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STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING NOTES

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Mid October Beekeeping

It is time to check your bees as shown here. It has been cold in Raleigh this week, but warmer weather is just around the corner. Leaves are beginning to fall and our honey bees are adapting to the change in seasons. Most bee literature will indicate that a hive of bees to survive the winter season must have 60 pounds of honey stored. That is an estimate that can be questioned but the fact is – the honeybee needs food for winter survival and there is not much out there now for them to get.

There are a number of options and management tools available for beekeepers to put their bees to bed for the winter.

The major concern should be directed toward helping the hive get through the winter season.
From now through December our concern should be first:

The Health of the hive:

- Varroa mite populations are at their highest levels. They will cause all kinds of health issues in the hive from spreading viruses to weakening developing winter bees that the colony needs for survival. Often the result is seen now with small populations of honeybees just hanging on and beekeepers wondering what can be done to save the colony. If such a colony is to be combined with a stronger one, it should be treated for varroa before combining it with a stronger colony. The transfer of diseases is common among those beekeepers that move frames and bees from one hive to another. Combining a diseased hive with a strong hive is adding stress to the stronger hive.

We are all familiar with Covid. A human example would be to move a number of individuals with Covid into the same living quarters of a large number of healthy individuals.

- My bees are faced with starvation issues now. The honey flow ended in July, honey was harvested, and they have had little opportunity to store the needed 60 pounds of reserve honey for winter survival. Those large populations of summer bees usually eat a lot of honey and one can see in many cases, that not much food is left for the winter bees. **It is time to check for winter stores and feed if necessary!**

- One other area of health management is comb management.



We often judge people by the way they keep up their property. Weeds in their yard, an old car up on blocks, the house in poor repair and this next to your house.

Bee equipment ages. That nice new look may end up looking like this:



Fall is a good time to remove frames that have issues. As a seasoned beekeeper, I own drawn comb frames in good condition to swap out with bad looking frames that need to be retired and saved for the solar wax melter. Bees often do crazy things when comb is built on foundation.



This is a hive body removed from a hive that died out. It is full of honey. Frames from a super like this can be salvaged and the honey given to hives that need it.

- In fact, I could just place this honey super directly above the winter cluster and let them use it as is.
- Earlier in the season, I might have placed this super out in the bee yard and let the bees rob it out.
- Or I might take the frames with honey out of the super, examine them and use them with colonies that would need a frame or two.
- That burr comb could be cut out and put into a division board feeder.



Over a period of time, if frames are not removed for inspection, something like this will happen. Honeybees survive some really bad beekeeping practices.

I am sure no one reading this article has honeybees in as bad a shape as the last few examples I have used. But it is a reminder that comb does get old and should be replaced on a planned schedule. I generally replace two frames in my 10 frames brood chambers every year. Hive boxes can last for a long time if painted and maintained. Frames on the other hand should be

considered for replacement when inspections are made either now or in early spring. If you have been keeping bees for a number of years and have not checked the condition of the comb in frames, now would be a good time to replace those frames without brood or honey in the brood chamber if better drawn comb frames are available as replacement.

A fall inspection should find some capped brood in the brood chamber and notice that the queen is reducing egg laying. Yellow bees (Italian race) are known for producing brood later in the season than dark bees (Carniolan races). It is possible to feed liquid sugar syrup mixed 1:2 (1 part water to 2 parts sugar) up until really cold weather sets in. Inside feeders such as top feeders, division board feeders and bucket feeders will provide food as long as bees have access to it on warmer days. The reason for feeding a heavy syrup now is to prevent a moisture build up in the hive. Moisture can condense inside the hive and it creates problems. I am not aware if you have noticed that inner covers are made of wood not plastic. At one time inner covers of plastic were sold but discontinued because moisture collected on the bottom side and dripped down on the bee cluster below – something like rain falling inside the hive. Warm air carries moisture up and out of the bee nest zone thru an upper vent. That is the reason an inner cover is designed with a hole at its center.



