STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING NOTES FOR 2023

Vol. 5 Issue # 20 Late May Management May 20, 2023

I have seen a number of beekeeping years but the swarming issues this year top all. I have been able to grow my hives from 3 to 8 this spring, harvest three 5 gal. buckets of spring honey, and the bees are still building swarming cells. They are beginning to use up the uncapped honey I was hoping to harvest to feed brood. Weather is always an issue with honeybees.

From that very warm early spring to cooler weather and a lot of rain, my expectation for the tulip popular flow has ended with bees beginning to get hungry. Normally, here in Raleigh, the bees need to be fed thru the hot summer to survive even though the bees are finding some plants in bloom.

The picture above shows a queen looking for a cell to lay an egg. Brood chambers are getting congested – no open cells for the queen to lay an egg.

I received a phone call from a friend in New Jersey also remarking that he has never seen a swarm season like this year. I thought it interesting to check out some reference books I own to see what beekeepers of the past might have experienced.

The best source for that kind of information is from either the A.I. Root publication ABC in Bee Culture or Langstroth on the Honey-Bee Revised by Dadant. These reference books published topics based upon articles published in their respective bee journals. Both of these reference books are published in current modern updated editions.

These old books are in many ways outdated but they provide some insight into this thing we call swarming. I have a friend who asked me to visit and see a swarm he caught this spring. Unfortunately when I visited the next day the swarm had left the nuc he put them into. He was somewhat

IMPORTANT POINTS

May is a critical month for beekeepers.

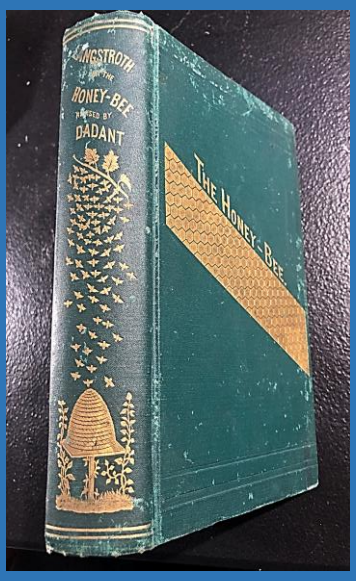
Issues that beekeepers must manage in May:

Swarming is still possible

Robbing is a real possibility. Now is the time to put entrance reducers on weak hives or put robbing screens on hives.

Wax moth may appear in weak hives and stored frames of wax. As temperatures warm, they become more of a problem.

Small hive beetles are on the move. They will find weak hives and strong hives. Now is the time to do something about them if they are seen. Beetle traps are a worthwhile investment.



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disappointed that the bees were gone. The very next day I caught a small swarm and we moved it into a deep 8 frame hive with some drawn comb. I again visited him this past Wednesday to check out the new hive.

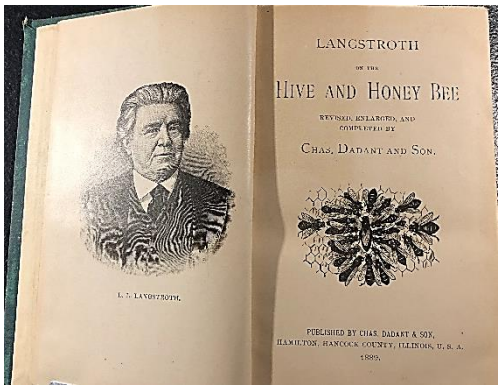
I might mention that his other hive had produced that first swarm. The new queen in that hive was doing well but the hive had little honey to be harvested.

The new swarm hive had a queen excluder over the deep hive body and a new 8 frame medium box above it – to provide bees with more room. The bees had started drawing comb in this medium box and the hive was well populated. He commented that the hive was much more active several days before but bees were bringing in pollen and flight seemed normal.

When we removed the queen excluder I could see every frame was filled with bees, and the bees had filled every space with capped honey. We took out the first frame from a side wall location and I observed capped brood but no eggs or larvae. It is not often that I see brood in the outside frame of a hive. The second frame was filled with honey and capped brood but queen cells were present and one of the queen cells showed a queen had just emerged. A nearby queen cell still had its cap but it was obvious that the cap was the typical dark color of a mature queen cell. The queen cell was removed and an incision was cut in the base of the cell to find out if it contained a queen. Sure enough, a beautiful queen fully developed was in the process of cutting the cap on the cell. She backed out of the cell and we watched her disappear between frames. [The hive had already swarmed]

This was a small swarm of maybe two pounds in 6 weeks approximately built up to swarm again. We closed the hive took off the queen excluder and now expect the royal fight for one of the queens to take over. I mentioned that the beekeeper might want to make a split because it certainly was an opportunity to use some of the queens to start new hives.

