



STAHLMAN

BEEKEEPING NOTES

**2024 Vol 6 issue
18**

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. Published 5-4-24

More Bees

New beekeepers are often encouraged to start with two hives of bees. The reason for this is the sound principle that often a colony of bees needs help available from another stronger colony in managed apiaries. However what happens when both colonies do well. One may even swarm and the beekeeper then adds another colony to the apiary.

Almost all bee books include a section about making splits. There are many ways to create a new colony of bees, so many ways that a book could be written about how to do it. In fact, Larry Connor has written a book called Increase Essentials which is available for purchase on line.

I was born into a beekeeping family and making increases was just part of the business of making a living. It was a way to increase the productivity of the business end of beekeeping. But I recently came across a new beekeeper who started two colonies of bees asking me if he could increase them to 10 this year. There are some people with an urge to get more of what they already have. I could use many examples of this. Anyone with a collection of say clocks wants more, it becomes an obsession.

I just wonder if “bee fever” would fit the beekeeper ready to grow his apiary to 10 hives? I own a copy of A.J. Cook’s The Bee-Keeper’s Guide; or, Manual of the Apiary printed in 1881. He lists the reasons for a person to become a beekeeper:

- Recreation
- Pleasure and recreation
- Profits
- Amateur pursuit
- Yields delicious food

He then lists what successful bee-keeping requires:

- Mental effort (The ignorant and unthinking may stumble on success for a time, but sooner or later, failure will set her seal upon their effort.)
- Nothing will take the place of real experience.
- Learn from others
- Bee publications

- Prompt attention to all its varied duties.
- Enthusiasm

Okay, back to that question. Yes, a person can increase the number of hives from 2 to 10. C.C. Miller in his book, Fifty Years Among the Bees, describes how he increased 9 weak colonies to 56 in the year 1899.

The person with knowledge of the biology of colony reproduction can form new colonies without too much trouble. The time to form new colonies is when hives reach the biological time to swarm. It takes time for a queen bee to raise enough bees to make splits. In the case of beginning with two packages of bees, it usually takes three brood cycles (60 days) to reach a point the hive can be successfully split. It takes each new colony time to gain strength and supply themselves with stores for winter. By careful management this beekeeper could add 8 new hives to his apiary. However, time is against this because bees build up strong when plants are in bloom and the nature of bees is to reduce brood production from mid summer on. To be successful, the splits would require successful queen matings, food requirement, pest management, and many other things that could go wrong.

Thus, I had to burst his bubble and share my thought about building these two colonies up so they could survive the winter. Make splits in the spring of the next year as a means of swarm control. He would have time to study and plan for more hives. When I saw him last, he was making splits!

Beekeeping is “dreaming about what one can do and just never finding the time to do it.” I don’t care how many hives one has, I go back in time to a statement made by Charles Butler.

A colony “ripe and full of honey” is worth three or four weak hives.” From The Feminine Monarchie: or The Historie of Bees by Charles Butler. 1607

One last story about a fellow who ordered 100 queens from me about 30 + years ago. He came to my home to pick them up. I had the queens ready for him. At that time they were \$6.00 each. He indicated he needed the queens because he was going into business to pollinate some pumpkins and a farmer was paying him for bees. As he was writing the check for them he made a casual remark to me. “I have built 100 boxes to put them into. How long will it take bees to find them?” I could not believe what I had just heard. I told him to keep his check, I was not going to sell him the queens. This is a true story!

Fortunately, those keeping bees or starting beekeeping have taken a bee school to prepare them to know something about honey bee biology. Those who haven’t are facing a tough road ahead.

I read a lot about keeping bees. Beekeeping literature is getting harder to understand with so many new words being used and techniques explained. As a Master Beekeeper still learning to keep bees, I receive material on a regular basis of what is happening in the beekeeping world.

One alarming new pest is on our radar. *Tropilaelaps* spp. It is an invasive mite that causes severe disease in *Apis mellifera* colonies. The document I have in hand lists the laboratory protocols for detecting these mites. This is like hearing about varroa mites all over again. Any

beekeeper needs to be alert to introduced pests into the U.S. I am trying to determine just how soon we will be dealing with this new pest. Check out this link [Tropilaelaps spp. \(ufl.edu\)](http://Tropilaelaps spp. (ufl.edu))

One thing that keeps me going is questions I get from readers. If you are not familiar with the Demaree System of swarm control, check out the May 2024 issue of the American Bee Journal starting with page 557.

A short description from an internet search:

[The Demaree split is a beekeeping method that splits the brood nest into two, making the colony believe it's small and has enough room to grow, reducing the urge to swarm¹²³. The beekeeper separates the queen \(and flying bees\) from most of the brood \(and nurse bees\) by manipulating the frames and using a queen excluder¹³. The result is a hive with little congestion and lots of room for the queen to lay¹. Importantly, it keeps all the bees within the same hive².](#)

Here is a question I received.

Dana,

I did a Demaree split with one of my hives this spring. I am surprised how well it is doing. However, when I inspected yesterday, I found a supercedure cell with milk brood in it. The queen has a good laying pattern and there are six frames of brood, larva, eggs. However, there was also a bit of drone brood. Finally, some of the frames have not been fully drawn out but she still has room to lay. I could replace those with drawn comb and use the ones I remove in another hive if needed.

I was wondering how I should proceed. I have two deep super boxes and a medium that are packed with nectar. The frames are at a minimum half way capped. There is an additional medium super that they are starting to work. If they supersede the queen, will it impact the capping process. And more important any idea why they may be superseding the queen.

My answer to this question:

First of all, if this cell is in the section of the hive with the queen it is not unusual for bees to supersede the queen perhaps because she has run low on sperm. If only one cell is present -- check all brood frames -- I would just leave it in place. The bees building that cell know what they are doing. It is not uncommon to see two queens in a hive -- the mother queen and her daughter existing for a short time before the mother queen for some reason no longer can be found. This is a good reason to mark a queen. Some beekeepers might be inclined to try to start a new hive with that queen cell. However, if the bees in the hive do not show signs of swarming, that will disrupt the natural order of what honey bees do. I would like to point out that many beekeepers have no idea a hive is replacing it's queen. It is a natural process as is the presence of some drone cells.

This should not disrupt activities in the hive. I am assuming what you describe is supercedure.

It is good that you are checking your bees.