

Stahlman beekeeping notes for 2021

Issue # 10 March 7 The arrival of new bees

The issue of how to install a package of bees gets my nod as a controversial topic. Most advanced beekeepers are concerned with the time it takes to install a package and they just do it the quick easy way – Dump the bees from the package directly into the hives after placing the queen cage between two frames close to the feeder (if it has a division board inside feeder). The division board feeder is now sold as a plastic feeder placed in the hive next to an outside wall.

If bees are dumped into a hive it becomes an interesting event with many bees becoming airborne (the area above the hive is full of bees). It may intimidate anyone who has not worked bees previously. This method also promotes drifting if several packages are installed at the same location. One can calm bees in a package if the package is well fed by brushing sugar water on the screen of the package with a brush dipped in the sugar water solution. Or a spray bottle will substitute if filled with a sugar water solution sprayed on the sides of the package but be careful not to get the bees very wet. The pictures below illustrate giving the bees some sugar water.

(By the way this is done 10 to 15 minutes before the package of bees is opened)



The key to getting the bees to stay in a hive after the bees are introduced to the hive is to remove the queen cage from the package cage and place it between frames in the hive as shown below: (Make sure the queen is alive and moving in the queen cage before proceeding)



New beekeepers should wear more protection than shown here. A jacket to cover the arms, and glove to protect the hands.

As one becomes comfortable working bees the gloves can be set aside. More experienced beekeepers will often work in hot weather without much protective gear.

Queen cages vary in design. Some are plastic and others are wood.



If the cage is wood, the cork in the candy end of the cage must be removed to allow the bees to eat the candy behind the cork. When the bees eat thru the candy (usually several days) the bees will be accustomed to the smell of the new queen and accept her as their own.



If the queen cage is not removed from between the frames in the hive after the queen is out, the bees will begin to build comb in the space between the frames and often fill up the space with burr comb.

Usually, one can begin to check to see if the queen has been released in three days. If she hasn't been released, check some frames to see if you can find eggs. Some times a queen from one of the hives shook for your package will be shook along with bees into the cage. If you don't see eggs

then open up the hole in the queen cage with a nail or something to remove the candy

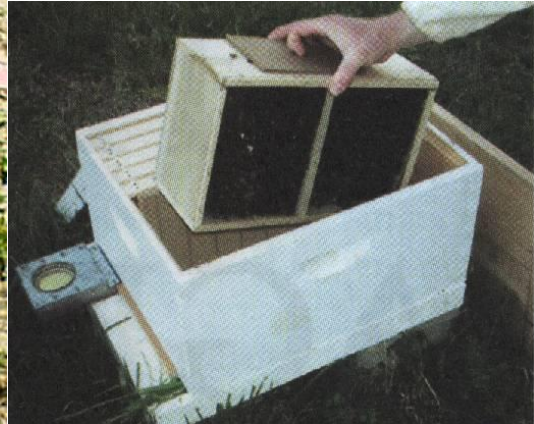
blocking her escape from the cage. I will add taking care of queen bees in cages in next week's notes.

Dumping bees – Don't be timid in shaking them out of the package cage! Gently rock the package so bees fall out the opening onto the top bars of the hive.



After the bees are dumped, the cage (with some bees still in it) is placed on the ground under the entrance to the hive with the open top in the up position. It is quick, simple and usually successful. Note the top feeder on the ground just behind the beekeeper! It will be placed on the hive after most of the bees have gone down into the hive. A little smoke at this time will also move the bees a bit quicker but they will move down into the hive in five to ten minutes if left on their own.

Another method to get bees into a hive!



The easiest way to be comfortable installing a package of bees is to take four frames out of the middle of your hive. Set them aside because they will not be needed until you remove the package of bees that goes into this space.



Notice that one can place the package in the hive body in other positions – this placement is next to a side wall and the queen cage was placed on the top of the cage

But the bees moved out of the package cage to the comb on the frames and the queen as can be seen, still had not been freed by the bees. The bees also started building comb in the space between the package and the frames in the hive. Note also the position of the plastic feeder. It is okay in this position.

