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BEEKEEPING NOTES

Why Beginning beekeepers Fail

In response to a question I asked in Issue 20 of these notes, I would like thank three readers [Randal Bowling, Roger Weisner, and Lynn Murray] for taking time to share their thoughts. I have condensed them down into 10 Reasons.

The reasons:

1. Discouragement
2. It can be overwhelming
3. Excitement and enthusiasm can quickly transform into despair
4. No bee buddy/partner to share questions and resources
5. Not getting any honey as a reward in summer of year 2
6. Not understanding the commitment required to keep bees and the pitfalls
7. Hive losses
8. Nasty bees
9. Not willing to invest time and effort to keeping bees
10. The bee buzz is gone (I tried it but stings are not for me).

What all of us should understand it is not possible to help someone who doesn't want to be helped. Mentors complain sometimes that the student assigned to them just doesn't follow up offers to help. There is some expectation on the part of new beekeepers that if things taught in school are followed, success is sure to follow.

As far back as I can remember, people have been fascinated with bees. How many times have you been stung seems to be the first question asked. Keeping bees in areas where people live requires special handling skills and some diplomacy.

I would guess that at least 25% of those who signed up for a bee school this spring are done with keeping bees by the end of the year or earlier. If the bee school gave a membership to a student, the real picture will be in focus next year when it is time to renew that membership. I am including a story at the end of this letter. It was told to me at an EAS meeting and it is about a person who had a far different idea about keeping bees than most of us.

I also have been in communication with a beekeeping friend who must sell a few hives because of health issues. The problem of what to charge for the hives came up in the discussion. New beekeepers pay high prices for bee equipment. There is no way this expense can be recovered completely when the equipment and bees are sold. I compare it to buying a new car. As soon as I drive the car off the lot, it loses a good amount of its value. A good example is the prices paid for queens. I know individuals in the commercial queen industry. If I were wanting 100 queens right now, I could get them for about 22.00 each and sell them for \$40.00 plus. That is the way prices are set. Those selling products must make a profit. A hobby beekeeper selling bee equipment is in a different situation.

Customers are often experienced beekeepers and any used equipment may have issues. Once bees are put on comb, any reasonable buyer must take into consideration disease issues. Is the equipment inspected and declared disease free by bee inspectors? Equipment such as an extractor will have greater resale value than a hive of bees. The demand often determines the price and I know that it is easier to find hives for sale than extractors which are in great demand at this time of the year.



This hive is for sale. What is it worth? Decision must be made as to what to charge for it. I would suggest starting by sharing what you have to sell with your local bee club. New beekeepers (if the club has a bee school) are looking for such things. Others are looking for bargains. Check to see what others are charging for bee equipment before you decide to put the items to be sold on the market. Here in the Raleigh area, I have seen some double deep hives with bees in good condition selling in the \$300.00 range. Some suppliers are selling nucs for \$150.00 to \$200.00. A nuc usually has five frames in it – three of which have brood and a laying queen. When making a comparison between a nuc as above described, a full hive of 20 frames with bees, brood, some honey and all equipment, \$300.00 is a bargain. But the hive shown here reduces the price – like buying a car with 100,000 miles on it and it needs new tires. If

you are new to beekeeping, be sure to find someone with some experience to help you make decisions.

The old adage of “be aware of buying old bee equipment”, still applies. AFB (American foulbrood) spores can live in old equipment for 50 years and suddenly raise havoc in a hive with comb having AFB spores. Most beekeepers in this era have never experienced AFB. But the old timers can share stories of how devastating it can be. It has been reduced because hives with the disease have been burned. It is very contagious.

June and July present interesting management issues for beekeepers. In some areas honey flows are over. In other areas honey flows are just beginning. North Carolina is a good state to

consider this off and on honey flow. Here in Raleigh, the bees are bringing in very little pollen and nectar. Many are extracting now. In the mountains of North Carolina and the coastal areas, bees are still bringing in or about to bring in nectar and pollen from crops such as cotton and sourwood.

The six big summer issues are:

- 1. Failing queens**
- 2. Robbing**
- 3. Small hive beetles**
- 4. Varroa mites**
- 5. Weak hives**
- 6. Feeding bees and taking honey stores without taking too much.**

I will be addressing these issues in up coming newsletters. They repeat year after year. If you are new to beekeeping, these issues will challenge you this year and next and years beyond.

I would like to share that I will be writing for ABJ (The American Bee Journal) beginning with the July issue. There is just so much to write about when it comes to sharing information about our favorite insect. The tasks given to me by the editor was to bring my own view of what the beekeeper of 1 – 5 years needs to know. Articles are due two months prior to publication and are based on what I have written and experienced.

I must admit that when I speak and visit with beekeepers, I learn a lot from them. And those of you who write about your own problems, help me a lot. I go back a long way and adjusting to current prices and challenges, makes keeping bees still more challenging than in the past. In the ABJ's editor's words, when I replied that I would take on this challenge, he wrote, "Excellent. It was evident from your weekly reports that you'd accumulated a broad range of knowledge but I had no idea you were old enough to run for President." So for the time being, I will be writing monthly articles under the "Beekeeping Basics" title. I hope I can do the job up to the standard set by previous authors. I will also be continuing to write this weekly newsletter.

I have been fortunate to know some interesting beekeepers. One was Paul Jackson, the state bee inspector for the state of Texas. Paul wrote a book called "Smoking Allowed." At an EAS convention in the 1990's, Paul was sharing some problems he was having with a non-beekeeper posing as a beekeeper. It seem like a couple of neighbors were having an issue over bees. He was called to investigate. A complaint had been filed about an individual keeping bees who had not registered them. Texas is a state that requires those keeping bees to register places where bees are kept.

All beekeepers should be aware of something called "A good neighbor policy." We want to send a positive message to our neighbors about keeping bees on our property. Is this case funny or is it one that gives beekeeping a bad image? I attempt to keep my neighbors happy that I have bees. I share honey with them and invite them to visit.

The story:

Paul was given an address by county authorities to check a bee dispute between neighbors. He called upon the person living at the address and noted that there were bee hives in the side yard of the house. “Do you own those hives,” he asked. “Why yes I do, the gentleman, said cheerfully!” “Your neighbor has filed a complaint and I notice the hives are not registered,” Paul said.

The fellow offered to take Paul into the side yard to inspect the hives. On the way to the hives the fellow asked if the law applied only to bees in hives or hives themselves. “Hives without bees are equipment and are not required to be registered,” Paul replied.

The two neighbors were unfriendly to each other. The one who filed the complaint was afraid of bees. So the guy with the hives, set the hives up where the neighbor could see them.

The beekeeper would dress up in his bee suit and light his smoker and open up a few of his hives so his neighbor could see him working on the hives! The neighbor claimed he had been stung on numerous occasions and the bees from those hives were responsible. Paul was pulled into this backyard squable.

The hive equipment was owned by a person not keeping honeybees. His objective was to cause his neighbor to be alarmed and worried about being stung. He was not breaking the law by keeping bee boxes without frames or bees in his side yard. However, he weaponized his bee equipment to cause this neighbor to think they did. Paul could only report to the neighbor that there were no bees in the hives! Paul assumed the value of the bee hives as a weapon to the neighbor disappeared once the true story was revealed.