

STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

NOTES

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North Carolina weather has been on a rolling coaster between two extremes. Just days ago we had really cold weather and by the time I started this weeks newsletter the weather is April like. Thus, I had a good chance to check my bees. I also had the opportunity to visit some of my new beekeepers to see how they were doing -- going into their second year.

Students listened to me about making sure their hives were well feed last fall. There were no dead-outs due to starvation. But there were some dead outs. I will share some thoughts:

- Small hive beetles have also survived the winter and dead out hives had a lot of small hive beetles.
- Dead out hives (not many) were queen-less. One hive we inspected still had bees alive but no brood or queen. If queens were available it would be a mistake to try to install one now. Bees (hive) had a cluster that carried them thru the low 20 degree temperture we had several days ago. When talking to the beekeeper I shared the opinion that a new package installed early would be able to get a honey crop yet this new year. By the time March rolls around, the bees now in the hive would be dead.
- From the above inspection I saw many drones. This hive also had scattered capped drone cells. And this reminded me that if drones are present in a hive during fall and winter, this is a sign that something is wrong. The live worker bees were old and without brood and no new bees to replace them – the hive is doomed.
- One important thing to report is that I requeened several hives in late summer. Those hive are busting at the seams right now! They not only have live bees, they have basket ball sized brood nests and lots of bees. And the activity at the hive entrance was spring like! They were hauling pollen (not sure what) into the hives.
- These hives are using up honey reserves fast.
- And the dead-outs: It was time to clean up equipment and store it. At least, I can make splits or order package bees and get early orders in before most other beekeepers start to think of placing orders.

Winter is not over!

Bee schools are now in session. I also note a lot of used beekeeping equipment is for sale. A good place to buy used equipment is on Market Place. Beekeeping is like owning a boat. Some people really get enthused and others have boats for sale. Some of the equipment being sold is fairly new and if listed and it is a good buy, it doesn't stay up on line for very long. Often complete with veils, gloves, tools, boxes and books. If you are looking to expand and need equipment, out check this source. One warning however, used equipment can be nothing but junk. If you are new to beekeeping, get someone who knows something about equipment to help you make your selections.

Winter Beekeeping



This is activity at the hive entrance on a warm day during winter.

Notice the color of the pollen coming into the hive. I saw at least three colors (coming from various sources). My neighbor reported bees at her bird feeder. I didn't expect to see this.

Also note the bees are cleaning debris and dumping it outside the hive.

This is a very good sign. I noted bee droppings on covers I placed on hives just before the cold period hit us this past week.

Opening hives was possible this week and checking for brood indicates the bees handled the cold very well.

As many of you know, I spent many years in Ohio keeping bees. Conditions in the north are far different from beekeeping in the south. I am well aware that most books on management are or have been written by northern beekeepers.

But once in a while the south does get northern winter like conditions. The mountains are more like northern areas and western North Carolina does have a region that fits the schedule that most beekeepers in Ohio would be comfortable with.



I was ready for the "Cold Period" that hit us this past week. A very good friend from Ohio, Nina Bagley, gave me a hive cover when I spoke in Ohio last summer. You might read articles she writes in Bee Culture Magazines.

I might have said, "Thank you." I hauled it back to North Carolina never thinking I would use it. It was a bit bulky and I placed it on a shelf in my garage.

If you are reading this issue, Nina; "Thank you again because over the years you have always helped me when help was needed." She has a web site: www.Ohioqueenbee.com. Nina is an accomplished beekeeper as well as an accomplished seamstress. She

raises queens, sells “German Village Honey and manages a number of hives --a real point of interest -- she has a small bee yard on the Ohio State Capitol House grounds in Columbus, Ohio.

