

STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

NOTES FOR 2023

Issue # 40 October 21, 2023 Fall is not the time to buy honeybees! Winter is on its way!



It is certainly time to begin to learn what is needed by a person who wants to keep bees. I have heard new beekeepers say something like “It is like drinking from a fire hose!”

Learning about honey bees never stops. Experience is gained by failing! There is not much luck in keeping honeybees. This is one of my favorite bee pictures.

It brings back memories of a tree company that delivered a tree trunk to me with live bees in it. This was taken sometime in the 1990’s and people were thinking even then “about saving the bees.”

This colony did survive the winter without any help from me. However some of my own managed bees died!

One fact about beekeeping: “It is not how many colonies of bees you have going into winter, it is how many do you have when spring arrives!”

While the sun shines and rain is still rain, get all those things done that need to be done to save your bees.

Some colonies will survive without you. Many will not!

We are now approaching the winter season. I have a bee talk coming up in early November called “Fall Management.” It is a bit late to talk about fall management but here in the South, fall management extends well into the winter season. If you live in the North, you know that frost comes early. Bees do not fly in cold windy weather conditions.

Thus, the next few newsletters will cover a range of topics covering both fall and winter management.

IMPORTANT POINTS

Bee Schools are a popular way to learn beekeeping!

Many local clubs train new beekeepers each year . However success in keeping bees goes beyond a bee school.

Learning beekeeping on your own leads to learning by failure – lots of it. In fact, without training, one picks up many bad habits.

Even a short workshop of 4 or 5 sessions is not enough to provide a person with enough knowledge to keep bees successfully.

Many beekeepers are not prepared for issues that often arise:

- **Distance from human activity:** Established hives must be located as far as possible from any areas with possible human activity such as roads, pathways, sidewalks, and right of ways.
- It’s important to note that beekeeping laws and regulations can vary by locality, so it is essential to understand what the rules are where you live and operate.
- More items on this next week.



Once summer is over – the bee population begins to decline rapidly. If good management is ignored during the summer season-- by the time September/October arrive, any action to save a hive of bees is too late other than feeding the hive that does not have winter stores to survive●



The blue arrow on this population chart is where we are now. Bee populations decrease naturally as food reserves begin to fail. This is not the time to buy a hive of bees – it runs the risk of dying during the winter season. The cost spent to treat and feed it may be more than the price of bees in the spring. Disease is also another reason beekeepers without experience should pass on hives for sale at this time of the year.

There are several items that must be addressed by beekeepers as winter approaches!

- Does the colony have a queen? If there is no brood in a hive at this time – A hive may have a queen that has shut-down egg laying. It is one of the most difficult issues any beekeeper may face.
 - A frame with some young brood (eggs or larva) can be used to determine this question. Queen-less bees will try to build emergency queen cells. If they do try to build queen cells it should indicate that the hive is queen-less.
 - Queens are hard to find in a well populated colony. Marking queens help a beekeeper see the queen. If no queen is observed a second inspection is required a few days later. This gives the beekeeper time to find a replacement queen if one is needed.
 - If one sees a lot of drones and maybe a few queen cells on frames in the hive where brood was raised, the possibility exist that they raised a virgin queen that is not yet laying. A hive in this condition is at great risk of failure because many of the bees left in the hive will die due to the lack of time for the new queen to generate enough brood and bees to replace the old bee population.
 - Or the beekeeper must make a decision to combine the hive with another hive. This is a good choice because the bees in the queen-less hive added to

another hive helps with the needed population for keeping winter clusters large to retain the heat generated by bees around any brood still existing or that may result later.

- Or, the most difficult issue – just let the hive alone and see what happens! If the hive has a good population of bees it seems a waste to do this. Many beekeepers have two or more hives. The beekeeper with only one hive is at a great disadvantage.

