

# Stahlman beekeeping notes for 2021

## Issue # 17 April almost in the rearview mirror

**April beekeeping thoughts -- Late winter storm hits eastern U.S. The low here in Raleigh hit the freezing mark on Wednesday night. Fortunately, day time temperatures allowed bees to forage for Tulip Poplar which is in full bloom this week. Beekeepers with established hives have been dealing with swarming issues and adding supers for the honey crop.**

**Depending upon where you live north or south – a lot is going on!**

**Package bees have arrived or are about to arrive. Nuc's most likely will be ready by May 1<sup>st</sup>.**

**As some of you know, I am working as a mentor to four Wake County beekeepers this year. As in the past, I continue to learn a lot about beekeeping with these new beekeepers. They encounter a number of issues. The following comment came from one of my students:**

Also, thanks again for helping me this past Saturday. That was a lot of fun! When we get another chance to meet, as a retrospective, I would like to go back through my notes of all the things we did and discuss next steps. I am so



impressed with your quick intuition of examining the current situation and making quick decisions in the moment on what to do to split and create a new hive from the swarm colony. In time i want to be able to do that but I know it will take a lot of practice and experience to get to that point.

The purpose of all teaching is to have our students succeed. I compare starting beekeeping with two experiences I have had in my life. 1) bringing home a new baby and 2) learning to ride a bicycle. "Oh! My G--" a new baby is in the house. Every cry or strange movement causes concern. The bicycle trainer wheels come off – "get up and try it again".

Before long that baby is telling you what to do! And that bicycle is now a trail bike taking on steep uphill paths!

I have several pictures taken this past week that deal with some of the early events in the life of a colony of bees.

This picture shows a new hive, summer screen, top cover and feeder ready for a swarm. The swarm is in the box on the work bench.



Once the swarm box was brought down from the tree and set on the work bench, the top was unscrewed and the bees smoked down on the frames. That is the reason you see no bees on the top of frames.

Cary, my student, had built this trap with scrap lumber and was concerned with bees getting into the box from several points (the cover allowed bees to enter in the gaps between the cover and the box - no problem). They were quite happy to use the extra entrance.

I had given Cary some old brood frames to go with the new frames he had put into the trap. A concern was mentioned about the inside size for the swarm trap. Was it deep enough?

A week or so earlier, Cary had seen scout bees flying around the entrance to this trap (15 to 20 bees). Then just before he was scheduled to take a trip out of town, he called! A swarm was moving into the trap. He was excited! By the way he had ordered two packages of bees. We had discussed a number of things about package bees – placement of hives on his property, equipment needs, building frames, and wiring foundation.

Upon his return to Raleigh, he found bees flying into and out of the trap from the various entrances. They were bringing in pollen and nectar!

We scheduled a time to examine the trap and move bees into one of the two hive bodies he had set up. Questions such as "**can we move the bees from the trap to the hive**" came up. The new hive location was some 50 to 75 feet away from where the swarm trap was located. One and half weeks had past since the bees moved in!



The queen was located – a nice large dark queen. As I write this, we are going to go back to the trap to check on the bees that stayed with it and check on the frames moved to the new hive. The goal is to mark the swarm queen and let the bees still in the swarm trap raise a new queen from the eggs in worker cells on the frame shown here.

This was at least a four- or five-pound swarm. The bees had also built some comb to the bottoms of the deep frames. This we removed to get the frames into the standard deep brood box of the new hive. New frames were added to fill the box.

### **The follow up trip to the swarm trap and new hive.**

The temperature was a bit chilly but a few bees were flying. After lunch, Cary and I visited the new hive. It had warmed up into the 50-degree range and the bees had broken the cluster. I like to work bees when it is a bit warmer. However, there are times when a new hive is started that a quick look is required.



The goal was to open the new hive – 1) to see if they adapted well to the move and 2) to mark the new queen.



These pictures were taken by Cary Orange of the work we did in his hives.

The queen was laying eggs, the bees were drawing new comb in frames and the bees in the swarm

were busy at work. That is exactly what was expected.

Moving the bees from the swarm box to the new location worked well.

Now we were faced with checking out the swarm box in which we left a frame of brood and some bees.

I would like to point out that if we did not leave a frame of brood, the bees would have most likely relocated to the queen in the new hive. Brood holds bees – I learned that when I was maybe

12 years old helping in the family queen yard. **It is a useful technique when hiving any queen-less bees.**



This is the swarm trap as we found it. One bees was entering the crack under the top cover. Other bees were entering other cracks and entrances. I want to point out the bees don't need some fancy home to take up residence. Any wood pallet has enough wood in it to make a swarm trap. **The only requirement that made this trap work was the old brood comb placed in it to attract the scout bees wanting to locate a new home! And a source of honey bees set to swarm!**

The swarm trap still held a lot of bees. These were foraging bees flying from the trap that were not moved in the frames we moved to the new hive.

This is the frame we left in the swarm trap. The bees were also drawing new foundation in the frames we placed in the swarm box.



Photo taken by Cary Orange

### What were we looking for?

- 1) How many bees stayed in the swarm trap after removing the queen.
- 2) Were the bees trying to build queen cells – emergency queen cells to raise a new queen?
- 3) Were the bees bringing in pollen and nectar to sustain survival?

### The answer was yes to all questions!

At first sight, Cary knew he had an additional hive to deal with. I recommended that the swarm trap remain in place until all the brood in the comb below the bottom bar of this medium frame had emerged. The brood in this section would add bees to the bee population when they were

most needed. The plan is to place this new colony in a five frame nuc as soon as all bees have emerged from this frame. Cary asked if the new comb built by the bees could be adapted to another frame? That is a certain possibility. All that needs to be done is cut the newly built comb from the bottom bar and fasten the comb in a frame with rubber bands or string. I like my students to determine what they want to do – the decision is really up to them!



### Emergency queen cells

#### Can you see any in the photo above?

We located at least four emergency queen cells on this frame. Most of these cells were covered by bees. When a virgin queen emerges from a cell she will attempt to destroy her rivals. **The**

**success of this colony will depend on a virgin queen mating and begin laying eggs within 5 to 10 days.**

To recap Cary's introduction to beekeeping: He did a lot of reading and studying. He took action to get some free bees by building a swarm trap. He took a bee school and ordered equipment he thought he needed. He wanted two hives of bees so he ordered two packages of bees. He took a chance on his own to build the swarm trap based on information he found on the internet (I think). He was assigned to a mentor by his local bee club. His journey is just beginning.

I certainly appreciate all the bee buddies I am going to be working with this year. This is the way I get a lot of the material I write about – I have been lucky enough to meet and work with some great people. By the way, swarm traps are not a dependable way to get started keeping bees. However, they offer anyone a change to get bees if they have the ability to build a box, put it up into a tree, and get lucky that bees find it.

I owe so much to all of my students and expect them to do very well.

**Next week I will get to that article about bees drawing foundation on plastic foundation.**