

STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

NOTES

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Published by Dana Stahlman Raleigh, North Carolina Email: stahlmanapiaries@aol.com
Published free as a public service to anyone interested in honeybees. Email me to be added to my mailing list.



Happy New Year -- I am now into the 6th year of publishing these beekeeping notes. The birth of a new year always brings optimism for the beekeeping season ahead. I think back to those friends who have left a remarkable memory and impact on my life. They have given me a few wise sayings that keep my feet on the ground and remind me that there is so much to look forward to.

Many years ago I was overwhelmed with work raising queens and making up package bees. I was complaining:

My friend, Billy Engle said this to me

“God only gives us two hands, two legs and twenty four hours in a day. You have to rest and relax so you can get up in the morning and enjoy life.”

**And then this from Art Buchwald a humorist that wrote a column in the Washington Post.
“Whether it’s the best of times or the worst of times, it’s the only time we get!”**

My home is not quite like this castle. I have to be realistic on what I can afford and how much effort I can put into keeping it up. My bees live simply and they don’t ask me why they can’t live in a castle like this.

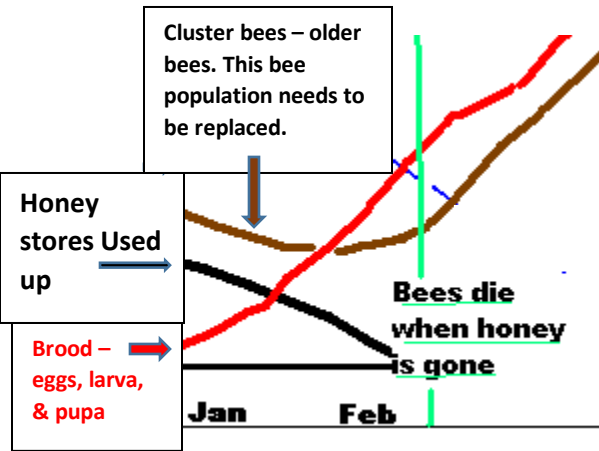
They do depend upon me to provide a protected home supplied with plenty of food during the winter season. With that said, I am going to start this year’s notes with some topics that may be helpful to both experienced and new beekeepers.

Now is the time to make plans for 2024! I hope you have a notebook filled with observations from past years – things like when you saw flowers in bloom, when swarming occurred, when the honey flow began, the hive management techniques you used and what can be improved upon!

If not, then it is time to start keeping notes.

A Calendar for January 2024

I generally look at beekeeping (hive management) as two separate seasons. The first is a period when hive populations increase. The second is when hive populations decline. If one is to begin keeping bees, the best time is when bee populations are growing.



The major task in January : MAKE SURE A HIVE HAS FOOD AND THAT THE BEES ARE ALIVE.

Other things:

- **Honey bees are unpredictable – hives die for various reasons.**
- **Bees do not die because of cold weather – bees keep the cluster viable as long as the cluster can maintain heat, get food, be in good health, and raise replacement bees.**

Brood rearing begins as daylight hours gets longer.

Survival depends on the breed of bees (the type of queen selected in the previous year and management used in the fall.) Cleansing flights with a few warm days give bees an opportunity to leave the hive.

How to check a hive during cold weather:

- **Lift the top cover to expose the hole in the inner cover.**
- **Bees may be gathered around the inner cover hole. It might be time to place some granulated sugar around the hole as emergency food.**
- **If bees are not present around the inner cover hole listen to see if you can hear them. A bump on the side of the hive will result in alarmed bees buzzing.**
- **It is time to consider a feeding method – bees use more food when brood is being raised.**

It is time to get your equipment put together or cleaned up. If you have bears, put up a bear fence and check it often. If you suffer losses, bounce back by ordering either nuc's or package bees as soon as orders are being taken.

Just keep in mind that February, March and April are critical to carrying out management techniques to save hives of bees. It is time to research topics that will face you as bee populations grow.

If you have taken a bee school class, it might be worthwhile to see if you could take it again. The second time around will give you some experience to ask questions which will result in giving those just beginning a heads-up on some things they need to know.

If your bees did not survive don't be discouraged.






Bee classes have yet to begin but those considering starting beekeeping in 2024 will search the internet. The people who really profit from beekeeping sales **are at it** with ads like this!

Ad

<https://products.bestreviews.com/> This is what I found searching for bee equipment. The best equipment!

Top 5 **Beehive Starter Kit** - We Reviewed Every Model - Voted The Best of the Year [By unnamed sponsor]

Find Top 5 **Beehive Starter Kit** Here. Free 2-Day Shipping and Free Returns. Our Research Has Helped Over 200 Million Users Find the Best Products. Up to 60% Off. We Do the Testing For You. Compare Prices. From the Experts. The Best Rated Products. Save Time and Money. Expert Reviews & Advice.

