

# STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

## NOTES FOR 2023

Vol. 5 Issue # 4 January 28, 2023



**This is wintering bees in Ohio.** This was a beeyard of mine. The hives were located in the wind swept Madison County area south of Springfield, Ohio during the winter of 2014. The hives were clusted together and covered first with straw over which plastic tarps were fastened to the ground with rocks. The bees in these hives were successfully wintered with only one hive lost. I kept my hive tool and smoker in the mail box you may see here. The bees were covered in early December and remained that way until the weather warmed up in Late March or early April. I did not worry about the bees. I took my bees into the winter with good queens, good bee populations, and plenty of honey stores. Mite treatment was done in April and fall. This was very cost effective and the work of getting the hives moved and ready was easy.

The little clump of trees and the rocks served as wind breaks. I have many good memories of this bee yard and others like it. This area of Ohio is fairly flat with winter temperatures anywhere from -10 degrees below zero to short afternoon temperatures that might reach 50 degrees F. February was always the coldest month of the year. I understand the “spring fever” comment made by a friend about last weeks article. I spent a lot of time in Georgia during late winter and early spring working bees. I was living in two different worlds of keeping bees.

I have included some words of wisdom passed down to us from a beekeeper in 1915, the fundamentals of being successful.

Many older beekeepers may question if the bee stock of years past was better than the stock of today. I remember Starline and Midnight bees. Early Buckfast queens and a multitude of named varieties of queens since. I really liked the quote made by E. S. Miles **“To be successful do not look upon bees as all alike, to be treated all alike, and to expect like results.”**

### IMPORTANT POINTS

This is a fact: There are variations in honey bees.

To be successful do not look upon bees as all alike, to be treated all alike, and to expect like results.

To be successful:

- Get good stock
- Use only the best equipment
- Understand the fundamental principles and biology of bees
- Be willing to put forth effort
- Adopt logical methods of keeping bees so as to harmonize with those instincts.

Quote from E.S. Miles from 1915 Gleanings in Bee Culture Magazine.

Do not be in a hurry to get started – “the early bird they say gets the worm.”

That is not true for beekeeping!

You might get a poorly mated queen – the most important bee in a hive!

The future success of a hive of bees depends entirely on the queen.

What has changed? As I see it, very little! Good queens have always been an issue for beekeepers. Just read the really old bee magazines to realize that every year there were articles about bee survival and the value of good stock.

We sometimes like to blame something for our failures.

- Climate warming – I really don't see much to blame on climate warming for the loss of bees. In fact, warmer weather should benefit bees. Bees survive better in southern Georgia than in Ohio. I can easily attest to that. I moved bees to Georgia to make hive increases and raise queens and sell bees.
- It is a fact that honey production per hive is falling and has been falling for some time. I noticed it in the late 1990's. As beekeepers we realize that some years are better than others when it comes to honey production. We might look at lost foraging opportunities as a reason.
- The CCD report of 2012 could not put the blame of honey bee losses on a single factor. In fact the D in CCD is not disease but disorder. Many things have contributed to hive losses.

It is important to stay positive when discussing hive losses. It is hard to be positive when a hive dies. Let us begin 2023 on a positive note. It is a time to reflect on the past and look forward to the new year.

A "problem" beekeepers face in the spring is where to get queens and package bees. There are many advertisements in Bee Journals and the internet. I would advise new beekeeper against having bees delivered early. I know that bees can be picked up in the Raleigh area as soon as early March. This might be fine for an experienced beekeeper installing bees on drawn foundation. It is not a good idea for someone just beginning with a new hive with new foundation. I would further advise beekeepers to buy locally. Local sellers will not hang up on you or simply not answer a message. When buying nucleus hives, buy them locally and see the nuc opened so you can see and inspect what you are buying before you put it in your vehicle and head for home.

Experienced beekeepers realize that a new hive of bees started on 8 to 10 frames of foundation will not draw all the comb given to them and gather a honey crop here in the Raleigh area because our honey flow is over by July. If started on drawn comb with some honey and pollen, the bees will thrive and build a population and still be able to store surplus honey by the time the honey flow ends.

But there is a big "if". If the bees have a good queen. If the weather and plants cooperate. If the hive is properly managed. Each of those "if's" is important!

Many problems can be encountered when queens, packages of bees or nuc hives are purchased.

- The queen can fail! One can check a nuc to make sure the queen in it is laying eggs. One can check the capped brood amount (a frame or two filled with brood) is normal. An egg laying queen is very important. Don't buy a problem! Some suppliers sell nucs that are nothing more than an introduced queen with some drawn comb and a couple pounds of bees. Check to make sure it has brood. Otherwise it is just a glorified package of bees newly started without any indication that the queen is good. You do not gain the benefits of buying that kind of nuc thinking you are going to get a four week head start over buying a package of bees. Usually an overwintered nuc with an overwintered queen is a better buy. Bee management will be like working with an over wintered full sized hive.

- Packages can be used in a number of ways.
  - Package bees can be added to a weak hive. It is my opinion that the old queen in a weak hive should be replaced regardless. I am quick to pinch old queens and replace them as early in the season as possible.
  - I do not recommend splitting a package of bees by buying an extra queen at the time the package is picked up. Quick development time depends on a large population of bees to feed and keep brood warm. It takes almost six weeks for a package of bees to replace the old bees that came in the package. Splitting a package reduces the work force of each new hive – slowing development time considerably.
  - Standard installing of a package of bees is covered in a number of web site posts and bee magazines. Checking the queen and colony development is extremely important! An installed package of bees requires loving care – one beekeeper described it just like
  - taking a new baby home from the hospital.
- There is an age old problem to be faced thru-out the bee season: We can talk about all the things we should do but the fact is: “Some hives still die during spring thru summer” before fall arrives. The Boy Scouts have a motto “Be Prepared”. That is a good motto for beekeepers as well! Future articles will address some of those issues.



This bee is ready to join us to get this new year off to a good start. She has been working for the past several weeks gathering pollen. A bit of cold weather and some rain may disrupt her flight schedule but guess what! She is alive, working and spending time in the hive helping to keep it warm and well supplied with food.

I am charged with making sure the hive she lives in is comfortable, dry and roomy. I must supply any shortages of food she is unable to gather. Daylight hours are getting longer and the trees around her home are just coming into

bloom.

Her queen is laying 1,500 eggs a day and all the young larva in the hive are consuming far more than she can bring into the hive. She needs help when it gets cold. Because of her age, she may take a position on the outside of the winter cluster – there to insulate the interior of which I am told gets to 92° F. The survival of her hive requires food for bees to generate heat to keep the brood alive. She is doing her job! Her sisters are doing so many things – feeding larvae, cleaning the nest, grooming the queen, flexing muscles to generate heat and so much more. In a few weeks her sisters will start drone cells and she will pass. Her place to be taken by the young bees now just emerging from cells. This is the world of a honey bee colony.