



# **STAHLMAN**

## **BEEKEEPING NOTES**

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### **More on Bee Removals - Cut Outs**

This issue of my notes is based upon a number of comments I received from last weeks newsletter. I have included a few:

*When I started beekeeping 7 years ago I would go to great lengths to catch them. Climbed up 40 feet on a ladder to get a swarm (once), I transition to swarm traps attached to a rope over a limb 8 to 10 feet above the ground. Now my rule of thumb is "if they are higher than my hands can reach with my two feet on the ground " someone else can catch them. Yes free bees but too old to break any bones. Cut outs requires a lot of skills and best left up to the experts. Thanks, Roger Weisner*

*Very good article on bee removal! Thanks, Glenn Zeblo*

*I read with interest your article about bee removal, since I am one of those who do a lot of bee removals and do charge a fee. My contracting and wood working background allow me to open up a building to remove the bees and do all the repairs when done. I am very skeptical when I hear people talk about taking on either of those parts of a removal without the proper skills. I am glad your open air hive removal account clearly discourages someone from attempting this if opening up a structure is involved, unless they have the ability to do so properly. Thanks, Richard Dunn*



I am always amazed at what honeybees can do. I would suggest a book Honeybee Democracy by Thomas D. Seeley for all beekeepers to read. I found this statement in his book *"when honeybees find a nesting place, you can be assured that bees select a location that provides good protection and sufficient space to hold the large honey stores they will need for winter."* I would add, those that don't do not survive. If the weather doesn't kill them, robbing bees and racoons will. I found this nest on my farm in Ohio and only discovered it after leaves fell in the fall. Ohio winters are tough on bees, especially if they are in unprotected nests.

**Following is a picture essay of a cut-out I did a number of years ago.**



**This is a typical easy cut-out if you have carpentry skills.** The bees in this situation built a nest under a window between studs. As one can see the nest was between the outside wall and an inside wall. There would be no getting the comb out of this nest with a “spade Plate” as shown in last weeks article. Someone had to make a decision on how to get to the bees. It would have been possible to

cut from the outside by removing siding or doing an inside removal by removing some drywall and several wall panels. The decision was to do an inside removal. A single room can be isolated from the rest of the structure because there is no way to remove a nest like this without bees flying around inside.



Bees do not need a large entrance to find a nesting spot. This is

the entrance for the bees between the walls of this building. This **Ed Karle photograph** shows an outside wall cut out This eliminates the mess done inside a building. Nests built between studs will be narrow or wide depending on the orientation of the first combs built. Many nests are not as neat as these I have pictured.





This is a swarm at an apartment complex I was called upon to get. By the time I got a ladder and equipment to get it, the bees moved inside the roof area.

This then became a job for a bee removal specialist.

There are several points I would like to share with you.

1) I agree with Rogers comments: "Now my rule of thumb is "if they are higher than my hands can reach with my two feet on the ground someone else can catch them."

2) **One can learn to become a bee cut-out specialist and make money doing it.** I spoke to Shane Woodruff whom I have known for years about how he got into the business.

**I am not out to scare anyone out of trying to remove bees from buildings but one must consider a few details.**

- Some states require one to be licensed to remove bees. Check your state laws.

- Shane shared with me that his biggest problem is removing bees from hard to get at locations. And his customers want the bees taken alive.
- He lives in New Jersey and indicated to me - the state law in New Jersey - does not allow killing bees unless they constitute a hazard.
- Buildings using concrete blocks or brick present problems. And some jobs require several people working together to remove a nest of honeybees.
- Many nests are located in multi-storied buildings requiring special equipment to work safely (OSHA rules). Any workplace accident such as falling from a ladder will be investigated. I can attest to the first question someone will ask when taken to the hospital emergency room with an injury is "Is this a workplace accident?"
- Owners of property are concerned about their liability in case there is an accident.

I thought I would look up what is in the OSHA rule book:

If you have a business such as doing bee removals, you may face questions like the following should an accident happen to you or someone helping you. Only an attorney can answer questions and help you if a situation should occur. Key questions are:

- If a hazard is likely, what have you done to abate the hazard or hazards?
- What safety and health practices are or were in place at the time of an incident?

