



# **STAHLMAN**

## **BEEKEEPING NOTES**

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I would like to keep my readers posted on weekly beekeeping topics. In April, I was invited by the editor of the American Bee Journal Magazine to write the Basic Beekeeping Column for one year. The instructions were to address problems and issues that new and those with less than 5 years experience have keeping honeybees. Many of you are aware that there are two major beekeeping magazines published in the United States. ABJ's first publication was in 1861. I have written articles for Bee Culture Magazine during the 1990's but working bees full time doesn't give a person much time to prepare an issue month after month and be on schedule.



I have a high regard for both magazines. My first article for ABJ was published in this years July issue. Articles for publication must be submitted two months ahead of printing dates.

I have mentored a number of beekeepers over my many years of keeping bees. My beekeeping experience covers a period from the late 1940's to the present time. I have slept under my truck waiting for the sun to come up to unload a truck full of bees. I have slept on top of my truck load enjoying the heat produced by the bees on a cold day. I have seen and worked angry bees – real angry. Yes, I wore protective gear – I had to. It was not fun but I did it. And I now enjoy just a few hives of bees – I call them my pets. Because I have neighbors, I buy non aggressive resistant queens to produce non aggressive worker bees and produce bees that are mite resistant. I often

wonder what has gone wrong when my queens begin to fail. I do replace them often, and this year I replaced every queen in my apiary. I am now going about the process of reducing hive numbers and selecting only those queens that are productive with large populations to carry colonies thru the winter season. I have also deciding to use no chemicals to treat for mites. My major defense against mites this year has been brood intrusion. All of us are in the same boat – finding bees that survive. Thus, I want to call to your attention some opinions that people I respect have to say about the current bee survival issues facing us as beekeepers.

Let me say that keeping bees is not always rosy.

The number of individuals raising queens has no standard by which to be judged and those selling bee equipment are eager for the new year to begin. Our system is set up for failure. New beekeepers are often victims of the false impression that beekeeping is easy. It is not the beekeeper, it is the system.

I just read an article by Albert Chubak who writes about the "critical honey bee queen issue." My September issue of Bee Culture Magazine has an article by Jim Tew about his thoughts titled "Old Queens and Old Frames." *His statement "The bee journals are replete with advertisement for high quality and high dollar queens."* His comment *"without any science to support my following comment, I can't say that high-dollar and specially bred queens are always more appealing to the colony than lesser bred queens."* I agree with this statement.

Did you know that queens used to be sold at a discount as summer approached? I don't see many queen producers lowering summer prices as was done when I was selling bees as a commercial beekeeper. Local queens are selling for \$35.00 to 40.00 by individuals who have little knowledge of the genetic characteristics of the drones or the queen mother producing the queen being sold. In fact, open breeding invites all drones (as many as 20) to mate with a virgin queen. One queen producer is producing and selling 10,000 queens a week from stock claimed to be resistant to varroa. From my own experience, spending \$45.00 to \$60.00 dollars for those queens is like pulling a handle on a slot machine.

Albert writes: *"There are an incredible number of queens pumped out daily to support the large number of beekeepers and domesticated hives in the U.S. alone. How many haven't been properly mated or kept from laying too long? A drone holds the DNA key. How many queens are inbred by local beekeepers using a special queen with related colonies producing drone stock?"*

*And beekeepers are asking themselves what did I do wrong?*

One important point that Albert makes is our breeding for a specialized mild friendly disease resistant bee is the mistake. Aggressive bees are resistant and thrive. They rob and gather honey stores and thus are better prepared for survival according to him.

I don't like aggressive bees. They are no fun to work. But I have observed, that aggressive bees tend to be resistant and thrive. They are not welcome in most beekeepers apiaries. In fact, I was pleased when those really "BAD \_\_\_\_" hives died out over winter.

**One thing that must be taken into account if you are buying a queen at this time of the year. Most hives have few or no drones.** Queens mated early in the summer will be better mated than queens raised in late summer. The reason, well mated queens are produced best when nectar and pollen sources are available. Developing queen larvae require a lavish supply of royal jelly. The composition of royal jelly is dependent upon a number of factors. One might find a copy of *Queen Rearing and Bee Breeding* to read. Laidlaw and Page list a number of

characteristics required for the queen cell building environment. If these environmental conditions are not present, the queens produced will lack the natural factors required for producing good healthy queens. Things like life span, health, and semen quantity and quality are factors that determine what makes a good queen. This may be a good reason why queens produced early in the year begin to fail by late summer.

Jim Tew had this to say about requeening: *“Requeen regularly as is possible with the best queens available to you. Expect some rejects and failures, but overall and over time, the production and longevity of your total apiary will be improved by the procedure – **just don’t ask for guarantees.**”* From Bee Culture Magazine September 2024 page 91.

To me this is the queen issue. One must discover who to buy queens from and evaluate the results of those queens. *Just because a queen is local or because it is expensive, the question is what is your money buying?*

**Failure could very well be the queen in the nuc or the package of bees purchased in the spring. It could also be the replacement queen bought with the intention of replacing a poor queen.**

As Jim Tew wrote, **JUST DON’T ASK FOR GUARANTEES!**

*“Success is never final and failure is never fatal.”* A quote from America’s Popular Sayings by Gregory Titelman, Cramercy books, New York published in 2000.

# Failure of the queen is always fatal to a colony of honeybees.

Unless the beekeeper steps in to replace her or the bees have time to replace her naturally.

More on this in the next issue. Combining hives and taking losses in the fall.