

2026 Stahlman Bee Notes

Published by Dana Stahlman

Issue # 19 Vol. 8 Early October "The Last Chance to do something with bees in need of help."

Previous issues are available at www.ccbee.org

October weather has arrived in North Carolina. This year was the most challenging in the many years I have kept bees. It is hard at times to stay optimistic. With less to write about as winter approaches, these notes will be published just once during the months of October, November, and December. I have included a list of things to do for October at the end of this article.

I selected these three replies to share beekeeping is always revolving with new lessons to be learned by all regardless of how many years we have been keeping bees. I have done many things wrong and each year brings on new challenges. Getting up and continuing on in beekeeping is something each individual must deal with regardless of the many challenges we face. Topics come and go. It reminds me that repeating a topic from time to time is important because it just happens. It takes time to learn to ride a bike and falling certainly is part of the learning process.

Frank Chesson wrote: Beekeeping isn't something we do for the money or even the products of the hive. It is simply the challenge of learning and understanding nature, to pass along to the friends and grandkid. "I come very close to giving up because for all the learning in the first four years, I could not explain the queen failures last fall. While I had done what I had learned in the first years, I was ready to quit because I could not explain and did not learn from the November losses. I decided to give it another go when John Pledger of Triad Be Supply suggested the queens may never recovered after the 2025 drought/early dearth." He added more but indicated he has rebuilt with four packages and is now running 5 eight frame colonies and 2 five frame colonies. Will see how it goes...feeding and watching brood now.

I enjoy reading your emails. It gives me motivation to keep on top of things. Wax moths got a few of my hives this year. First year bee keeper. But I'm Not discouraged.

Keep the emails coming.!

Alan King New Hanover County Bee Club

It's not only happening in Raleigh but everywhere in NC. When I was growing up on our road, there were 13 houses and farms and everyone knew their neighbors. Now, we're are down to one full time young farmer and land is being sold left and right for new housing (if you can call them that). I call them lick and stick 'em homes. At the moment, I have feed 250 pounds of sugar water, and expect maybe another 100 pounds to get them heavy enough for winter. That's the most I ever had to feed but the drought is the reason. Might be one of the many reasons new beekeepers quit. They don't expect to feed bees to help them survive. I hear too many times new beekeepers thanking off too much honey and don't provide the sugar to replace it for winter and surprise that the hive didn't make it through winter. I recommend local beekeepers keep at least 60 pounds on hives in winter, and even then recommend to check regularly. Our winters can be like a yo-yo, up and down. This drought has been hard on my bees. The fall flow has been better than expected due to some rain, but still having to feed the bees to prepare for winter. Checked hives yesterday for queens and brood. Started with 31 hives- 3 medium frame Nucs, and combination of Deeps and mediums 8 frames. All looks good except lost a hive due to robbing. Was baling hay last 2 weeks and guess it was robbed then. Did find the dead queen but all the honey was gone. But it happens. **Roger Weisner**

The one item that really got my attention was the statement by Frank Chesson. **“Beekeeping isn’t something we do for the money or even the products of the hive. It is simply the challenge of learning and understanding nature, to pass along to the friends and grandkid.”**

Making money from keeping honey bees is a driving force for some people. I have seen both sides of this “coin.” Beekeeping is hard work. Getting rich keeping honey bees is not very attainable. Those making money often do not consider the time spent on keeping bees, expenses for equipment and upkeep, and other related expenses. **There must be some enjoyment involved in what one does.**

Now for something new:

I was fortunate to attend the **5 County Beekeepers** meeting to see **Dr. Tarpy’s** zoom presentation on “Good Queen/Bad Queens.” Scientists have been dealing with the problem of bee losses for the last 30 years. In the past, products were developed to combat mites, American foulbrood, European foul brood and nosema. The problem has been that some products become ineffective because mites and bacterial diseases developed resistance to these products.

I can go back to bee magazine articles written about good queen stock and bad queen stock. In a March 1940 article on Package Bees—Good and Bad, Clarence Tontz shares the result of an experiment with bees introduced into 100 hives in two separate locations with Italian bees. He found that acceptance by one group was 100% vs. the 2nd group at 90%. He describes the average honey crop for the colonies was 135 pounds. The best hive brought in 155 pounds and the poorest brought in 85 pounds. Much of this could be explained by the difference in forage available to each bee yard. But he explains that some of the bees in the 2nd group were faced with supersedure, less brood and some drone layers (demonstrating their inferiority). In summary, a problem exists for the average beekeeper to judge the quality of the queen from a package of bees. There is nothing new when it comes to the queens that arrive with package bees today. **Some will do well while others fail.** But the research Dr. Tarpy described indicates that something has been happening over the years. Queens no longer live for 5 years as many bee books would say. In studies done by his lab, the average life span of a queen has been reduced downward to maybe 2 years with many failing before the first year. A queen might look good but other things in the colony may prevent her from performing well. I have always used the poor brood indicator to judge queens. Dr. Tarpy pointed out that may not be the case at all. Queens may be affected by viruses that result in poor brood as well as poor mating opportunities. In many cases the bees recognize a poor performing queen and try to replace her. Sperm viability is important and the food used to feed developing queens is being studied. It might be that worker bees—not just the queen herself—play a central role in determining colony outcomes, and why environmental stressors like temperature and pesticides can lead to premature queen failure.

