2026 Stahlman Bee Notes

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"Put a Spring in your steps"

Finally, a bit of warmth for our bees. This bee is deciding - fly or don't fly. I see my bees gathering at the entrance of their hives when the air temperatures are in mid 40 °F. This indicates the cluster within the hive has expanded due to warmer temperatures within the hive. I have seen bees leave a hive well before the air temperatures reach 57° which most literature indicate that bees begin to form a winter cluster. As the air temperatures increase the bee traffic to and from a colony increases dramatically.

This activity within the hive is quite different from bee activity in winter. Bees must conserve energy during the spring due to weather conditions, but so much is happening as winter ends. Bees use far more honey stores now than they did during winter. This is the time to be inspecting colonies often – I have recommended every 9 days but some reduce this to 7 days. It is important to understand the rapid build up of brood occurring at this time of the year which along with a number of things, require a beekeepers attention.

The Basics of Spring:

- **Vigorous queens**. The amount of brood (eggs, larvae, and capped cells) are an indication of a vigorous queen. If the colony is not developing good brood patterns, or has a small bee population – one must consider replacing the queen as soon as possible. Usually, the amount of brood being produced is based on bee populations that are required to feed young larvae and keep brood warm. Sometimes this may require just the addition of more bees. One can buy queen-less packages of bees or

This colony has a very vigorous queen

combine the colony with a stronger colony. When done early in the season, a combined colony can be split – the new split given a new queen and the beekeeper is back with two very vigorous hives that may be quite productive by the time of a honey flow. With bees added to a week colony and the brood area grows; the colony can be made ready for a honey flow. The problem is the queen. A poor queen is not going to produce more bees in any situation. By the time an inattentive beekeeper realizes this, the honey crop is lost.

- **An Abundance of Stores** Weather conditions in spring are frequently unfavorable to requeening or feeding. Feeding bees in the spring depends on a number of factors:

  - To those that neglected their bees in the fall, One can only partially make up for the neglect. If colonies are alive – and "there are always bees that survive human neglect" – an inspection is extremely important.
  - **The best by far are colonies** with surplus honey now in the hive. Stored surplus honey could be placed near the brood or above it where it is more available to the nurse bees tending to larvae. Last fall feeding really pays off now!
  - Feeding bees stimulates bee population growth. My experiences in the South showed that feeding bees was very important. Egg production by a queen is neceessary for population growth.

Walter Rothenbuhler

Vic Thompson, Walter Rothenbuhler's (Famous for his study of resistant bees to AFB) "right-hand man" told me many years ago that it takes one frame of honey and one frame of pollen to produce a frame of bees. Thus, don't over look the need for pollen.

Building bee populations takes more than feeding sugar syrup. Good management requires frames of pollen as well as nectar – pollen patties can be used for those colonies low on pollen stores.

  - Active bees use honey stores up quickly especially during the late winter season when the queen begins to lay eggs. It is at this time that colonies face starvation. A **colony facing starvation** results in a halt to continuous egg laying by the queen and the emergence of young bees. This is why it is important to check colonies. Looking at bees flying from the entrance of a hive is not the way to do an inspection. Frames must be removed and examined – checking especially for honey stores and pollen resources.

- **Another issue with feeding** – Feeding bees too much in early spring will lead to early swarming. In fact, we are seeing swarms in North Carolina and have been seeing them for several weeks. Beekeeping is a balancing act – too little food sets a colony back; too much food encourages bees to build bee populations resulting in swarm management.

A swarm being hived.

  - It is important for a beekeeper to know when the peak of strength is expected by a colony of bees. This might and often comes before the honey flow in the area where bees are located.
  - The time to stop feeding is when honey supers are added. An exception might be for a new colony with undrawn foundation. Feeding stimulates comb building.
- **Comb Management**
  - Those new to keeping bees have little choice but to use new foundation when starting new hives. Established beekeepers with drawn comb in their hives have a great advantage over those without drawn comb.
  - I might add that this might be one good reason to begin keeping bees by buying nucleus hives. Drawn comb does not require the bee resources and lost time required by bees to build new comb.
  - It is important to remember that feeding also encourages bees to draw wax to build comb. This is the time to place frames of foundation to be drawn out. Bees are slow or not interested in building comb after honey flows. have seen bees draw foundation in medium frames within just a few days during a heavy honey flow. Thus, adding honey supers above a strong colony is extremely important to give the colony room to expand.
  - Any colony showing crowding of bees on top bars should **have supers added**. Bees need room to grow!
  - Honey bees tend to begin comb building just above the brood area. Transferring drawn frames from the middle of a super to a sidewall will encourage bees to draw frames of foundation quicker.
- **Use of Queen Excluders**
  - Queen excluders are designed to keep the queen out of honey supers. This is good because brood in honey frames cause comb to get dark over time. Some claim this allows for contamination of the honey.
  - Queen excluders also keep the queen in a section of the hive so she can be located a bit easier.

- **Queen Excluders** are also called "honey excluders." Bees seem to prefer storing honey below the queen excluder – the result is a congested brood nest -- a leading cause of swarming. A shim could be placed above a queen excluder as shown below.

- An **upper entrance** for foraging bees might be something one could try to reduce swarming. An upper entrance allows for less travel for nectar to be carried to cells. If this interest you, Check out using upper entrances as a management tool. I found this listing on an internet check for the Imirie board so. They are very easy to make. Some are available as ¾" rims with an entrance on one side – generally located above the hive entrance.

The **Imirie board** is a crucial piece of equipment in beekeeping, designed to improve brood chamber ventilation and reduce swarming. Here are some key points about the Imirie board:

- **Purpose**: It helps relieve brood chamber congestion by providing additional entrances and exits to honey supers, aiding in honey production. 2
- **Usage**: The shim should only be placed between supers with drawn comb and should not be used in the brood area. 2
- **Benefits**: It enhances airflow, regulates temperature, and supports winter feeding methods, making it essential for maintaining a healthy hive environment. 2
- **Installation**: The shim can be used with both 8-frame and 10-frame hives, and it is available in various sizes. 2
  For more detailed instructions and specifications, you can refer to the sources provided.

A Short Comment on swarming

Much has been written about swarms. There are tons of pages written about stopping bees from swarming.

It has only been in the last 200 years that swarming has been considered something bad. Those wanting to produce honey must manage bees to be strong at the time of a honey flow. They realize that swarms reduce the foraging bee populations and the result is fewer foraging bees left in a hive reduces the amount of honey that can be gathered.

The best way to prevent swarms in my own bee yards has been to make splits of strong colonies early. Once drones in large numbers are seen and left unmanaged, it is almost too late to stop a hive from swarming. Cutting queen cells is not the solution to stopping bees already geared up to swarm. What you can do this week – Build swarm traps. I hope you have a copy of Tom Seeley's book, ***Honeybee Democracy,*** or his book "***The Lives of Bees***. If you get one swarm in a trap, it will easily pay for the purchase of either of these books.

Of all the research on swarms, Seeley has found that bees prefer a nest entrance rather small, faces south, is high off the ground, and opens in the bottom of the nest cavity. In addition, cavity volume and presence of comb in the cavity were important. A swarm trap with a small volume or one with a large volume is not attractive to a swarm of bees. His dream home for honeybees is an interesting read. For a bait hive plan, see page 61 of his book, ***HoneyBee Democracy.***

Also see: **See https://www.wikihow.com/Attract-Bees-to-a-Bee-Box**