

# STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

## NOTES FOR 2023

### Issue # 15 April 15 , 2023 Early Honey Flows

As I write this article, I am well aware that honey flows vary from region to region. Many beekeepers must depend on honey producing plants grown near their hives. Sideline and commercial beekeepers have the advantage of moving hives to areas known for certain crops.

The term “location” has everything to do with this one aspect of keeping bees. Other factors to consider are weather conditions such as frost, wind, rain or temperature. But perhaps the most important of all is bee populations.

#### Bee Management for a honey flow:

- In order for a hive of bees to gather a good honey crop, check out the blue box to the right.
- The regularity of honey flows from year to year are unpredictable.
- Preparation for a honey flow must begin early in the spring.
  - It starts with getting bees strong enough to gather surplus honey. One can combine weak hives to make a hive stronger. One can requeen hives in the fall so all hives have young productive queens. The goal is to make hives stronger rather than weaker.
  - Feeding hives to build bee populations may be required.
  - All equipment – extra honey supers should be ready when required.
  - Having some knowledge about past honey flows is helpful.
  - Inspect hives prior to a honey flow – A good brood pattern is a guide that a hive is ready prior to the honey flow. Swarm management is very important – swarms reduce the foraging population in a hive.
  - A hive just started as many beekeepers do in the spring will be hard at work building foundation, growing the bee population and by the time they are well established the honey flow will be over.

### IMPORTANT POINTS

The success of gathering honey depends on the abundance of honey-secreting plants in the vicinity of the apiary.

Most nectar and pollen from early flowering plants are valuable for feeding brood making it possible for bees to gather surplus honey later in the season.

There are over 300 honey crops recognized in the U.S. Most honey gathered is a mixture from various sources of flowering plants.

#### Honey Getting Management:

- 1) Strong Hives
- 2) Young bees do not collect pollen and nectar!
- 3) A hive must be healthy.
- 4) A hive must be located in an area with nectar producing plants.
- 5) A hive must be managed to produce surplus honey.
- 6) Weather conditions must be good for bee foraging flights.

### Signs to look for:

- Bees returning from foraging flights in great numbers carry pollen.
- The appearance of white new wax. Foundation is being drawn.
- The brood nest becomes congested.
- Comb being filled with fresh nectar – most uncapped.
- Hive temperatures going up.

### Things to do:

- Place supers above the brood nest.
- Provide ventilation – summer inner cover screens or a small gap between the top super and the inner cover – an 8 penny nail works well.
- Do not medicate during the honey flow – In fact, complete all medication several weeks before adding supers.
- Do not feed sugar syrup – it will end up being stored with the new honey crop.
- Make a decision on using or not using a queen excluder. This is a management issue that needs to be made early before adding supers.
- Do not inspect the brood chamber while the honey flow is ongoing. Any major management of the hive needs to be done before the honey flow. Opening the hive to check on the progress of the honey flow should be brief.
- Add additional supers as needed. Do not pile on supers. The bees will store honey up the middle frames and ignore the frames close to the sides.

Ripe honey is the goal. During the honey flow the beekeeper must decide how to harvest the crop.



This is a super of capped honey.

Normally a deep super can hold 60 pounds of honey.

A medium super can hold 40 pounds of honey.

A shallow super can hold 30 pounds of honey.

