximately 5mm forming an ‘L’ shape.
- Cut a further section 150mm x 75mm.

Back to the crownboard …

- Take the smaller piece of mesh and staple it across the middle feeder hole. This will allow the scents to spread throughout both boxes but keep the bees separated.
- Next, put the larger section through the slit and make sure that the turned up section does not protrude beyond the edge of the crownboard.



Finally, cut three pieces of stripwood to length then glue and pin them around the larger mesh screen. Quite why I do this I’m not sure; initially it was a desire to protect the bees when withdrawing the mesh but I’m probably worrying needlessly.



That’s it, all complete.

To use:

A day or two before moving, I will replace the existing floor with the uniting board leaving the entrance open.
On the night before the move, the entrance is closed and sealed with duct tape - the bees can get through the smallest of gaps! I also make sure that the feeder holes in the top crownboard are securely covered. NOTE: if both hives have queens, one will need to be removed. If she is in the box above the uniting board, she must be removed before it is sealed up.
The next day, I will tape around the join between the uniting board and brood box then secure the complete hive with one, or two, straps.
The hive is then ready for moving and placed on top of the receiving hive.
Obviously, with no newspaper to eat through, the bees cannot unite without your intervention. I tend to wait 24 hrs or more before removing the larger mesh screen and allowing them to merge. After that, it's standard uniting procedure waiting a week before merging the brood frames into one box.