



# STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING NOTES

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Swarming What are the signs:

I am not sure how many times I have written something about swarming but it is an issue that comes up every year. I can cite a number of techniques to stop it, but how to prevent it is a real challenge.

I was fortunate to have a beekeeping friend from New Jersey stop by here in Raleigh for a visit. He considers me a good beekeeper. This morning (Thursday) I took him out to visit my bees. I get busy at times and take a lot for granted. This morning was cold. I am going to share some pictures of what we were looking at.



The time was 9:00 a.m. with a temperature around 40°F. This hive had a small cluster of bees outside on the bottom board. Keep in mind that it was cold outside and it is unusual to see bees outside a hive. Bees were not flying.

This is a red flag! What is going on with this hive?

I like to think that I am a step ahead of my bees. Most recommend a bee inspection every 9 days during swarming season. I do inspect my bees and I feel I have done a good job. However, evidently not good enough for this hive.

I took off the top cover and found bees clustered above the inner cover as shown here. It was still too cold for them to fly.

Wow, this hive was packed with bees.

This hive is ready to swarm.



My beekeeping tasks for today –  
**Try to stop this hive from swarming!**

The guy in the picture is Shane Woodruff visiting me from New Jersey. He is a beekeeper and long time commercial beekeeping friend.



“So what are you going to do, Dana?” I was asked?

This is what happens when a hive swarms:



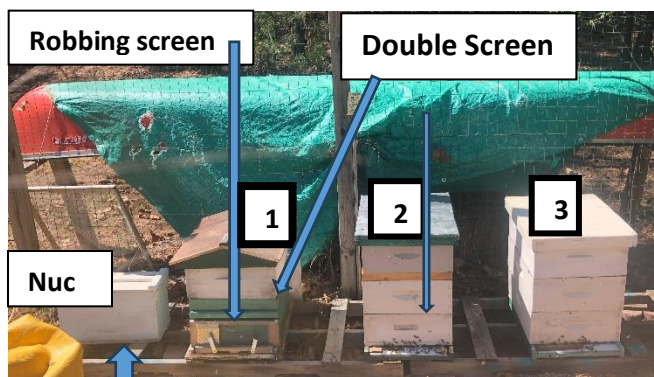
Some comments about a hive that swarms:

- Swarms are normal bee behavior when conditions are right. They normally occur during a period of colony build up -- intense brood build up in the spring when food sources are readily available. But colonies do swarm later in the year.

**A lost swarm results in a loss of bees and the queen. It takes some time for the hive to rebuild especially if a beekeeper is expecting a honey crop from his/her bees.**

**Two things were on my mind: I want a honey crop and I don't want to expand and grow hive numbers.**

The option I decided to take was this:



This is a picture of my bee yard. It is located in the North West corner of my lot. It gets a lot of early morning light.

I have limited space for growth. My wind break is a canoe with a green tarp – well used, old and hole ridden. It keeps people from seeing my hives. “Out or sight – out of mind” is my moto. By the way, the canoe is okay – no holes.

This is a picture of the things I did to the hive on the right #3.

Step 1

This is the swarm hive # 3 and the nuc I moved it's queen into.

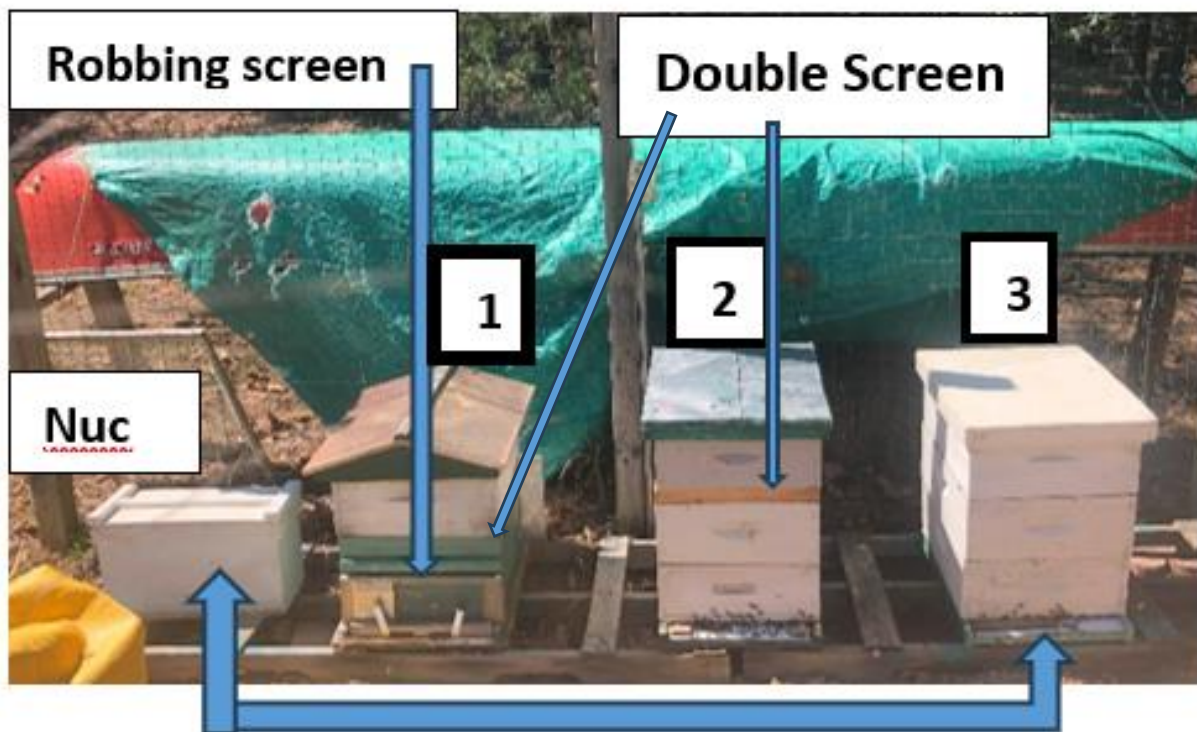
-- I got lucky and found the queen (my queens are all marked)! I moved her with a frame of