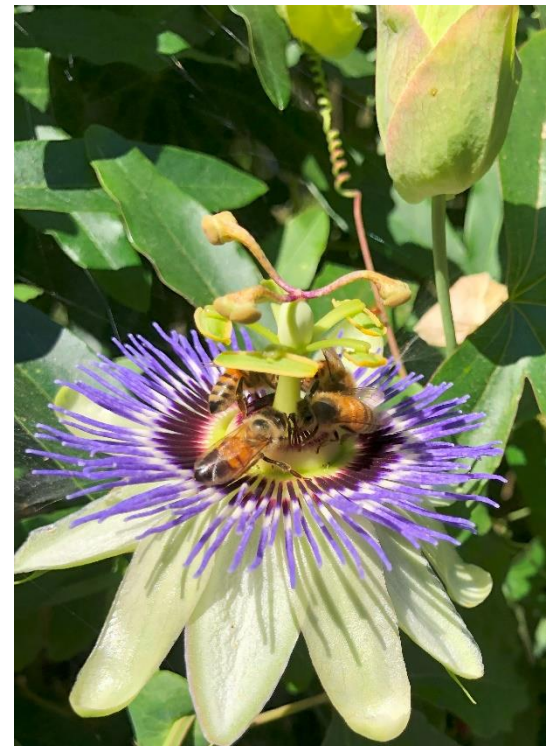
As this photo shows, bees were flying looking for nectar even when the temperatures were in the low 50° F. range. Ray Raynor gave me a start of this passion flower *Passiflora foetida*. The vines have spread on the

fence around my hives. Here it is October 18 and the



temperatures are in the low 50° F range and when I visited my hives this morning to take a picture of the brood nest, I found bees all over these blooms. Not just one bee to a blossom, but numerous bees as shown on this single flower.

The winter cluster nest looked like this in one of the hives. The bees are clearly established in a cluster. However, bees were moving about and some flight activity was present at the entrance. It was not a

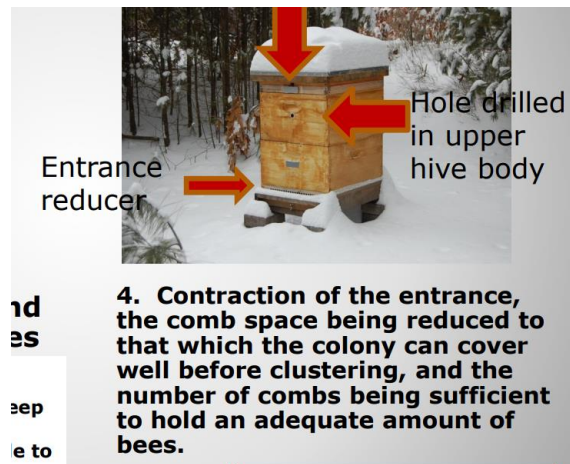


time to pull a frame and check to see if the queen was still laying eggs. My visit I am sure caused this hive some stress, but I know warmer days are coming and a frame by frame inspection will wait until the temperatures get back into the 60° F. range.

Right now, I need to start mixing up a batch of sugar syrup and start feeding. As long as the bees can store the syrup where it is most useful, I will have succeeded hopefully providing each hive with about 25 pounds of sugar each. As it gets colder I heat water to about 160° F and mix 1 part water to 2 parts sugar. This makes for less moisture and reduces the work required by the bees to store it. Without brood to raise, that 25 pounds of sugar should last these bees up into January. Here in North Carolina, I can expect the queen to start laying eggs around Christmas Day.

I have included a power point presentation from past beekeeping days. It still has a lot of information which one can use to get ready for the fall and winter season.

This is just a sample of what you will find when you download it.



• Methods:

- Feed honey in the comb if you have it!
- Feed sugar syrup (2 parts sugar to one part water) while bees can still fly.
- If it is cold – putting liquid into the hive is not a good idea. In cold weather feed dry sugar, fondant, or a sugar candy.