I helped friends and never accepted money for the help I gave. I never gave thought to laws or anything else except to do good. I was lucky. Today I am more cautious.

**A Photo Essay:** This bee nest was located in a room located in a church. It was interesting because smoke from my smoker set off a smoke alarm that brought the Westerville, Ohio fire department to put out a fire. Instead they found me and the bees and thought it better to watch from a distance. My helpers were Jim Chambers and his wife, Pat. We were church members and beekeepers. The church needed our help. Children using the room could hear bees in the walls and a few bees actually got into the room. This was a concern for the safety of the children and we responded to the request to get them gone!



First, we had to find the location of the nest in the wall. That is Jim with hammer and a pry bar. And there is the nest just under the window exposed.

The next picture is of me removing comb and looking for the queen.



This is a sticky job and rubber gloves are a help. Note the use of rubber bands to hold comb in frames. We tried to save as much brood as possible. We did locate the queen and marked her. She was safely moved to a frame with brood and the frame was then placed in the hive body



The box with frames was placed against the inside wall where the nest was located so bees would move down into the box with brood and the queen. Her pheromones drew the bees to her.



The job was not done. We had to give the bees several hours to reorganize themselves and settle into their new home. There were some scattered bees that did not enter the box. We used some smoke to drive them down into the box. Later that evening we moved the bees to a new location.

We sealed the opening the bees had been using to get into the old nest. We filled the nesting area with insulation, replaced the old drywall with new, and replaced the original panels.

This cut out took the better part of one day and the next to complete. I would think that today someone would vacuum the bees up while we waited for them to gather on their own. Cleaning up the mess was the last task.

As a final comment, something like this should never be attempted by anyone other than an experienced beekeeper. All three of us working on this were well equipped to do the cut out. Jim was an expert home builder and followed his wife into keeping bees. All of us had a good idea of how we would remove the comb, handle the bees, and move them into a hive.

Once a cut out is started, it is hard to go back and undo what has been done. **Protection from bee stings is important.** I don't recommend that you try something like this without protective equipment. I have worked bees for a lifetime. There are times like shown in these photos that bees are gentle to work with. There are other times they can be very aggressive. I do own protective equipment and use it when required.

One other thing is very important. Those that might want to watch what you are doing should be suited up. Working with bees is considered hazardous work and people do get stung even when located some distance from where work is being done. I was advised to

place signs where they would be noticeable warning people that bees sting. At least I would not be negligent if someone was stung – they had fair warning.

**One last photo.** Again this was for a member of the church I attended. She was a bit elderly and needed some bees in her basement removed. I volunteered to do a cut out by myself. It looked like an easy cut out but it was not.



These bees were nasty. You are looking at a nest built under the floor between floor joists. After removing the ceiling where this nest was located, I was looking up at a lot of bees. This nest contained bees, brood, and a lot of honey. I estimated it had at least 100 pounds of honey that could be saved.

Quarters were cramped – one can only reach so far on a ladder. Add to this that comb is soft in hot weather which this was. I tried using a dust pan to

hold each comb as I removed it.

Think standing on a ladder with both hand tied up holding comb so it would not fall to the floor. I did have a bee veil and a suit on for this job. That bee veil made this removal hard because I could not always see what I was doing. The day was hot – you know one of the 90° F days. Comb was hard to remove at its base – not nice neat comb as shown in last weeks photographs. The major problem with this removal was the lack of help and my determination to get the job done. My gloves were smeared with honey and dead bees. I squished a lot of them. The comb filled 3 deep supers and each comb had to be fastened in a frame to save it. I swore never again. Always bring help so comb can be handed down, and help to carry boxes full of honey up stairs and to the truck.

Can you image trying to cut out a nest **16 feet up** in the air with a ladder leaning against an outside wall. This nest was only 8 feet above the floor and all the while, bees were stinging thru the bee veil and bee suit. Yes protection helps but some bees stingers found their mark. **I would never call this kind of cut out fun.**