brood and several frames without brood (honey bound frames with bees) and a frame of new wax foundation into the nuc. I would have lost a real good queen if they had swarmed. Loosing bees is one thing but a good queen – that would have hurt.

The frames of hive # 3 were loaded with swarm cells. Maybe 20 or more. Another issue [What could I do with all these queen cells?]

Hive #1 and #2 had queens. I decided that I would try to use some of those queen cells to make up three mating nucs. I am always interested in good queens.

There is one piece of bee equipment that I use that made it possible to raise queens above hives that had a queen. It is called a double screen board. I have switched from deep supers to medium supers because they are not as heavy to move. There were no issues with moving frames.



This is a fancy double screen board taken from an ad on the internet. It was a bit expensive. \$50.00 range. My screen boards are rather simple. They are nothing more than an inner cover – I cut out an open square in the middle of the inner cover somewhat like shown here and staple screen wire over the hole on both sides. Some inner covers have a notched opening on one side that can be used as an entrance. If not, make an entrance for the hive placed above the screen. An entrance for bees and a virgin queen to fly from is very important for the system to work. The screen board allows warm air from the bottom hive to enter the hive above it. Thus it takes fewer bees to keep the brood nest warm in the upper hive.

I took frames of bees and queen cells from hive #3 and placed them with frames of bees and brood into medium supers above the screen board on hive #1 and #2. I left a few queen cells in hive #3.

**Note:** If and when the young virgin queens are laying, I will have some options.

**Hive #1** It is the weakest of the three hives. Most likely I will just combine the two separate hives into one hive using the newly mated queen to replace the old queen in Hive #1.

**Hive #2** I could possibly keep the double screen board in place and use both queens to build a super bee population for a honey flow yet to come. I would have two queens to use if I needed one later. Or if one of these queens failed, I could just reunite the two groups of bees back into one hive. Strong bee populations are necessary for a hive to gather a large amount of honey.

**Hive #3** It will also raise a queen (hopefully). If not I have an insurance policy. That old queen or one of the others could be reunited back into her hive.

**The Nuc** I could take frames of brood from the nuc and use my double screen hives to make more queens. She is the best queen I have. Or other options are possible. I could use her to start a new hive!

If you are thinking maybe I could sell her and the nuc for say \$180.00 -- forget it. If I want to sell nucs, I could take the newly mated queens with frames above the double screen and sell them and still hang on to the queen which has survival traits, is a great brood producer, and in my opinion has some hygienic traits making it possible for me to take the action I took.

**Had she swarmed:** Someone else most likely would never know what I lost! They would know nothing about where she came from and what history she is carrying from her genetic ancestors. The fact that she is marked should indicate to her new owner that some beekeeper somewhere will miss her.

**One final note on stopping a hive about to swarm – minutes count.** Once worker bees engage themselves for the journey ahead, temperatures rise inside the hive, and the queen has lost weight by reducing egg laying, one is facing the task of preventing everything “mother nature” has given to honey bees to survive from one generation to another.

What I did was create an artificial swarm. I took the mother queen away from the bees. I took the queen cells except for the few I left in the mother hive from them. I took a number of younger bees protecting and feeding brood away from the hive. The bees left behind is really the swarm without a queen. They will have a virgin queen that will take a mating flight and hopefully begin to lay eggs in 10 to 12 days. It is a set back but they will survive and if enough time passes before a honey flow, they again will be a thriving colony of bees.