

STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

NOTES FOR 2023

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Feeding bees & some notes on what it means to get in over your head!

During my commercial bee days, I kept diaries of daily activities. On March 11, 1994 I wrote “Ever felt like trying to move a lake with a teaspoon?” Those were days when I drove to Georgia to keep bees and when I could spend a few days in Ohio, I would check on bee yards to see if the bees were alive and which needed feeding.

The topic of feeding bees can be made simple – Bees die without food!

Many hives die of starvation during February and March. Records of hives I visited when I was home from Georgia gave me the following figures:

Doran yard #1	1 hive alive	3 dead
Dorna yard #2	2 hives alive	14 dead
Doran yard #3	11 hives alive	3 dead
Voryes yard #1	22 hives alive	2 dead
Voryes yard #2	20 hives alive	6 dead
Alexandia yard	20 hives alive	4 dead
Total hives alive	76	Dead 32

These were strong hives that I did not take to Georgia for the winter of 1993-94. I thought all was okay.

Two bee yards were missed when I did my feeding in the fall of 1993. The results clearly shows the success of fall feeding.

Some hives fail during the winter season even if one has fed them in

the fall. Bees in a hive fail for various reasons: Poor queens, mites, and bad management.

There were two times of the year when I had to feed bees.

- In the fall to get bees ready for the winter season.
- In the spring when honey stores were nearly exhausted.

A normal feral (wild) colony of bees doesn't get this kind of help! By nature honey bees store honey they gather in the area around brood. As populations grow they build comb downward for the queen bee to continue raising brood. Thus, the amount of honey in a wild nest is quite large – ask anyone who has tried to remove a wild nest from a house, tree or other nesting place.

A hive of bees is usually managed to get a honey crop. When honey is taken from a managed hive it is assumed that enough honey will be left for the

IMPORTANT POINTS

Beekkeeping is a funny game.

What is one to do or believe when someone gives you advice about keeping bees?

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New beekeepers tend to believe what they are told.

Old beekeepers are pretty well fixed on methods they have used with success over and over again.

“Learning beekeeping by the trial and error method is one way to learn, even though the tuition may come at a high cost.”

Quote from M.J. Deyll editor of Gleanings in Bee Culture 1947

Ads for bees for sale are popping up on my marketplace account with Facebook.

If you are looking for beekeeping equipment, check marketplace out. You may find a local person selling beekeeping equipment at a reasonable price. Or if you have something to sell – list it.

bees. Often the bees are left with little, the beekeeper thinking that the bees will find a fall honey crop to replace what was taken.

The history of bee management is filled with feeding methods. A look at any bee supply catalog will provide the reader with many choices of equipment used to feed bees.



Many commercial beekeepers use what is called a division board feeder. It replaces either one or two frames removed from the bottom brood box. In commercial operations the feeder is not removed – it is permanent.

If hundreds of hives need feeding, a truck equipped with a tank and a hose is used to deliver the syrup just like you fill the gas tank on your car.



This pictured feeder converts a 10 frame hive into an 8 frame lower brood chamber with a standard 10 frame box above. There is no need to remove it for storage.

It is used by hobby beekeepers as well. They often remove the feeder after spring

feeding and replace frames giving the queen more room to lay eggs enlarging the brood chamber.

Another feeding method that I like for winter feeding is a sugar patty or sugar brick.



Sugar patties are sold by bee supply companies. But they can be easily made. Often fondant is used but a beekeeper can use powdered sugar to make a similar mix.

One can find many formulas to make a patty. In the past something like Crisco oil was used with the benefit that it helped control Tracheal mites.

Sugar bricks are often made up of granulated sugar and water. Something like a small cup of water to a two pound bag of granulated sugar. Just enough water to get the sugar to stick together rather than fall apart. Often a drop of vinegar, bleach, lemongrass, or wintergreen is added to the water before mixing.

A rim must be placed on the hive body to allow room for the patty or sugar brick. The sugar needs to be placed above the winter cluster-- (Where the bees are).

Another easy feeding method is called the mountain camp method.



As shown here, a piece of newspaper is placed over the top bars, a rim (call it a feeder rim), and dry granulated sugar is poured or dumped onto the newspaper and the hive closed. Moisture from the bees allows the bees to use it. They easily eat through the newspaper.



