

2024 Stahlman Beekeeping E-mail Notes Issue #32a

Finally, a good week to work bees. I am evaluating my queens and making decisions on which hives need to be combined with stronger hives. I firmly believe in feeding only those hives worth saving going into the winter. Hives with a poor queen which by the way are pretty easy to spot at this time of year are going to help a stronger colony with the added bee population going into winter. This will also reduce my hive losses later in the season and lessen the cost to feed sugar.

Last year, I reduced my hive numbers down to three. I lost one but made increases this past spring to get to nine hives. I gave one away to a friend that lost bees over the winter, lost another during the summer due to robbing, and now again I am reducing hives to a smaller number. I don't consider the number of hives I own as to my ability to keep bees. I realize that for winter, I want my bees to survive. Even if it is three instead of 7.

Not all queens are equal. I judge each and every queen. I see those that might make it. I use the word might make it as hive that need a lot of help now to build up for winter. Rather than spend a lot of time hoping a hive is going to make it through the winter -- understand full well that they most likely will die anyway -- I use their resources to build hives with outstanding queens. The number of hives I over-winter depends on what a queen has done this summer and fall. I know fully well that the time to make increases and get honey crops depends on good strong queens in my hives in February.

I know that I can take a strong hive in March and count on it to get a honey crop and provide me with several good frames of bees and brood to make up a new hive. In fact, I will share that process in later articles next spring. In the meanwhile, check out C.C. Millers book [50 Years Among the Bees](#) as reading material over the winter. He grew 9 hives to 56 in one year and all 56 were productive hives able to produce honey. To me, honeybees are like rabbits. One just can't build cages for them fast enough.