

STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

NOTES FOR 2023

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NOTES WILL BE SENT
OUT TWO TIMES A
MONTH DURING THE
WINTER SEASON

A true Backyard Apiary I visited the home of Greg Wolgemuth in Northeastern North Carolina prior to speaking at the Wilson County Beekeepers group. Greg is very active in beekeeping. I have always known that many beekeepers are driven by individual thoughts and the term “Beekeeper” really doesn’t do justice to the how, what, and when of their experiences.

Every one of us is unique in one way or other. I have a new appreciation of who Greg is and how he keeps bees. I am still learning about beekeeping.



I have thought about how to write this article over several weeks. What you see here is Greg standing in front of 38 hives of bees.

There is much more to this apiary than just some rows of bee hives. Greg shared with me that he started beekeeping by taking honey and comb out of large mature trees. At that time old growth trees were plentiful.

As those trees were cut, the nesting opportunities for bees declined because tree farms are now planted in rows of

trees and harvested for wood long before they can grow old and develop the cavities that old growth trees have. We call that progress!

Then he gave me a tour of his apiary. The sounds coming from this apiary were beyond anything I have ever witnessed. I expected buzzing. First to catch my attention was barking dogs – lots of them. Greg is also a hunter. Then I heard a rooster crowing! Greg keeps chickens. As I approached the working shop in his beeyard, I saw rabbits running free. Greg had my full attention at that point.

Beekeeping has its own unique set of terminology and vocabulary/lingo.

Research is adding words to the beekeeping vocabulary continuously.

Thus there are things that one needs to be careful with or events one needs to watch out for.

One of the longest and earliest bee meetings in 2024 is the ABF (American Beekeeping Conference and Trade Show in New Orleans, La. Starting January 10th.

And another regional meeting is held January 4- 6 in Sevierville Convention Center in Sevierville, Tenn. It is called Hive Life Beekeeping Conference.

From what I heard from last years meeting, it is an outstanding place to get the latest on what is happening in the beekeeping world.

And don’t forget to renew memberships in your own local beekeeping organizations.

A great Christmas gift idea:

A years subscription to either American Bee Journal or Bee Culture Magazine or both.

I have only seen one other beeyard in my lifetime that had hives set on post above the ground. I never considered a fixed bee stand in my own beeyard because I move bees from place to place.

But upon examination, these hive stands were sturdy and well built. And I know that hives raised in the air are more natural than hives resting on or near the ground.

And then there were rabbits. Lots of them. The beeyard is enclosed by a fence buried down into



the ground to prevent the range grown rabbits from leaving. These rabbits shelter under the hives during cold weather, according to Greg. They also live under his out buildings and natural holes in the ground.

There is so much going on in this apiary at all times. Anything falling from the bottom boards from these hives will be devoured almost immediately. The rabbits eat the grass and weeds. No mowing required. The chickens eat dead bees, small hive beetles, and even wax worms. I saw no evidence of ants.

The apiary by all accounts could easily fit into the 1880 bee articles about the advantages of keeping chickens in the bee yard.

Greg still has a regular day job and still has time to manage all of this. He shared his several specialized buildings – honey bottling room, super storage area, workshop, and a room with freezers for saving honey and preventing wax moths.

Then he shared his secret (it's not really a secret) for keeping his bees alive. Frequent treatment for Varroa mites and raising good queens. Because we are in the winter season, he uses oxalic acid to treat all hives when brood is for the most part absent.

A few more photos and then I will let Greg in his own words answer a question I put to him.



Greg bottling his honey – he lives in an area where the honey flow is over early in the year. He bottles and sells his own honey.

The crop this year was from Tulip Poplar and Cotton. Both are bottled separately and sold not as wildflower but by the source.

Treating with Oxalic acid. Greg has a hole drilled into each hive. He uses only solid bottom boards. The steps:



Above putting on gloves and a respirator for working with Oxalic acid.



He closes off all openings to the hive.



He inserts the tube from his vaporizer into a hole just above the bottom board and the acid is vaporized.

By the way, Oxalic acid can safely be used when little brood is available during the fall/winter season. I have seen this vaporizer listed for sale and it is expensive.

It is battery powered and in a few minutes the job is done. Remove the vaporizer and open the entrances (Greg uses both a bottom board entrance and an upper entrance on all his hives).

This is why the use of gloves, mask, and protective clothing is needed when this device is used!

What is it?



INSTANTVAP 18V

\$495.00



Removing the vaporizer from the hive after a few minutes.

Check out this vaporizer at www.lorobbees.com. With four hives, I find the price way out of my range. There are other less expensive ways to use oxalic acid to treat for Varroa mites. But if you have a number of hives, I can see this as an answer to saving time and something that does a good job according to Greg.

I ask beekeepers often what they consider important factors for successful beekeeping.

“You had asked me for a few thoughts about beekeeping, following are some fundamental beliefs I have come to rely on.”

***Beekeeping is Extremely Local.**

The beekeeper must understand what the current and long-term environmental conditions are within his/her own colonies 1 to 3-mile foraging range.

A knowledgeable local speaker stated in a local bee club meeting there was never a need to feed protein substitutes in our area of NC, he lives about 20 miles south from my bee yard, but only a few weeks before after an 8 to 10-week period of zero rainfall at my bee yard, I went thru 35 hives without finding a single pollen cell.

During that same period, a farmer/beekeeper friend of mine that lives about 20 miles east of my bee yard was having to push trucks out of the mud to harvest crops.

I also hear beekeepers telling other beekeepers to apply ApiBioxal, (Oxalic Acid), treatments during the period from around Thanksgiving to Christmas because that's when colonies in "**this area**" have low to no brood conditions. That is absolutely not the case at my bee yard, nor is it for many other yards of good beekeepers and club apiaries I visit. Most of my colonies are broodless or close to it around the first 2 weeks of November. You have to actually look at your frames to determine when low to no brood occurs at your bee yard. It's extremely local. Correct application time of ApiBioxal is one of the most critical management aspects of my operation in my opinion.

***To be successful a beekeeper must understand basic honey bee biology and normal seasonal colony cycles.**

***Unfortunately, Varroa Mite Control is no longer a once-a-year treatment, it requires a constant rotation of properly applied control techniques.**

I apply ApiBioxal, Formic Pro, Apiguard, & Apivar at appropriate times during the year while also using drone brood removal and culling of heavily infested colonies.

***Queen genetics: It's likely more beneficial to have multiple genetic lines with different traits in the apiary as opposed to single lines of one dominate trait.**

Get in on or organize club purchases where a block of queens is ordered from a particular supplier and several members share in the cost. Some queen lines are only available by ordering 20 or more queens, and this is a great way to get away from only having access to the local bee supply stores one genetic line. I'm not saying those lines are necessarily inferior, just that there is little to no genetic diversity there. I buy queens from the local bee supply store regularly and encourage all beekeepers to do the same. When a queen is needed, there is no substitute by mail that can beat being able to drive a few miles and get one immediately.

“Thanks for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts, and thanks again for an enjoyable visit and presentation to our club.”

Greg