



STAHLMAN

BEEKEEPING NOTES

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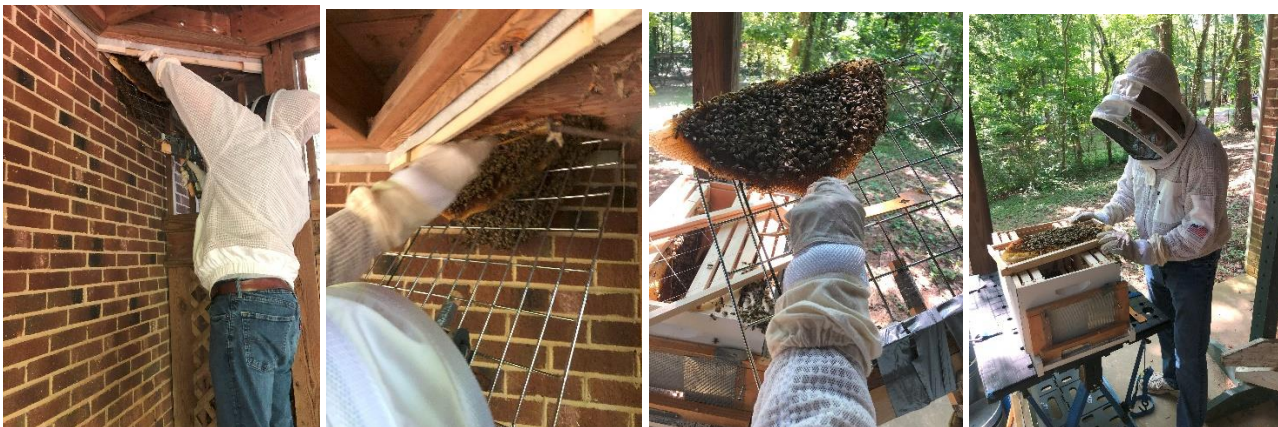
Bee Removal

This past week Cary Orange, a beekeeper I mentored a few years ago, invited me to go with him to get a nest of honey bees from a porch. It was his first attempt to do this. He had questions and I tried to give him some advice. I usually tell beekeepers to avoid getting bees out of houses. After our talk, he had provided me with a good idea of what he was dealing with. Questions I ask when it comes to getting a swarm or taking bees out of a building are:

1. How high up is it?
2. How easy can it be reached?
3. Do you have to cut into anything?
4. Are they honeybees?

All the things that would clearly determine “if it was worth the effort to get them.” I own a pick up truck and Cary indicated he had a lot of stuff to take over to the place where these bees were located, and once the bees were captured, putting them on the truck bed to take them home seemed like a good idea.

I will share that I expected this nest to contain a lot of honey, and working overhead under a porch could be a real sticky affair. I can look back at several removals I did between joists over my head. Comb breaks off and falls dripping all over the place. Wear gloves so hands do not get sticky was a point I needed to make. I also indicated that he needed something to slip between hanging comb that could support an entire section of comb. Something strong enough to support some weight without crushing bees. As you read and study Cary’s notes, realize that honeybees build comb top down in an oval shape. One needs to start on the outside of the nest and work toward larger sections of comb and it is important to save as many bees as possible. He solved comb removal with a device he calls the “Spade Plate”. It was a flat grill he found to which he added a handle to hold it. Here are a few pictures I took of the removal process:



The spade plate in action. Sheets of comb removed whole with bees, then transferred to frames. Cary was prepared! Not a single comb section was broken apart in the removal process. Thanks Cary for inviting me along to take pictures. And the best part, the bees were moved comb by comb with little disruption to the nest.

Background:

- A neighbor requested help to relocate a live open colony of honey bees that was first noticed in the Spring season of 2024. The colony sheltered in an open space about 6 feet above the ground. The wax comb attached to the bottom-side floor boards for a covered screened-in porch.



What to bring:

- Protective clothing (gloves, veil, jacket, suit)
- Smoker, lighter, hive tool and fuel
- Deep hive body with cross-wired frames, bottom board, inner cover, top cover, entrance reducer and robbing screen
- No drawn comb frames needed
- Duct tape
- Bungee cords and ratchet straps
- Heavy duty C-clamps
- Ladder (if needed)
- Lamp and extension cord
- Platform and bricks for leveling (if needed to reach colony)
- Disposable drop cloth
- Rubber bands
- Work table
- Bucket
- Dust pan and bee brush
- Rake and Shovel
- Razor knife and paint scraper
- Water hose and dish soap with water end-hose sprayer

- No need for spray bottle with sugar syrup
- Spade plate (flat grill works best) with extension rod
- Clips to secure frame to spade (if needed)

Preparing the site:

- Caution: as an open colony is exposed and does not have an entrance, the worker bees will be more protective, in general, so light smoke is recommended in a general application at the outermost wax comb facing the beekeeper while implementing the wax comb removal.
- Caution: full protection is recommended when getting started. Be prepared to destroy the colony in case of intense defensive behavior that prohibits live colony removal. Attacks from Africanized bees pose a real threat and danger to the beekeeper, as well as humans and pets/livestock nearby. A charged water hose with dish soap in a end-hose sprayer is recommended as a precaution. If during the live colony removal it appears that bees are calm, less protective gear may help the beekeeper in the colony removal.
- Caution: live colony removal with 8 feet or less above ground is recommended using a secure level platform and/or step ladder as needed. Removal of live colony above 8 feet from the ground brings greater risk of injury due to fall and is not recommended.
- Caution: wax comb may be very heavy with stored honey. In hot temperatures above 85 degrees F, wax comb may be so soft that removal may result in the comb falling apart creating a huge mess. To assist in securing the wax comb, a spade plate is recommended to rest the wax comb and gently pull away from the rest of the colony while separating the wax seam at the top of the comb.
- Daylight is best when bees are flying (mid-morning works best)
- Temperature between 65 and 85 degrees F and low humidity
- Lay disposable drop cloth below the colony to catch spilled/dripped honey and wax comb fragments
- Set up platform and level it (if needed to stand on in order to reach the colony)
- Set up ladder (as needed to reach the colony)
- Set up a lamp (as needed when there is not sufficient natural light)
- Set up work table with easy access to rubber bands and cross-wired empty frames

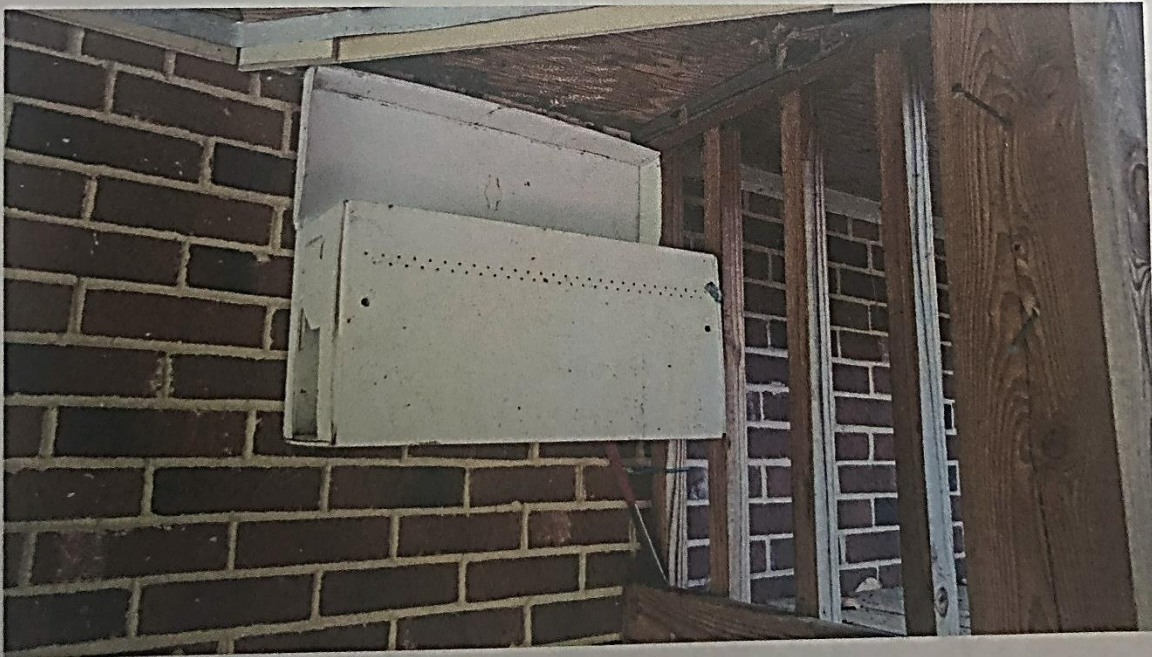
Removing the wax comb

- Lightly smoke near the top of the outermost wax comb to move bees out of the way so the seam is exposed at the top of the comb
- Insert spade plate on the inside of the outermost wax comb and gently use a hive tool to separate the wax seal where it attaches at the top (using extension rod as needed)
- Carefully rest wax comb on the spade plate and move space with wax comb and bees to a nearby work table
- Lay out a cross-wired empty frame on the work table and gently move wax comb with bees from spade plate to the empty frame.
- Remove any remaining bees on the spade plate by firmly knocking bees off into the hive body

- Use several rubber bands to secure the wax comb on the cross-wired frame
- Place frame in the hive body in the same orientation where the wax comb was located in the open colony
- Repeat until all wax comb has been removed
- Use a dustpan and bee brush to gently collect any remaining bees on the brick walls and bottom-side of porch floorboards and add them to the new hive

Relocating the new hive

- Before leaving the site, take one of the new frames with bees and young brood and place it in a small catch hive nuc box. Secure the catch hive nuc box in the same location where the open colony had existed. The foraging bees will return to stay with the brood frame.
- Close entrance of new main hive and relocate hive to a new location and supplement feed with sugar syrup as needed until colony can be reestablished.
- Extinguish smoker and properly soak any remaining hot coals or ash with plenty of water
- Return later at night after dusk or in the early morning before dawn to pick up the catch hive
- Remove any C-Clamps used to secure catch hive nuc box and clean up any remaining wax residue
- Remove platform and dropcloth (if not done earlier)
- Clean up any wax at the seams where the comb in the open colony had been attached.
- Dispose of the drop cloth along with any drippings and loose wax comb



Great job Cary and the lesson plan he had to get the nest may be of interest to you. By asking questions and then following thru on his plan, he was able to do a successful removal with a happy home owner. Also a happy beekeeper. I might mention that Cary is in his third or fourth year of keeping bees and is now a mentor to other beekeepers as well as being involved in the Wake County Beekeepers Association. And I was lucky to be asked to tag along.