 <p>\$149.99 complete starter kit Hive, smoker, bee veil.</p> <p>The Langstroth hive -- #1 selection</p>	 <p>Wooden Auto Bee Hive Starter Kit Beekeeping...\$220.61</p>	<p>Full Set 7PCS Auto Shed Beehive Honey Hive...\$208.00</p> 
<p>Amish Made in USA Complete Langstroth Beehive...\$179.00</p> 	 <p>FREE SHIPPING US Stock</p>	<p>New beekeepers need to make decisions. I would assume most of you reading this have your own idea of what suggestions you would make.</p>

That deal for \$149.99 looks pretty good. I would ask what kind of smoker, how many frames, and a few other questions such as what else is included! Is it sent complete as shown? Is there postage to pay? I support buying from local bee equipment suppliers. They can answer questions and make suggestions and even supply the bees that will be put into the hive.

I spend a lot of time talking about experience. I have made mistakes in my life time and learned from them. As this year rolls around new beekeepers will be facing choices. Over the years I took advice that led me astray but I learned. These new beekeepers will learn as well.

It would be interesting to find out from my readers what advice they would give to a new beekeeper on what equipment to buy! Feel free to email me with your suggestions – I will print some of them.

One reason for taking a bee school is to avoid mistakes. I will always remember a short story "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" (1939) by [James Thurber](#). "Walter Mitty's "dam the torpedoes and full speed ahead" fits the description of many new beekeepers.

Bee school is not perfect but it does provide guidance and encourages future learning.

Since we are in the winter season - study and reading – can prepare us for the new bee season.

The two big questions for this week (Are my bees alive and what can I do better than last year?)

The major question is "What can I do better than last year?" So far the jury is out on my bee's survival. Since mid-December I have not opened a hive to check the bees. I have lifted a hive cover just to peak down the inner cover hole and placed my hand over it to see if warm air was present.



That was not necessary if I could see bees!

On warm days the bees have been active and I put out some empty 5 gallon buckets – they had a little honey on the sides left over from bottling honey. The bees did a good job of cleaning the honey buckets. All I need to do is wash them before using them this year.

Believe it - I did see some pollen coming into to hives on warm foraging days. In North Carolina we do have a few shrubs with flowers – Those of you living farther North will have warm days as well. One problem that usually causes worry is dead bees in the snow around the entrance to a hive.

This is sometimes alarming but for the most part indicates that a hive is alive. When temperatures within a hive reach 50 degree temperature the cluster begins to break up and some bees venture out of the hive. Some of these bees carry out dead bees that accumulated on the bottom board of the hive. Others may attempt to fly and air temperatures are cold.

They drop to the front of the hive depending on the distance they can fly. They drop because their bodies/WINGS freeze up. I have made mistakes and I have been surprised a number of times thinking a hive was dead when it was actually very much alive. When a hive is a dead-out, I use the winter months to clean and repair the equipment so it is available for spring.

Looking ahead:

- Not all is lost if a hive dies out. Equipment can be cleaned up – drawn comb is valuable.
 - Orders can be placed for package bees to put back into the dead out hive.
 - Consider that drawn comb gives a package of bees a great advantage over bees placed on undrawn foundation.
 - Many hives of bees die during the spring season. They are alive now but will die if action is not taken –
 - Evaluate queen bees as soon as possible with early inspections if weather permits.
 - Check mite levels.
 - Check for moisture levels – any water present on the under-side of an inner cover should indicate a problem with ventilation.
 - A small bee population may indicate problems. (Hives may be queen-less and this is easy to spot if a hive has no brood by the time trees begin to bloom or it may have disease issues or it may be a failing queen). Be prepared to order queens or a package of bees to bolster a weak hive. A new queen and a 2 pound package of bees will do wonders to get a honey harvest from a weak hive being nursed along hoping the queen will get better. Replace the old queen – a colony of bees needs a good queen.
 - Another problem is food for the bees. Spring feeding will be covered in a later issue but it is important to consider what needs to be done now. I have been buying sugar at the lowest price I can find. Since last September the price of sugar has shot up dramatically.
 - Fortunately, if you are checking your bees periodically during the winter season, you will be able to spot problems. We have had some serious wind damage here in North Carolina. If hives are located in out-yards it is very important to check to make sure top covers have not been blown off hives. No protection from rain or snow will doom a good strong hive of bees.
 - Hives are attractive to creatures that can claw and chew. Ants, mice, skunks, raccoons, bears for example. Do not leave anything around hives that will attract any of these creatures -- especially dead-out hives with honey in them.
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Please help me add to this list. Just email me at Stahlmanapiaries@aol.com.

Dana Stahlman