I would suspect that many beekeepers are facing the second swarm season about now. Thus, I found a reference to swarming in 1883. A beekeeper [Mr. J.F. Racine, of Wallen, Allen Co., Indiana] claimed to have kept bees for 57 years reported: 505 swarms from 165 colonies and 61 swarms came out on the 3rd day of July.



He counted primary, secondary and after swarms. Many of the swarms settled on the same trees – in his words "The bees were no sooner shaken in a basket, and emptied in front of a hive, than another cluster gathered, in the same spot. Some swarms had no queen, while others had 3, 4, and 5 of them. Some queens were young and some were old. 61 swarms were hived in 20 hives, and surplus cases were given them at once. And the best of it is, I did not want any swarms at all that season." If you chance to find this reference – it is page 231 Item 451 of the Hive and Honey Bee published by Chas. Dadant and Son.

In checking these reference books, both gave a lot of page space to the subject swarming. Swarming was a way sell bees to new beekeepers – although most did not have much trouble finding swarms to get started. (See the autobiography of A.I. Root) I might also mention that one of the jobs for children was to watch for hives swarming – no iphones, tv, radio, car or truck. Almost every farm had bees and many kept bees in small towns and villages.

Some points in bee management at this time of the year:

- **I was alerted to a case of robbing this week. Strong hives may be bearding on the front of hives. When a honey flow ends and hot weather arrives, the interior of a congested hive gets hot. Bees occupying the space between frames slow or inhibit good air circulation within the hive. Thus, worker bees move outside the nest to allow for air movement to cool the hive. This is often mistaken as a sign of swarming. In many cases in cooler weather it is a sign that the hive is crowded and swarming is possible.**
- **Another issue is hive inspections with large populations of bees. Finding a queen is almost impossible. When honey supers are on hives, it is heavy work to remove supers to get to the brood chamber to check what is going on down there.**
- **As soon as honey is harvested, it is time to check on the condition of the brood chamber. Mid summer replacement of queens is an important task to make sure a hive is ready for winter. There is still plenty of time this bee season to help a hive in trouble. Waiting until late summer is a mistake.**
- **Queens purchased at this time of the year are generally well mated. They - unlike early spring queens - will continue to lay eggs well into the winter and next spring season. One should be checking on new queens especially those queens that are shipped with early package bees. Many of them fail because they lack the sperm to fertilize eggs – becoming less effective and in some cases become drone laying queens.**
- **And back to the robbing issue – act now to reduce hive entrances of weak hives or provide robbing screens to hives in general.**

This is the style of robbing screen I use. There are slight variations from manufactures but generally the entrance can be closed off leading into the bottom board while an upper entrance is left open for the hive bees to leave and enter. These entrances can be closed off completely if a hive is being robbed. If robbing is observed in near by hives, the upper entrance is left open and the bottom entrance or in this case two entrances are closed off.

If a hive is being attacked – it is most likely that a great deal of damage to that hive has already been done by the time the beekeeper becomes aware of it. Covering a hive with a wet sheet might help. Moving the hive to another location might help.

There is a reason that a hive is being robbed. Strong hives can defend the entrance to their hive. Even with no reduced entrance some hives will be avoided by other bees. Why?

They are strong enough to prevent robbing bees from entering the hive. Fighting at hive entrances can be observed and before it becomes a problem, the wise beekeeper begins to take action to prevent robbing.

A note about weak hives at this time of the year.

I shared the story about a small swarm growing so fast to become a hive that swarmed. If a hive of bees is not growing bee populations by this time of the year – something is wrong. There must be a problem – most likely a poor queen. The start of June beekeeping begins a new phase of bee management. It is the month that hives can be saved! Varroa mites are continuing to be a big issue – Swarming may have helped a bit with brood interuption but treating for mites is almost a fact of life for the honeybee. Articles in the Bee Journals do not paint a future very promising due to the possible spread of other pests of honeybees found in other parts of the world.

I am not an expert on mite treatment. I have tried most of the products sold to treat the mites. None of them have been real successful in my opinion. I do not use the same product year after year. I am still hoping that we will find a solution by breeding better queens. The Varroa mite has found the honeybee to be a perfect host.

There will be an intruption in the publication of the next issue of Stahlman Notes. I will be on vacation starting the middle of next week. Issue # 21 will be published June 3rd.

June will provide a number of topics to write about:

- **Things like what do you do after the honey flows are over!**
- **Comb management – getting comb drawn on foundation etc.**
- **Raising your own queens/making splits.**
- **Extracting and processing/handling honey – fermentation & granulation.**
- **Bee population management**