Practical Beekeeping
Transferring colonies of *Apis cerana* to frame hives

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Following our article ‘Simple ways to manage stingless bees’ in *BfDJ67* we would like to advise on moving colonies of *Apis cerana*.

Here in the Philippines, wild colonies of the Asian honeybee *Apis cerana* are abundant. Colonies are found in hollow trunks and crevices. They also inhabit manmade structures including cupboards, ceilings, discarded tyres and pots. The transfer of colonies into hives makes management easier, allowing honey and pollen harvesting and crop pollination.

The transfer of wild colonies is not a new technology. However, to prevent absconding we modified the usual practice. First, we do not mount all the combs to the frames. We mount only selected brood combs and those that have a good number of sealed brood and other stages of development.

We found out that not having all the combs mounted on frames enables the bees to ensure the survival of the newly transferred brood. With all the combs well covered by bees, they are much less susceptible to wax moth infestation. Also, fewer combs mean that the bees can easily fix the damaged combs and clean debris from the hive.

Secondly, queens are caged for three days to prevent balling. This is when worker bees surround the queen in a ‘ball’ and kill her. We observed that the bees have the tendency to ball their queen after transferring, and also sometimes to abscond, which is to abandon the hive and their brood a few hours after being transferred. Caging the queen gives time for the colony to stabilise.

**STEP 1** Locate the nest

**STEP 2** Prepare the following materials

- Hive
- Knife
- Hive tool
- Smoker
- String
- Bee veil
- Flashlight
- Gloves
- Swarm net
- Queen cage
STEP 3 Clear the work area and install the swarm net

STEP 4
Smoke the nest entrance
Widen the entrance to expose the combs

STEP 5 Cut the combs one at a time

STEP 6 Shake the comb inside the swarm net. Set aside the comb on top of the inner cover

STEP 7 Catch the queen. Insert the cage in between the frames
STEP 8 Mount the comb on to the frame. Select only a few brood combs since not all the field bees are captured.

STEP 9 Place the frames inside the hive in a sequence similar to that in the original nest.

STEP 10 Insert a dummy-board between the wall and the first frame and a division board after the last frame.
STEP 11 Scoop the remaining bees into the nest using your bare hands.

STEP 12 Close the hive, leaving a small gap at the top for ventilation. Cover the entrance.

STEP 13 Move the hive to the desired location. Feed the bees with equal amounts of sugar and water. Release the queen after three days.

STEP 14 Monitor the colony once a week. Make sure that there are enough stores. Protect the colony from ants and other pests.

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