I took a number of important thoughts home with me after this meeting.

- 1) Brood pheromones (brood does release pheromones). Placing a frame of brood in a newly started hive using package bees is important. If I heard it properly, the workers ability to perceive brood pheromone plays an important role in queens acceptance and supersedure.
- 2) The effect of cold and heat on a queen in transit from the breeder to beekeeper does have some impact – maybe a lot of impact on the success of that queen. Temperature stress – over heating or chilling – can reduce sperm viability – but not kill the queen.
- 3) I must now consider environmental factors. My colony of bees is located in an area with a number of complex stress factors.
 - Weather has had an impact this year – drought like conditions.
 - Yards in my area are mowed, sprayed, and treated for insects. There are no wild foraging areas except where one can find power lines.
 - Air quality – I don't give much thought to smoke, pollen counts, wild fires in western N.C. or who knows what is being dumped by industries in the water or air. But I am told it is there when I turn on the TV weather outlooks.
 - New housing and all the dirt in the air created is stress. Once roads, sewage, water lines, telephone and tv cables are buried, nothing is going to return that area to a promising foraging area for bees. Flowering trees in the spring may be good, but what about the season after blooming has ended.
 - Bee completion – too many colonies in the area. Many bee books refer to this as over population of bee hives. Bees can not be fenced in but they are limited to how far they must fly to find food sources. Absconding (bees leaving a hive) could very well be one reason -- a lack of food resources. This is not an uncommon instinct for some races of bees.

Thus, as a beekeeper **I must be aware** of how my bees respond to all these factors. Honey bees do not live in a vacuum. Dr. Tarpy referred to this as something called (a complex, responsive colony system). My take on his talk was this:

1. I need to requeen my hives on a yearly schedule. Maybe a good queen might be okay for the 2nd year. Most queens examined in his study produced viable sperm for less than two years. Most beekeepers are not aware of the age of a queen and the only way to check to see if a queen lives longer is to mark queens.
2. Look for other reasons for queen failure. Do chemical use by neighbors change the perception that worker bees have for their queen? Could street lights cause some disturbance for the worker bees. Sounds and vibrations near-by can provide stress to a colony. Think – road noise near a busy highway ,diesel fuel exhaust and road vibrations.

If that is not enough for you to consider what your worker bees are doing, **your job as a beekeeper is going to require frequent examinations of your hives to look for signs of trouble.**

Every thing within two miles of your colonies will fall into possible environmental

Aa2020Aa!!@@contamination issues for your bees. Mites are easy to examine to see if they

exist in your hive. Environmental contamination is invisible and most is likely another good reason why bees are dying.

Here is a list of things you should check or do for October

- Finish feeding before cold weather sets in.
- Plan for final varroa mite treatments. Remember that the bees emerging in September and October are the winter bees that will carry the colony through the winter season.
- Equalize colonies and remove any unnecessary empty space. Remember that any escaping heat from a winter cluster moves upward and if empty supers are above the brood nest, a lot of heat generated by the bees will be of little use to them during cold weather.
- There may be time to check comb conditions. Make sure stored honey is close to the brood cluster.
- Install entrance reducers. This prevents robbing, mice, and reduces the amount of cold air moving into the hive. Bees do need limited fresh air movement within the hive during the winter season. Bees will also be taking cleansing flights during warmer winter days. Do not block the bees in by closing the entrance entirely.
- Prevent condensation from accumulating above the winter cluster. Bees need some movement of air and an escape for moisture. A open hole in the inner cover provides a way for moisture to be reduced above the winter cluster. If you have a solid inner cover it might be good to drill a few holes to allow moisture to move up and away from the bee cluster.
- Some inner covers have a notch cut into one of the side rails. This allows an upper entrance for bees if the bottom entrance is blocked by dead bees, or snow.
- Wind chill exposes bees to unnecessary stress. A bail of straw or a hive coat will give some protection. Bee books often mention fences placed in bee yards to give wind chill protection. Some beekeepers still use black felt paper to wrap hives for the winter.
- Finally check to make sure any hive stand is stable and the bottom board raised at the back so that water does not collect within the hive. This will protect from unnecessary moisture issues.
- Make any repairs to bee equipment (deteriorated bottom boards, cracks and holes in supers, damaged hive covers). I use heavy bricks to hold my top covers on hives during the cold season. Strong winds can blow covers off hives.
- **Also note any issues that will need to be taken care of in the spring.**

Some not so good news, I talked with a beekeeper producing nuc's. The price is going up this next season. I was told that both package bees and nuc's would likely cost \$10.00 more than this year. If that happens, expect the price of queens to go up as well. If fuel remains high, just expect more expensive bees. To top that off, I was at Home Depot to buy some lumber. The price for lumber is out of this world. It is going to be interesting to see the new 2027 bee catalog prices for equipment.