



STAHLMAN

BEEKEEPING NOTES

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Issue #38 Getting Ready for Winter

I received a phone call from a Pepsi Cola representative just this past week about honeybees attacking their booth at a public event. It seems like from what they explained to me -- they were offering free drinks to the public. But the honeybees were drowning in cups set out for people to enjoy their products. In addition, this is a photo they sent me of tubing and valves used to fill the cups. My advice – stop filling the cups and seal off any leaks. Once the bees found this booth, they would not go away. And they thought, I could help make the bees go away. Sorry, but bees are bees and that is what they do! (The bees did not sting anyone but there was some who were very concerned about the bees behavior.)

They clearly proved to me that they were honeybees! My neighbor also contacted me about honeybees flying around their house. They would see a bee dart from time to time around a work bench where they were building a owl nesting box. I went over to check out the bee situation – they know I have bees. Yes, there were honeybees now an then flying around where they were working. It was not a dangerous situation but they were concerned.



It is that time of the year for honeybees to search for winter stores. Robbing is a big issue in the Raleigh area this year. I still have robbing screens on my bees and I notice that when I try to feed a hive, it is immediately set upon by honeybees. They can't get into the feeders but they try.

There are a number of other beekeepers living near by and I notice it is better to feed at night than during the day. It is not normal to see bees trying to get into a hive near the top cover. This is what happens when a top cover is not sealed against robbing bees or is left off the hive too long.

When food supplies are not available and bees are on the verge of starvation, they will seek any food source containing sugar. Thus, our neighbors will see bee activity especially around pop cans, and any source of sugar like food.

Hive inspections are critical now! **Weak hives by November are hard to save.**

Beekeeping boils down to making sure the bees are close to plants producing nectar and pollen or the beekeeper must feed to support brood production and comb building earlier in the season. Many beekeepers want more hives and make late summer increases. There is a problem if the



bees can not find food in time for winter survival.

It is now time to determine which colonies of bees have a chance for survival. It is not possible to save all hives. Hives

can be combined and prepared for winter survival. There is an old adage about beekeeping that is true today as it was years ago. The Wisdom of L.L. Langstroth is often forgotten in today's world. But in the 1850's he put together some Bee-Keeper's Axioms. Axioms 7, 8, 9 and 10 apply to hive increases or late season wintering.

7th *In districts where **forage is abundant only for a short period**, the largest yield of honey will be secured by a **very moderate increase of stocks**.* (This fits Raleigh N.C. well)

8th ***A moderate increase of colonies** in any one season, will, in the long run, prove to be the easiest, safest, and cheapest mode of managing bees.* (This was a warning about making too many increases.)

9th ***Queenless colonies, unless supplied with a queen, will inevitably dwindle away, or be destroyed by the bee-moth, or by robber-bees.** If you had wax moth damage, it was because the bees could not defend the hive. The queen and colony health are responsible for producing enough worker bees to defend the hive.*

10th ***The formation of new colonies should ordinarily be confined to the season when bees are accumulating honey; and if this, or any other operation must be performed, when forage is scarce, the greatest precautions should be used to prevent robbing.** [And I might add starvation!]*

Many beekeepers want to save as many colonies as possible, even very weak colonies. C.C. Miller wrote in his book, ***50 Years Among the Bees***, that he would combine any hive with less than four frames of bees and brood with a strong hive. Combining two weak hives was according to Richard Bonney, ***Hive Management***, making up a larger weak colony.

I would like to share that C.C. Miller was a successful commercial beekeeper living in Illinois. His goal was to produce honey crops and he had a number of useful methods to increase hive numbers as well as over winter bees. Weak hives in the fall had very little chance of survival.

First they were weak for a reason. He did not have to deal with varroa mites or small hive beetles. The time to make increases is when nectar and pollen are available to bees. His argument was that weak hives just don't have the bee populations to build up quickly and often actually diminish in strength resulting in failure.

Take only strong well fed colonies into winter. The winter season is long (November, December, January and February). A strong colony with a large bee population of young healthy bees, a good productive queen, and well provisioned with winter supplies was money in the bank.



A weak hive going into winter is going to be weaker when spring arrives. Just remember that a queen must lay eggs early in the new year and eggs develop into larvae which must be kept warm 92° F. As bees die they are not replaced and if the colony is unable to produce young bees, the bees might look like this by February.

The bee cluster and the queen had honey stores. However, the bee population to keep the cluster warm was too small. The queen is indicated by this red line.

Weak hives are easy to spot because of low bee populations at this time of the year. They need food if honey stores are not present but they also need a good strong bee

population. The only way to handle a hive like this is to make the best of a bad situation and combine the fall bee population with another hive. The queen is largely responsible for creating the bee population but other things such as mites and disease may be responsible.

From my perspective, feeding weak hives takes a lot of time and effort. Time and effort is better spent by combining worker bees from a weak hive with a strong hive, feeding and treating for varroa. A strong hive can be split in early spring when the cycle of nature is in its favor. Even when I do everything I think will help a colony survive the winter, I know from experience, that hives die. My problem then becomes why did it die? Could it be something I could have prevented?

I would also like to share the success of two of my former mentories -- Sharon Schwinger First place in the picture catagory and Ray Raynor won 3rd place in the dark honey category. Pictures show their prizes.



Look closely at the smoke from Sharon's smoker. Smoke Angel was its title.

Congratulations to both for getting involved in the North Carolina State Fair.