



# STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

## NOTES FOR 2025

2025 Vol. 7  
Issue # 1

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### **This is what I was seeing in Raleigh on New Years Day.**

What a way to begin a New Year. Our temperatures in the Raleigh area have been very mild for the past few days and as I normally do, I check to see how my bees are doing. I reduced my hive numbers late last year down to two strong colonies. Both are alive and have already started rearing brood. Along with various “honey do” things such as putting Christmas decorations away, I am finding this week full of bee stuff to do.

I want to know where this pollen is coming from, I checked food supplies and even though the bees are quite heavy, I am going to start feeding fondant (directly above the brood area). Cold weather – really cold weather is still coming – and food placed above the brood area might just help my bees. I usually expand my hive numbers in early spring and build my bees up to make splits. This is not necessary for all beekeepers. But I have done it for so many years that it is in my blood. I know it is too early to talk about swarming but my swarm control is generally

based on making splits. Western North Carolina beekeepers got hit hard with hurricane Helene and I am thinking that any increases I make will be heading west this spring.

I spoke to Joe Latshaw a few days ago about what is going on in Ohio. Joe and his wife Leah are old friends. He asked me a very interesting question about North Carolina bees. The question was “Have you been seeing any Africanized bees in your area coming from nucs or package bees shipped in from Florida or Georgia?” Come to think of it, I have. I mentor a few new beekeepers for Wake County Beekeepers Association. Three or four years ago, one of the new beekeepers I was assigned to mentor, bought a nuc from a local source. This vendor buys nucs from a southern source (not sure which one) and sells hundreds of nucs each spring in the Raleigh area.

I mentor new beekeepers and they have problems. Thus, when Joe asked me this question, my first thought went to a new beekeeper, Lynn. I mentored her in 2021 or 2022. My memory is a bit foggy on the date, but the visit to her home is not.

When first contacted she shared that she had purchased and installed a nuc into her hive. She mentioned that her bees were mean. From a new beekeeper, I take a comment like that with “a grain of salt”. A few days later, I made my first visit to help her do an inspection of the new colony. Normally, and those who work with me know, I generally work bees without a bee veil. I left my bee veil in my truck with my wife, who likes to visit with new beekeepers to make them feel at ease and kind of like members of our family.

She showed me the hive in a nice new painted box with bees busy flying in and out. I spent a few minutes talking about the hive location and getting an idea of her experience. She had attended the Wake County Bee school and had a pretty good idea of the tasks involved in keeping a hive of bees.

She asked me to help with the hive inspection and handed me her hive tool. By the way, I don't take a smoker or hive tool of my own when I go to visit other beekeeper's bees. I was a former bee inspector in Ohio and one way to spread diseases is with contaminated gloves and hive tools. In fact, I don't like others coming to my bee yard with dirty gloves and a hive tool.

As usual in a first visit to a new beekeepers hive, I demonstrated how to approach the hive and pop the top cover. Suddenly this was not the normal calm me! This hive exploded with bees in my face. I tried to retreat in a respectful way, but I had a swarm of bees following me. My wife, in the truck, saw me coming. She rolled up the windows and would not let me in. She backed the truck down the drive while I dodged in and out of shrubs. Finally, allowed in the truck, I got my bee veil after a number of stings. Well, Lynn, the new beekeeper was right. Her hive was mean.

She mentioned that bees followed her to her house – she owned several acres of land and the bees were located some 200 feet or more from the house. So what does a mentor say to “Lynn” the new beekeeper. Yes, those bees are mean!

Today, Lynn is a good friend. She called before Christmas that she was coming over to our house with a gift. She is still keeping bees and I often ask her to share this story.

You may have a few questions such as “how was this problem resolved?” Or maybe, “What was the Christmas gift”?

**First the Christmas Gift** One of the best smoker fuels is one that burns slowly, is easy to light, and produces a cool smoke. The one I like is actually a bit hard to find.



I am not sure what you might call it, but I have always heard it referred to as “punk wood.” Actually these are the remains of dried pine tree trunks rotted to the core. The wood is of a feathers weight, lights readily, burns long and the smoke has a good smell. She had gathered the punk wood and presented me with a box of it. It was a great gift and I appreciated it so much.

### **That Mean Hive!**

Let me say something about that mean hive. I can do more damage to a mean colony than they can do to me. When ever I need to dress up – put on work boots, make sure my pant cuffs are tucked in, put on a bee jacket with bee proof veil and gloves -- the queen and her bees are in big trouble.

Sorry I don't have pictures to show the outcome, but this nuc had brood in dark comb – not something one sees in good nucs, and a large population of bees. I didn't fool around trying to find the queen. Some may suggest that one find the queen and replace her. But those hive bees are going to be around for some time. If

one wants to wait six to eight weeks trying to save them, what would happen when the neighbor fires up his/her lawn mower.

Thinking back to the days when I shook bees into packages to sell, I took my bee funnel, shook all the bees into a package cage and tossed it and the bees into a burn barrel. The dark brood comb went into the barrel as well. Lynn agreed with this process. I was able to re-populate Lynn's hive with bees from my hives. Another trick I learned working with bees is to take a road flare, light it and set it where the colony was located. Returning bees fly through the flame -- burn off their wings and thus, when I am asked to solve a problem -- this is what happens. No more mean bees.

**But this issue is big.** Many of the bees being sold from areas where Africanized bees exist have some of the African genes in their line.

**The colony that Lynn allowed me to kill, definitely was aggressive. Any drones flying from that colony could mate with locally open mated queens within a two mile range. There is no standard in the United States to measure Africanized genes getting into our bee populations. But the problem is here and many are seeing consequences when they run across “a Hot Hive of Bees.”**

As early as 2011 Tom Seeley was able to find traces of *A.m. scutellata* (African Honey bee) genes in bees gathered in the forest around Ithaca, New York. He did a study on the ancestries of honey bees comparing data collected in the 1970's with bees collected in 2011. He writes: “***This is probably a result of Africanized honey bees – hybrids of African and European races of Apis Mellifera – becoming established in parts of the southern United States in the late 1980's and 1990's. These southern regions – which include the states of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and Texas – have warm climates favorable to Africanized honey bees, and they are where much of the commercial queen production in the United States takes place.***” From “The Lives Of Bees – The Untold Story of the Honey Bee in the Wild, published by Princetown University Press, 2019 page 11.

New beekeepers should be warned about buying bees that are hostile and mean. And if you have a mean hive, consider how Lynn and I took care of her mean bees. **There is no excuse for putting people at risk if you know you have a mean hive.**