It is very important to feed the bees when they are placed in their new home. Many types of feeders are available. In cold weather the bees are unable to get to food placed away from the cluster of bees. It is therefore important to use a feeder available inside the hive close to the cluster of bees – a plastic division board feeder or a feeder placed above the bees. Entrance feeders are okay in warmer regions with temperatures that allow bees to break cluster to gather the sugar syrup near the entrance to the hive.

About feeding: Beekeepers usually use a mix of granulated sugar mixed with water in a ratio of 2 parts water to one part sugar. (Spring feeding)



Have you ever wondered what would happen if the package cage is not removed from the hive?

That is exactly what happened in this hive. The bees built comb above, down into the cage, and around it. This is a real mess to straighten up.

The best time to remove the cage is just as soon as the bees are out of it. If installed one day, the bees should be out of it the next day.

Regardless of the method used, it is important that a beekeeper realize this is a critical time in the life of this colony.

Normal progress is measured in the ability of the queen to begin laying eggs. In the event that a queen does not immediately begin egg laying, the new hive is in trouble!

More on that next week!

A quick review on feeding bees.



Perhaps the worst way to feed bees is by open feeding. It may help in an emergency if used for a short period of time. This happens to be a bucket with some honey in the bottom of the bucket.

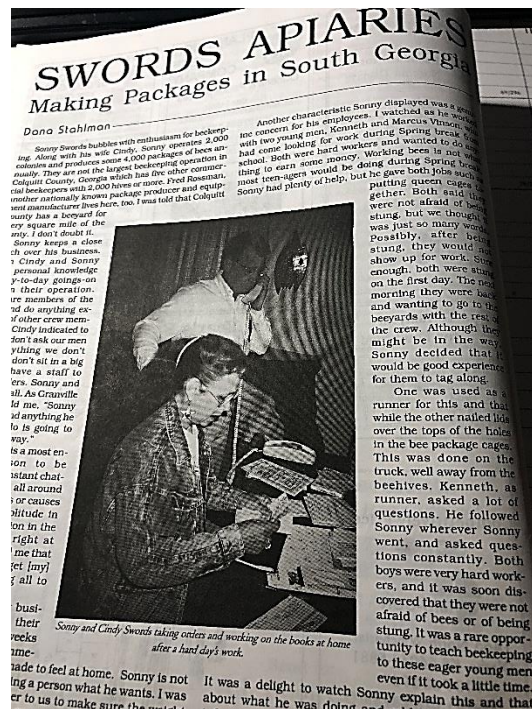
It promotes robbing and it feeds all comers – It will attract bees far and wide. If you have neighbors with bees, guess what! Their bees are being fed as well.

Many commercial beekeepers feed dry sugar in open containers in bee yards. I had one experience with open feeding in Georgia many years back. I was fortunate to work with a large commercial beekeeper who had a deal to buy candy canes by the box full from a company making candy

canes. Red and green and other colors as well. They were broken rejects placed in boxes on pallets to be gotten rid of.

Candy canes were dumped in 50-gallon drums with open tops. Imagine 200 to 300 hives in one location along a swamp. Rain would soften the sugar in those canes, wrappers would float to the surface and sticks would be placed in each barrel for the bees to climb up and out of the barrel. I regret that I did not take a photo of the set up but I can say the bees were busy gathering sugar. There were several thousand queen mating nucs in the area as well.

No matter how much experience in beekeeping one has there is always something more to learn!



Feeding bees is an essential part of raising honey bees.

Without food any animal will die. Honey bees in an area with low density of colony populations can usually survive from year to year without feeding. However, placing more colonies in an area places each colony with what economist would call diminished returns.

One of the biggest changes in beekeeping I have seen over my life span is the loss of food habitat for honey bees.

If you are starting beekeeping, you can easily find out how much competition for food your hive or hives will have. On a warm day before any bees are put into hives on your apiary site -- set out a small

bowl with a small batch of sugar (maybe a ½ cup – add a little honey to it and just a little water) sit back and wait. All it will take is one bee to find it!