



STAHLMAN

BEEKEEPING NOTES

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Published by Dana Stahlman Raleigh, North Carolina Email: stahlmanapiaries@aol.com
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Anaphylaxis & that Epi-Pen

The most common question asked of me is: “How many times have you been stung!” I used this statement in last weeks newsletter.

Some of you ask questions about how I come up with topics I write about. Last night I went to the Wake County Beekeepers meeting and sure enough I was given much to think about. There is an old saying “You can not teach an old dog new tricks.” I appreciate new information and what is going on with current beekeeping news. I appreciate those of you that stop to say “hi!” and maybe ask a question or invite me to a beekeeping event.

So let me begin by sharing a little about the topic for this week. Wake County Beekeeper’s Association speaker was Maureen Michele Petersen, MD. Her topic was anaphylaxis. This kind of fit in with comments I made last week about new beekeepers. The meeting included all the students signed up for the bee school. The room was packed.

Dr. Petersen talked for well over an hour and half about life-threatening insect allergies. There were tons of questions and answers (very technical in nature). In all my experience, I never was so glued to what a speaker had to say. I can say I am no expert and I lack knowledge on this topic.

I have never taken this subject very seriously. I never ever included this topic when I was helping organize and develop a bee school. In those days we (the bee school committee) did not want to say anything that would scare away new beekeepers.

Thus, after many years of working with bees and listening to various kinds of comments about stings, I walked out of the meeting with a new understanding of “What is a serious reaction to a bee sting compared to anaphylaxis?” I learned quite a bit about Benadryl and Epinephrine (EpiPen).

A few things I can share with you. First, I am not making any suggestion for what one should do! I am not a medical doctor! I will stick with facts:

- No one should handle an EpiPen without knowing how to use it. Yes - there is a right and a wrong way to use it. Read the directions on the label.
- The difference between anaphylaxis and a severe reaction was explained:

- **Anaphylaxis involves at least two (multi-systemic allergic reactions) – Life-threatening symptoms were described and involved a number of body functions and systems.**
- **The list she shared is somewhat long but include some of the following:**
 - **Central nervous system (lightheadedness, loss of consciousness, confusion, headache, anxiety)**
 - **Swelling of the conjunctiva – a thin clear membrane that protects your eye.**
 - **Swelling of lips, tongue and/or throat.**
 - **Fast or slow heart rate – low blood pressure.**
 - **Shortness of breath, wheezes or stridor (A high-pitched, whistling sound most often heard while taking in a breath.**
 - **Pain with swallowing. Also coughing**
 - **Hives, itchiness, flushing (Person's skin, face or body becomes red and hot)**
 - **Gastrointestinal issues such as abdominal pain (cramping), diarrhea, vomiting and loss of bladder control**
- **Then severe reactions –**
 - **Any continuous swelling or pain – she emphasized continuous. Such as a bee sting on the hand that continued to spread but was confined to hand and arm. No other reactions involved such as listed above. She explained it takes two separate reactions to be considered anaphylaxis.**

What I took out of the talk:

- **People (beekeepers included) should take a bee sting seriously!**
- **Action for someone showing signs such as listed under anaphylaxis should be taken seriously and help sought immediately.**
- **It is good to have an epi-pen but it is not the solution to all bee stings. I was surprised to hear about the ineffectiveness of Benadryl! I had always been told that Benadryl was the solution to control reactions to bee stings.**

If one does have serious reactions to stings or think they may have – see your doctor - (Allergist/Immunologist).

I would like to thank the person or group that selected this speaker and topic to start off the bee season. Anyone taking on the hobby of keeping honey bees should know what they are dealing with. After many years of being stung – I have become somewhat negligent about what could happen to anyone visiting my bees. I am going to change that practice. I can remember when Five County Beekeeper's Association required any one entering the club beeyard to sign a waiver so the club could avoid being sued. That would be a good option for beekeepers as well.

Based upon what I heard, if one does have a serious reaction they can get venom immunotherapy (VIT).

Dr. Petersen's talk was worth far more than the cost of my yearly membership. Even a person with allergies to bee stings -- help is available to allow a person to keep and enjoy beekeeping. Her talk reminded me of an incident that happened in Texas in 1994. Briefly the trial court found a beekeeper, a commercial beekeeper and a partner of the commercial beekeeper responsible for

the death from a bee sting a helper received while helping a commercial beekeeper move hives of bees. The jury trial was held in Texas. That jury found that all (the beekeeper who sold the hives being picked up, the commercial beekeeper and a partner) responsible and liable for a helper's death. The jury awarded compensatory damages to appellees (wife and children) in the amount of \$1,591,000.00 and also assessed exemplary damages of \$75,000 against each. The case was appealed and finally settled in 2003.