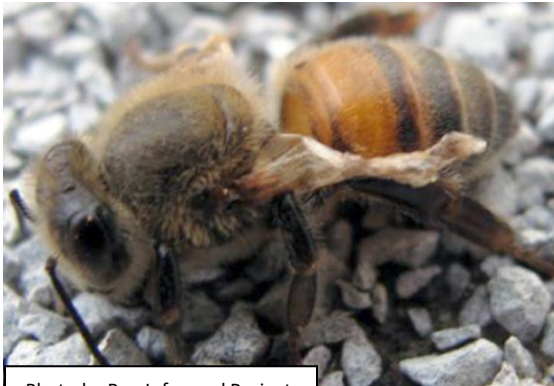


Photo by Bee Informed Project

- **Mite count and health of the hive**

There is no excuse for not taking mite counts and treating hives when needed. A majority of hives that go untreated for Varroa mites will die. Beekeepers that do not follow up on mite counts are “bee havers!” At this time of the year Varroa mites far exceed summer levels. The number of mites per bee have reached a death hold on a colony if one observes

honeybees with deformed wings. Viruses are spread by Varroa – another reason not to combine a diseased hive with another. *A colony weakened by Varroa should not be combined with another hive of bees!*

- **Feeding hives low on honey stores:**
 - Honeybees need food to live. They do not hibernate during the winter season!
 - Feeding is a very important aspect of keeping honeybees alive – a hive most experts suggest must have 60 pounds of reserves to survive. This is a big topic and I will cover it in some detail with the next issue.

There is an impression among many beekeepers that winter protection should solve wintering problems. The problem often is the poor condition of colonies before the winter season begins.

I have had to tell a few beekeepers that their hives have no chance to make it thru winter. No amount of food, no new queen, or any action taken now can save the colony. The loss is due to some defect – usually poor management – during late summer. Colonies need to be inspected on a regular basis – especially leading to the fall season. Anything that goes wrong in the fall cannot be easily corrected except for feeding a hive short of winter food. Some may argue that Oxalic acid treatment for Varroa will kill the Varroa mites but if a hive is so weak from Varroa earlier, treatment during winter is almost too late.

- Winter protection will not bring a colony thru the winter if the colony is not in its normal healthy condition when winter begins. However, a beekeeper can do a number of things to help colonies survive – especially when weather conditions are harsh.
 - The four factors that a beekeeper can control:
 - Strong colonies of vigorous bees
 - Ample supply of food
 - Insect pest management
 - Protection that is adequate for the most severe winter conditions a hive/ colony may face. This will vary from region to region.
- Most hobby beekeepers use what is called “outdoor wintering.” In the past if you read old bee journals, other methods were used such as: putting hives in cellars, putting bees in buildings, and in some instances (building cases set outside). Commercial beekeepers today store hives in large buildings built to maintain temperatures or they move bees south.

Outdoor wintering:

I like reading old books on beekeeping and how practical some of their thinking was:

From A.I. Root -- To illustrate a point about Ohio wintering, he wrote “Two people on a cold winter’s night require less bed clothing than one person would in the same bed.”



Most commercial beekeepers use pallets. Four to six hives spaced next to each other. Placing four hives in a protective box surely would serve the same purpose. One does not need a lot of insulation to keep a hive warm. In fact, warm conditions inside a hive during a period of cold is not good for bees. More about the winter cluster next week.

I am sorry I do not have a picture of bees on the ground outside an observation hive that I witnessed at a

popular nature center. The observation hive had an entrance in an outside wall. The observation hive was in a warm building – at least warm enough to be comfortable for people. Bees were leaving the observation hive to fly outside. As soon as they hit the cold outside air, they dropped to the ground. Before long the ground was covered with bees. The entrance was closed off after people entering and leaving the building brought the issue to

the attention of the people inside. A few of the bees were brought back into the warm building by individuals thinking the bees were dead.

Soon, the nature center had bees flying around light fixtures which created another problem. I was called to fix the problem. What they thought was a lot of bees turned out to be less than ten. Those ten bees revived themselves from the shock to cold air and seemed to come back to life. But the lesson simply reminded me of a story in A.I. Root's autobiography about building a building to hold bees through the winter. He shared the story as one of the biggest mistake he ever made.

I will be following up with topics on fall and winter beekeeping in up-coming issues. I am looking forward to visiting a North Carolina beekeeper in early November. I will share pictures and comments he makes especially concerning wintering and caring for bees in the coastal region of North Carolina. Keep in mind that North Carolina has three distinctive beekeeping regions. I am still learning a lot about keeping bees in North Carolina.

I have visited but not kept bees in the Yukon Territories of Canada. They have bees survive the harsh long winter that includes temperatures at -40 ° to -50 °F. If one thinks winter is hard here - think what one has to do in the Yukon Territories of Canada to over winter bees. I had a chance to speak on a radio station in Dawson City. Believe me, I know nothing about beekeeping there. Fortunately they were very kind to me. They talked about burying bee hives as a survival technique.