Another method along the same principle is pouring granulated sugar around the inner cover hole. I usually consider this an emergency method to keep bees alive.

Note: Of the methods I have listed, only the dry methods should be used when cold weather prevents bees from flying.

Too much moisture in a hive is not good for the bees. Thus, I would advise beekeepers to avoid feeding sugar syrup in the winter season.

One method of feeding that is absolutely bad during winter is the Boardman feeder often included in beginning beekeeper kits. I see many using top feeders during winter as well. Any liquid food given to bees during very cold weather will add moisture to the hive. When spring arrives the top feeder and Boardman feeder will stimulate brood rearing which is good.



What is wrong with this feeding method?

Wise management of bees requires selection of the right tools to use during the bee season.

The Boardman feeder used outside the hive will provide food for bees in the hive. But during the cold of winter it is useless!

Finally, liquid food is better than nothing if bees are starving. One common method I have used in the

early spring (weather varies from cold below freezing nights and warm afternoon flights) is the bucket feeder method.



A major problem of starting package bees too early in the spring is for beekeepers to think bees can get to food supplied to them. A jar or bucket with liquid sugar syrup will provide the bees with needed food if it is placed where bees can get to it. Liquid measurements of sugar syrup should be 2 parts sugar to one part water for winter survival. A mixture of 2 parts water to 1 part sugar is good for stimulating brood rearing. (Good for spring feeding)

One more thought about late winter feeding!

If the bees do not need feeding to survive, why feed?

Feeding could result in:

A lot of bees sitting around in a hive consuming a lot of honey stores when there is little or no possibility of

foraging for pollen or nectar. Bees will swarm when they are crowded-- they can and will raise drone brood, and start early queen cells.

I checked my hives this week and this is what I found: (Raleigh, North Carolina)

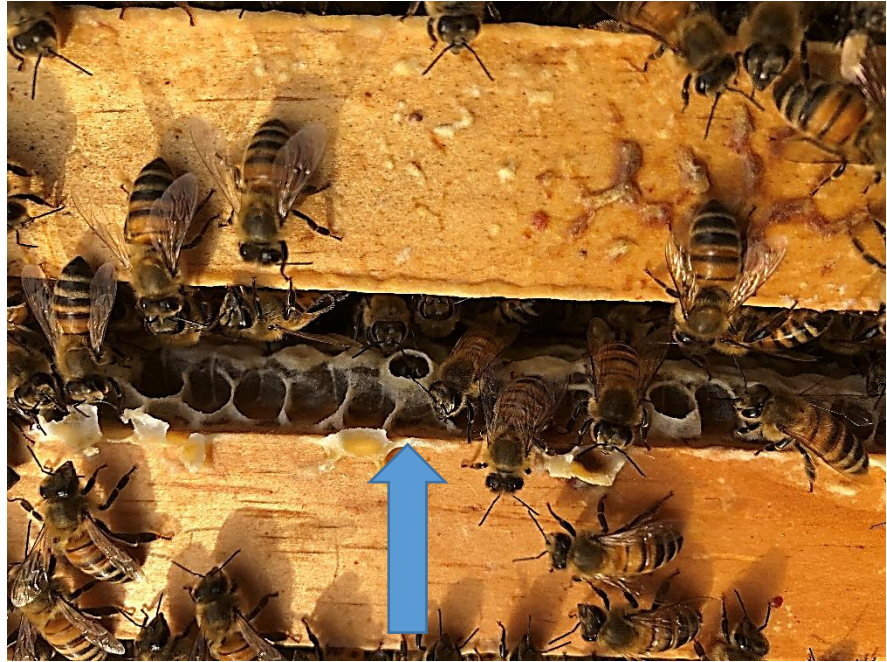
I found drone brood, some adult drones, hives packed with bees and plenty of honey stores.

I am not feeding but when I see new comb being built, **I have a problem!**



A few photos to indicate I have bee work to do!

Wall to wall bees.



See that new wax – nice white wax cappings.



And burr comb between hive bodies filled with drone brood.



I need to add supers. I need to check frequently now for queen cells.

I know that the sequence of population growth is going to result in a number of good things for me if I manage these hives correctly.

Up next week: Mite control!