What really stands out in this case is: The case file which I downloaded reviews the meaning of anaphylaxis which an expert witness testified is not uncommon and considering the factors involved – including whether one party had superior knowledge of the risk or the right to control the actor who caused the harm. The actor in this case the bee. According to an expert witness – “We know it's potential –anaphylaxis – It's potentially a hazard for anyone working with bees.” The appeals court ruled that anaphylactic shock as a result of a bee sting is not rare and found the evidence both factually and legally sufficient to support the jury's verdict.

Gross Negligence played a role in the jury's verdict. “Gross negligence” means more than momentary thoughtlessness, inadvertence, or error of judgment. It means such an entire want of care as to establish that the act or omission in questions was the result of actual conscious indifference to the right, welfare or safety of the person affected by it.”

The good samaritan defense the appeals court ruled did not apply to this case. Appellant was not sued for damages resulting from acts that he performed during the emergency; but rather, he was sued for damages that resulted from those acts he was under a duty to perform but failed to perform.

After years, the Wilhelm v. Flores Case was finally over. The Conclusion, the beekeeper who sold the bees was not held responsible for the \$75,000 – amount for gross negligence. The court affirmed the remainder of the judgement in all other respects. To get a pdf file, download a summary of this case. No.13-98-148-CV Court of Appeals of Texas, Thirteenth District, Corpus Christi – Edinburg Wilhelm v. Flores.

I am not an attorney and I am not acting as one. But I did hear Dr. Petersen say do something. Lay a person down and raise their feet so blood oxygen levels settles in the head instead of the feet. Use the Epi-Pen (one should consider getting permission from a parent for a child). However, calling for Emergency Assistance and getting a person showing signs of “anaphylactic shock” help-- is a good samaritan action. Use the Epi-Pen correctly – don't stab the victim with it. Hold it to their body- follow the directions on the pen.

So much for learning something really important! (Life or death situations)

Future Topics

“What can I do to stop my bees from swarming?” This was a question I was asked at the meeting. A hive check by a beekeeper this week indicates that we need to worry about that topic very soon. Our winters are becoming more spring like. I was reminded about hive management. What does one do with a hive that has no brood? And then I was asked to help a group of students. It was

requested that I talk about various treatment for Varroa mites. Some things were mentioned that made me feel like I missed the bus – words or management techniques. So it is back to acquiring some new information. I do read bee magazines and I own a few new bee books. Yet, new things are happening and to be honest with you, I must keep up with the research going on – it just never stops.

I enjoy the sound made by all those new beekeepers building frames and boxes. It reminds me somewhat of the sound coming from a bee hive. The pure joy of listening to the hum of young and old working together is somewhat like listening to a strong healthy hive of bees.

In up coming articles, I am going to look back at the past just a bit. Of all the bee books published – there are thousands of them – I will be looking for gems of knowledge that I will pass along.

I made two recommendations for bee books last week. I would like to pick out more that I feel should get special recognition. Many of these are still available and some can be found in the used book market (check out ebay).

A book published by the Walter T. Kelley Co. in 2001 is one of the books I frequently visit and get ideas for articles. It was written by James E. Tew who some of you will know from his many years writing articles for Bee Culture Magazine. I have not seen it in used book stores or offered on ebay.com but if a copy is available, it would be a valuable addition to your knowledge of keeping bees. It is written in friendly easy to understand language.

This book covers the early information we had on mites and small hive beetles – limited to that time period. But the Principles of Beekeeping he covers in this book are sound and a little more modern than found in another favorite of mine “50 Years Among the Bees” by C.C. Miller. I often say a beekeeper knows nothing if they haven’t read Miller’s book.

My copy is special. It was signed by Jim with a personal note to me but that is not all. It is also signed by Jim’s OSU technical assistant in the OARDC bee lab, David Heilman.

There is not a single color picture in the book except on the covers. Today bee books are mostly in color – something readers expect.

You will find me giving credit where credit is due in upcoming articles which take a look at principles and management techniques I share with you. I have learned from some of the best over a lifespan that reaches back to the 1940’s. Some things just stay the same and when you have a grandfather, father and uncle telling you what to do, it stays with you. Change is sometimes hard. I am standing on the hill they built.

To all those new beekeepers – some day you will be standing on the hill that your instructors, friends and family build for you.



This book gets straight to the point – 245 pages

“The little honeybee is a tiny, energetic marvel. Raising brood, producing honey and pollinating plants are all in a day’s work. In a worker bee’s entire lifetime of 3—5 weeks, she will produce approximately 1/12 teaspoon of honey.” Quote from book.

And the epilogue -- Jim had this to say.

“Beekeeping is a pathway. It has a beginning but no ending. To the beginning beekeeper, everything is new, even foreign. Like one learning another language, new beekeepers grow in confidence and skills until they are no longer new beekeepers, but they never stop learning – even as they become old beekeepers.”

There are no words better said than this to describe beekeeping.

I recognize Jim and Dave as beacons of light in my life.