

2022 Stahlman Beekeeping E-mail Notes Issue #43a

This issue of Stahlman Notes is being written as frost has pretty much ended the growing season from Raleigh north. I was in the bee yard yesterday still getting bees ready for winter. Tasks included checking on laying queens, honey stores and in some cases combining weak hives.

I can generally determine the chances of a hive going thru winter by checking the size of the winter cluster. A hive without any capped brood with a bee population covering three frames even with a lot of honey is at risk of not making it thru winter. I found hives yesterday with some queens still laying eggs -- they had large bee populations. I found several with small patches of capped worker cells and a queen without a large population of bees. Most bees in double deep hive bodies have already move up into the upper deep. Many of them still need feeding. In those cases the upper box was set on the bottom board and the bottom box removed if no honey stores were in it. It is very common to find no brood or honey in those bottom boxes.

It is decision time! Do nothing and those weak hives are going to die out! I have been on the topic of the winter cluster. A cluster capable of keeping the brood nest warm will survive into spring. A hive with small clusters of worker bees and no brood will in time loose bees. As they die, they are not going to be replaced. Thus the cluster will get smaller and smaller resulting in the cluster contracting to a point when they can not generate enough heat to survive -- even with the hive full of honey stores.

This is the time to determine what decisions you will be making. It may be too late for some hives. The old adage, "take your losses in the fall and make increases in the spring" works if some of your hives survive the winter. For those that lose 100% of their bees, the only option in the spring is buy packages or find swarms to start over.

Fortunately, beekeepers still have some time if the problem is lack of honey stores. If the problem is mites or poor queens, the situation with the bees right now is dire and many of them will be lost in the coming weeks.