

Stahlman beekeeping notes for 2021

Issue # 46 Theft of bee hives

Bee hives have over many years been stolen. Stealing hives of bees is not a random act! I had over 30 hives taken from a bee yard in Ohio many years ago. I called the county sheriff and his office informed me that if I found who took them, they would do something about getting them back. I was asked if I had a way to identify my hives. I did not brand the hive boxes or frames. My equipment was standard Langstroth hives. I was not in a position to visit other beekeepers bee yards to see if I could find my hives.



Technology in today's world makes it possible to locate stolen bee hives. We can buy sensors to monitor many things going on inside the bee hive including GPS trackers. This is a monitor for checking temperature inside a hive. It is shown almost actual size. It can be connected to the cloud and information from it can be found on an iPhone. This device keeps a log of temperature changes in my brood nest. Similar devices are sold to track movement of bee hives and those devices have been used in commercial beekeeping equipment as well as hives.

The demand for bee hives has increased greatly with most hives being stolen in California – reason – a hive of bees rents for about \$200.00 a hive for almond pollination.

Hive theft is an all too common occurrence. One quick Google search, and you're inundated with tragic stories of beekeepers losing bees.

It really doesn't make any difference where you live! Bee hives are being taken from almost any location where a beekeeper might keep them. Some thieves might not be interested in the whole hive. They might take just a honey super full of honey. Or as reported in Long Island, N.Y. – a queen producer lost valuable queen stock developed over a long period of time and it was irreplaceable. See [Valuable Queen Bees Stolen From Beehives On Long Island](#). Or another -- Hive rustlers are hitting Middle Tennessee stealing bee hives.

It is obvious to me that the people involved in stealing bees are most likely beekeepers. They must have some knowledge of where bee hives are located and how to move them. They either add hives to their own operations or sell them (as in chop shop for hive equipment) – frames with bees can be removed from stolen hives. A good double deep hive could be

divided into say three nucs selling for as much as \$200.00 each. Total take for one strong hive -- three nuc's = \$600.00!

"The answer to why would anyone do it?" Easy money! Bee hives are easy to find! The thief only has to case out a bee yard, determine the method of removing a hive or all hives, select a time to do it and then show up with required trailer, truck or car. See stealing "Billy's bees" in a section below on how he solved a problem he had.

What can you do to prevent someone from rustling one of your hives?

- If your state requires registration of hives, register them. Ohio does require registration and the Department of Agriculture carries out bee inspections in most counties. Bee inspectors aware that hives have been stolen will be able to identify marked frames and hive bodies easily. North Carolina has bee inspectors that cover the state but no formal requirement to register hives for inspection except for those selling hives or raising queens (more than 10).
- Consider the area where you keep bees! Can someone drive right up to the hives and load them into a vehicle? Maybe you have a property with an alley and the bees are near. A hand truck used to move bees could easily make the job easy and fast. Or, the bees are in the country near a road. Access is important to someone looking to steal bee hives.
- Keep them in a location within view – be able to see the hives on a daily basis will prevent all but very brazen thieves.
- Marking a hive some way is useful. The best is branding hive equipment. It is now possible to use electronic locators (GPS) installed within a hive to find its location. It is not difficult to set up and install one of these devices. Cost might be a factor!
- Marking equipment by burning a registration number on all equipment is an easy way to identify stolen hives – If the hive equipment is recovered, one can easily prove ownership of the property. For example, a number such as 25-112 provides a lot of information available from the state of Ohio. Each registered beekeeper has a number and the owner is easy to find.
- Reduce the number of people who know about your bees -- the less chance they will be stolen. People don't steal what they don't know about!



- Gates and fences are a deterrent.
- Set up a trail camera to monitor the hives. At least it may be possible to identify the thief or vehicle. This is evidence that could be shared with law enforcement.

Billy's story of a hive taken from one of his bee yards:

Billy could see tire tracks of a vehicle that backed up to the hives in his bee yard. The question of who was never answered!

However, there was something Billy did that amused me and gave me something to imagine when the next attempt to steal a hive was made. By the way, Billy was right – the thief came back.

Billy's solution:

Billy's hives – like most hives of bees – had bottom boards. He later switched to moving bees on pallets which would be much harder for anyone to steal unless they had a hive loader capable of picking up four hives at a time.

His bee hives were lined up in a row in a clover field which was being grown for seed production. Access was possible because as a clover field, one could drive right up to the hives.

Billy's arsenal: An eye bolt, a length of nylon rope, a ground stake and a bottom board. Hives on each end of the row were equipped to prevent being moved in the following manner.

The bottom board was turned over and an eye bolt was screwed into the center of the bottom board. One end of the rope was fastened securely to the eye bolt. The other end of rope was coiled up and fastened to a ground stake placed under the center of the bottom board. All was placed to be unseen by anyone attempting to move the hive.

A few days later when Billy went to work the bees – sure enough one of the hives was laying on the ground toppled over about six feet from the hive location. The bottom board was laying a short distance away still fastened to the ground stake some four feet from it.

One can only imagine the surprise the thieves got when that rope tightened and ripped the bottom board out of their hands. The hive was jerked off the bottom board and all the bees in the hive were suddenly exposed. It turned out that a couple of guys living a few miles away had been stung severely. The previous stolen hive was never found but there were no more attempts to steal hives from that bee yard.

If you are keeping bees in out-yards, it is important to consider the chance that your hives could be stolen. It is a shock when you suddenly become aware that something is not right. The economic impact on stolen hives is great! Not only is equipment gone but the chance for the income from those stolen hives is gone.

If one is trying to assess the loss figures from stolen hives, one must consider not only replacement cost of hive equipment and the bees, but rental or honey crops no longer coming in from the hive or hives stolen.



If bee hives are stolen let someone know about it. It might generate a TV spot because people are now more aware of honey bees and the problems of keeping them alive. TV reporters are always looking for a story.

When I reported my bees stolen, the sheriff deputy took a report. The most common question one will be asked is, "Do you have any idea of who took your bees?" I never heard back if they even did an investigation.

They have more important things to do besides looking for a trailer with a load of bees on it. But I would expect that some unsuspecting beekeeper moving a trailer load of bees might be stopped and asked a number of questions including proof of ownership.

This happened to one of my friends pulling a skid loader behind his truck loaded with bees. He did not have a serial number on the trailer with the skid loader. The State Patrol hauled him into a weigh station and impounded the trailer and loader until he could provide proof that he owned the skid loader and trailer. I guess a number of skid loaders get stolen each year. Yes, the trailer was licensed. But they still impounded it.

May I also suggest -- thieves do not usually work during daylight hours. Owners of bee hives often do not discover the loss right away, giving the thieves plenty of time to hide or dismantle the stolen bee hive or equipment.

Below are a few notices reporting stolen bee hives.

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My buddy had 16 pallets stolen last night from Elk Grove ca. If anyone sees these hives please notify me. The theft of bees is getting out of control!! They picked out the strongest hives from the yard. It's a mix of 10 frame and 8 frame boxes all doubles. Some have my company name GVA.



Stolen 20+ individual colonies from (Kern County) Richgrove, CA area. All supers are branded with 11-B99 or HR and every frame is branded 11-B99.



We had one of our bee yards broken into over the weekend. They stole 32 boxes that look like this. If... See More