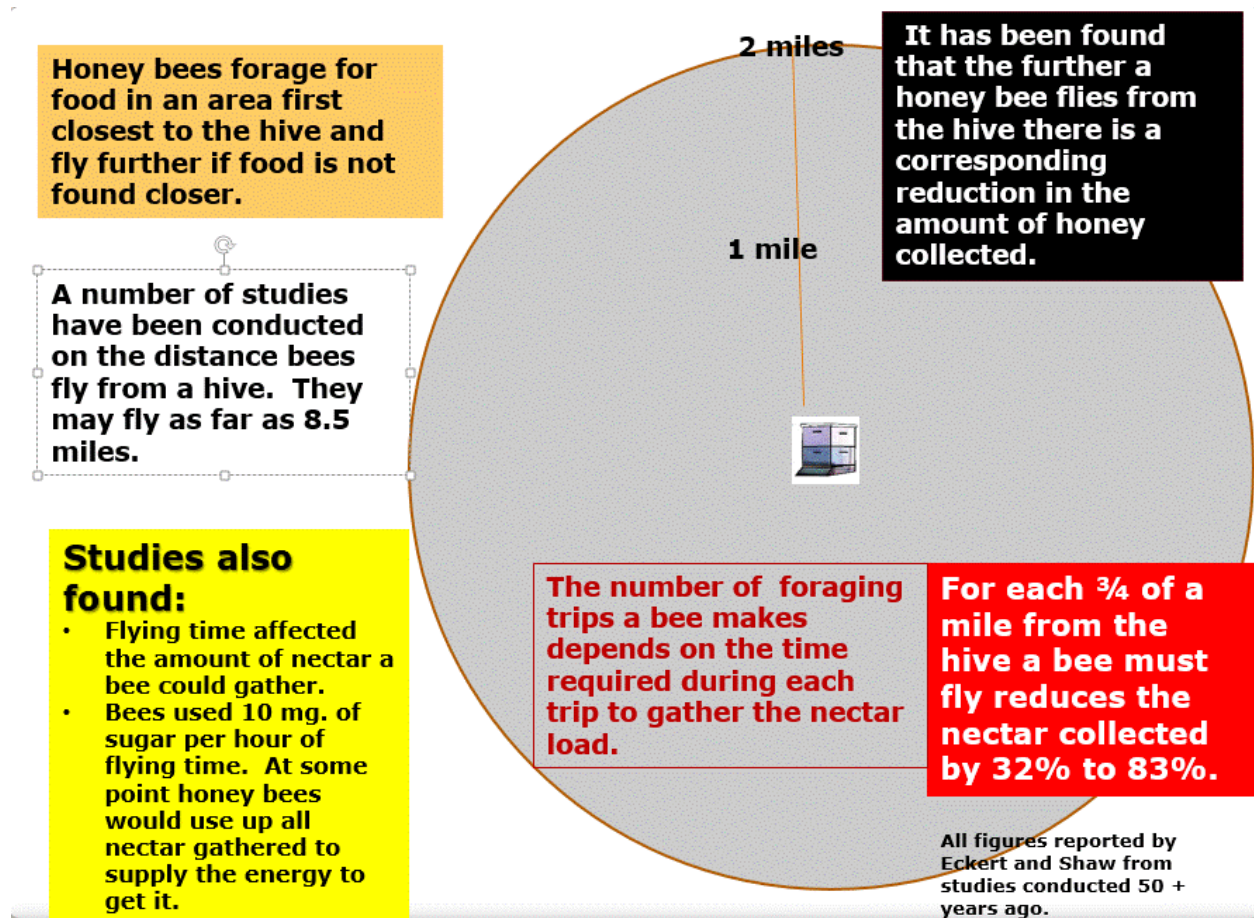
A super of honey can be very heavy

to lift. This is a good reason to use medium supers for honey and deep supers for brood. 8 frame honey supers are easier to lift than 10 frame honey supers.

### Honey bee foraging areas: Honey sources

Google Earth can give one a pretty good idea about land management and how the land is being used. Housing developments are a major problem for bee foraging possibilities. Parks, rivers, power lines and open areas provide more foraging activity than roof tops, manicured lawns, roads without weeds growing in the easement zone, and high lawn weed control. Spring trees seen in many communities add a lot of nectar and pollen sources. Two great honey sources such as dandelion and clover are indicators that bees will find a number of other weed/wild flower sources that are good for all pollinators.

The diagram below may help indicate the nature of resources available to your bees.



### Some honey gathering issues:

Beekeepers do not control what is grown, what is sprayed, new construction, or changes in land use management. What is -- may change quickly on the decisions that others make.

- A hive of bees needs a continuous supply of nectar and pollen.
- How many bee hives will the site support?
- To get liquid honey requires that honey be removed from frames. This is best done shortly after the honey has been taken from the bees. Warm honey flows much better than cold honey.
- A big issue is having equipment ready in time for the bees to store honey.

One must also plan for harvesting the honey crop. Most honey produced today is liquid honey removed from frames of capped honey.



### Extractors spin the honey from the comb

A small hand operated extractor will do a fine job of removing the honey in a comb. However, extractors come in many sizes including very large ones. All are operated using the same principal [centrifugal] force.

Honey directly from an extractor will have a number of [things] mixed with the honey - ie. Bee legs, wax particles, parts of wood etc.



### Liquid honey displays well

When honey is bottled and offered for sale, it should be clear and free of all debris that comes out of the extractor.

Anyone with honey can sell it. Usually new beekeepers will share with the family and give gifts.



A single bee produces 1/12<sup>th</sup> of a teaspoon full of the honey in a jar. It takes a hive to produce honey and it took time and energy you put into helping the bees produce it. Don't waste it!

The National Honey Board mentions 300 different honey sources. Beekeepers can see color and taste a honey sample. Even wild flower honey color and taste will vary from region to region. Spring honey is often lighter in color than fall collected honey.

Colors range from water white to light amber, amber, dark amber, and dark. Often dark colors if held up to a light will indicate a red tint. All of these are used in honey judging – yes, county fairs, bee organizations, and honey conventions hold honey shows. They are looking not only at the color of honey, but the moisture content, presentation, and particles in the honey being judged.

Local honey has great value. It sells at a higher price than grocery stores because it is produced locally with honey unique to the area. It is not highly filtered and heated as is honey sold in stores. And – It is not blended with cheap honey from foreign sources.

Your bees producing your own honey make this a lasting good feeling. I would suggest you keep small sample bottles of honey produced from one year to the next. Also keep a small bottle of honey that you see varying in color and taste. This is something like keeping your first dollar bill (framed) as many businesses do.

I know a friend that collected blue honey one year. It was delicious and he sold all he had. He regretted not saving any for himself for years after that. Her never got blue honey again. I know of beekeepers who had red honey and some other colors as well.

Beekeepers sometimes find various colors in honey such as red, blue, yellow and purple. In many cases this may be the result of someone (open feeding bees.) Open feeding - feeds all the bees in the neighborhood. It might be a case of someone buying a tote of broken candy canes, dumping the broken candy into a barrel and allowing bees to gather the sugar and dyes for food. Bees, yellow jackets and hornets will visit the open source of candy cane food and in the case of honeybees return to their hive and store it as they do nectar.

I am including a publication put out by the National Honey Board that covers the topic of "Sensory Attributes of Honey. I found the information very interesting. It covers the floral characteristics of a number of popular varieties. This is one way The National Honey Board promotes honey in the U.S.