

STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

NOTES FOR 2023

Issue # 32 August 26, 2023 Are you ready for “Fall?”

A number of beekeepers are dealing with failing hives this time of the year. Much of this is due to the lack of understanding that inspections during summer months are just as important during these hot days as they were earlier in the year.

Almost every part of the U.S. this year will see heat records set. Storms seem to be more violent. Our bees are facing many obstacles to just survive.

I listed what I think are major problems keeping honeybees alive in the side-bar.

If your bees have plenty of stored food in the hive at this time, that is good. It would indicate that the hive has a strong population of bees that gathered it and if it has a good queen, the winter bee population will carry it into next year.

I have been aware for many years that there are locations in the U.S. with ideal honey bee pasturage. Honeybees in those locations have a better chance to survive than in other locations. Bee survival depends on how the beekeeper manages all the things listed in the side-bar. I don't want to say one is more important than the other. But the health and quality of the hive depends on the beekeeper and location. I start with my selection of queens and treat for mites. But things often don't go the way I thought they would!

I do not move my bees to better foraging areas. In fact, I would have to drive some distance to do that. The term location, location, location is important when keeping and managing bees.

Thus, anyone keeping honeybees needs to consider local conditions and adjust management for that location. What is written as general information does not fit all conditions one keeping bees must deal with.

Summer is winding down! My honeyflows are over and keeping bees alive has required me to feed my bees while others are still managing bees bringing honey into the hive.

I have contacts with other beekeepers that help me understand what is happening to their bees. I sure appreciate that feedback. So let me

IMPORTANT POINTS

Six major fall issues:

- Wax moth
- Small Hive beetles
- Varroa mites
- Failing queens
- Food resources and related issues such as robbing by yellow jackets and honeybees.
- Lack of knowledge or effort to manage bees.

What may have looked like a good hive of bees just a month ago may have obvious signs of failure that could have been prevented by earlier intervention.



share a few things that stand out -- I am stuck with a heritage of thinking like a commercial beekeeper. Move bees from a poor location to better locations. My father never would have considered "baby sitting a hive of bees". In fact, he called any hive that could not produce surplus honey a "welfare hive!" The concern then was American foulbrood. In some years the goldenrod honey flow failed, and feeding a hive of bees was necessary to get it thru winter. But winter management was important.

Your 2024 spring beekeeping season relies much on what you do now!

Many of the beekeepers I talk with have problems. I am asked questions that often are asked too late to take corrective action or use management techniques to save a hive.

There are really two bee seasons – first a time when bees are building up to harvest honey – splits can be made, new hives started and bee populations are growing. The other is identified by diminishing population growth, honey being stored for winter survival and young winter bees born to carry the colony thru winter.

Starting beekeeping is one thing! Keeping the bees alive is another! There is no one answer to fit all situations.

Bee management for fall is pretty simple:

Beekeeping Tasks:

- **Make sure a hive has a queen with a good brood pattern!**
- **Make sure a hive has a large population of healthy bees!**
- **Make sure a hive has pollen and honey reserves!**
- **Make sure pest and mites issues are addressed!**
- **Make sure hive equipment is in good order and the hive location provides some protection from the elements!**

There is an old saying in beekeeping: "Take losses in the fall, make increases in the spring."

Weak hives in many cases cannot be saved. Feeding a weak hive is often tried but all the effort, time and cost to save it often ends in failure.

Fall and winter seasons are long in the north. In Raleigh, bees often can fly from the hive in December and take advantage of various plants that bloom early.

I heard Vic Thompson, a bee specialist at the Ohio State University, tell a new class of beekeepers "Don't shirk any of the basic rules of caring for your bees! In nature they survive without you. The greatest enemy of the bee is you!"

We put bees into boxes provided with frames designed to keep comb straight. We upset colony moral everytime we open the hive. We remove their honey stores destroying much of the work they have done for winter survival. We place them in locations they would in nature avoid.

You may be asking “why are my bees dying?”

I think the answer to that question might be you! Let me give you one answer to that question – I moved from Ohio (a farm) to North Carolina (an urban populated area with manicured lawns, large pine trees, 300 homes in our subdivision). And at present 5 or 6 beekeepers are keeping bees within a mile of my bees.

Research has provided us with results of over populating an area with honeybees. As far back as the early 1900’s beekeepers could keep 100 hives in one location and still harvest good honey crops. Check out many pictures in Old beekeeping journals like Gleanings in Beekeeping and the American Bee Journal. More recent research by Tom Seeley at Cornell University indicate that an area of one square mile can support one ferrel colony of bees in wooded areas in his research area.

Thus, I find myself having to make up for the ability of my bees to survive by managing them responsibly. If you have read these notes, I do harvest about 60 pounds of honey from each hive in the spring. By June all honey flows are over and the bees consume the honey stores I do not take. I also realize that mites and small hive beetles are present in neighboring beekeepers hives. I don’t have to check for mites and small hive beetles – I know because of the close proximity of my bees to other bees, I am going to have to treat my bees for mites.

Thus, I am continuing to feed my bees to provide them with the necessary food to feed brood and save some for winter survival. I also feel that large populations in a hive are important to prevent the hives from being over-run with small hive beetles and wax moth. I am also selecting hives that have good queens. It is not the number of hives going into winter – what counts is the number that survive winter and can produce splits for increases and honey crops next spring.

The problem is over population of bee hives in my area. We (humans) have experienced COVID. Exposure to any disease or pest increases pressure on our bees. That is the reason we are dealing with Varroa mites and Small hive beetles.

Winter prep begins early!



This hive was started using a 5 frame nuc this spring. It was it was doing well by mid summer.

However by late August nothing could be done to save it. It was being fed – but something went wrong much earlier.

Wax moth and small hive beetles did not kill this hive – they took advantage of a hive that was robbed of its food stores. The hive was robbed because the bees could not defend the hive. And this happened because the bee population declined. Was the decline in population due to mites or was it a queen issue?

It also points out that things can happen very fast. I was told that this hive had bees in it just weeks earlier.

Beekeepers must have an objective (a goal). We never learn all there is to know about beekeeping. One thing that makes beekeeping so interesting is that there is so much to know.

So our goal now is getting bees ready for winter. Take our losses now! One can easily start over again in the spring. Weak colonies still might have a chance for survival but beekeepers must keep ahead of the bees rather than wait until it is too late. We are now seeing stores selling Halloween items. We have to think like those that market products. For them Christmas is next. For us, winter is fast approaching. Fall prep is now!

A thought about combining weak hives:

- It is not a good idea to take brood frames from a strong colony to give to a weak hive at this time of the year. C.C. Miller long ago realized that taking from a strong colony in fall to help a weak hive was a big mistake. The old adage “Take your losses in the fall and make increases in the spring” was important for strong hive survival. Removing brood frames from a strong hive is removing future bee populations from it.
- Adding frames (uniting a weak hive with a strong hive) could spread disease or mite loads into a good hive.
- Unite or combine several weak hives – killing one of the queens might be better.
- Moving a weak hive into the spot where a strong hive sat (the strong hive is moved to another location) is an option. The foraging bees will add to the weak hives bee population and help the hive produce more brood if the queen is able to lay more eggs. The strong hive’s foraging bees will all be lost but at no great loss to the strong colony because the colony replaces them quickly with young bees.

Finally, when hives die out during the late fall period, the equipment can be gathered up, cleaned and stored. Dead hives require no food stores, and equipment will be ready in spring for making splits or package bees. Experienced beekeepers repeat this process year after year.