Back to my story:

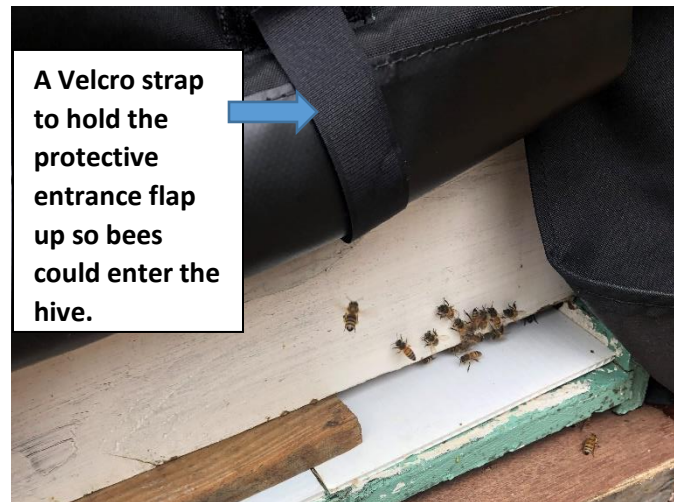
One hive received special treatment just before the cold hit. I went to my garage and this hive blanket was placed over one of my special queen hives. I also wrapped the others as well.

This is most likely one of the most expensive hive covers on the market but it has features that others do not have. I keep my hives on old pallets. Note the wind break behind this hive --bales of straw covered with a tarp.



I reduce my hives to a single deep brood chamber and add one medium super full of honey. But I worry a bit about my special hives. If I lost this hive, I would have been somewhat devastated. We all have hives that perform very well, have good queens, and are special. They have characteristics such as gentleness and produce good honey crops and hopefully have the genetics we all look for – they survive from year to year. This hive got the hive cover.

On Wednesday the temperature was slightly over 60° F. Bees were flying and the entrance to this hive was very active with bees.



A Velcro strap to hold the protective entrance flap up so bees could enter the hive.

This photo was taken about 10:00 in the morning.

This was the entrance. Notice how the entrance is open and protected by the hive cover.

The other hives were covered as well but that is just the beginning of the story for this hive. I lost one hive with a full super of honey virtually untouched. I did not have to take the cover off this hive in order to add a super of honey

There were bees and some brood in the upper medium super. I did not inspect the full deep super on the bottom board – it had a winter cluster area that I did not want to bother. The medium super told me all I needed to know.

- The queen was laying eggs -- larva and capped worker cells were present.
- The bee population was adequate
- The hive needed some food.

As I have pointed out in earlier editions, I pick up my dead hives, clean them up, and plan to replace the dead bees when packages become available. I store any honey frames in my garage because they are great for feeding new package bees. I have an old refrigerator that keeps them safe from wax moth, mice, cockroaches, and robbing bees.



What follows is a little photo essay of finishing up the job of closing the hive. This inspection took less than 15 minutes to do.

The hive cover has a zippered top flap. To open the hive blanket all that is required is to unzip the top, let it drop down exposing the top cover, inner cover and frames below.

Carry out the hive inspection – in this case pulling a few medium frames to examine and then replace the frames.

I wanted to add a honey super! The bees needed food. I went and got several good capped frames of honey. Then I returned to the hive. Some bees hovered in the air around the hive. I really was in and out so fast, I did not need my bee veil but I would always recommend wearing one when working bees in the winter.



I was able to replace the inner cover and top cover quickly. No exposed frames. I pulled the cover up around the hive and let bees enter.

This didn't take long.



This cover has a heavy duty zipper with a heavy canvas cover and padding.

I am not a sales person and I don't usually write about equipment. But if one has a special queen and one wants to provide a little extra protection to the hive – this one really is handy to have facing cold temperature conditions. It was designed by Nina who has a ton of beekeeping experience and that special skill of being a pattern designer and seamstress. The cover is not cheap plastic or tarp material.

Many other hive covers are available. But I can say, I have never worked with one with so many features:

- **Easy to slip over a hive.**
- **One can add supers or open the interior of the hive to manage simple beekeeping chores.**
- **It allows for the expansion of almost any standard hive because it has extra material at the bottom. Most likely for 3 – deep super hives.**
- **That zipper! This is just not a slip cover going down over the hive.**
- **And it is vented to release moisture not contain it.**

Any cover that traps moisture is not good for bees! One can check for high moisture in a hive by just looking at the under side of a top cover lid. If the under side of a top cover is wet, bees are not getting the ventilation that they need.

One other point, black absorbs the sun's heat – warming a hive a bit when the sun is out gives the bees a chance to take flight when the outside air is warm.

