



STAHLMAN

BEEKEEPING NOTES

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A Summer Problem – Wax Moth

This is the seventh time I have written about wax moth. They have been around for years and continue to be a problem for those beekeepers who are unaware of the damage they can cause. I recently talked to a beekeeper with several years' experience that lost some hives last year to wax moth. Wax moth are insects of opportunity. When I see a hive taken over completely by wax moth it indicates one thing to me – it's the beekeeper that is the problem. Inspections need to be done on a regular schedule and it is the responsibility of a beekeeper to identify those colonies that might be subject to wax moth infestations.

Wax moths are beneficial insects to some extent. They make excellent bait for fishing. In fact, there are individuals raising wax moths for that purpose.

One other good thing about wax moth is they destroy comb that contains American foulbrood spores in abandoned comb. One of the greatest issues in years past was the spread of American foul brood from feral bee nests. With the decline of feral colonies AFB issues are rarely found in bee inspections. But the wax moth is an insect of opportunity and any unattended beeswax comb that has pollen or darkened comb due to brood being raised in it is an attractive target.

I have seen bad situations caused by wax moth. At one time I bought another beekeeping business that had failed due to the beekeeper's age and ability to manage his bees. He had bee boxes stored in an old barn. Most of the equipment was not worth the time to load it on my truck. Frames were full of wax moth webbing, and equipment was marked with divots left by wax moth cocoons. This clearly reduced the price I was willing to pay for the equipment.

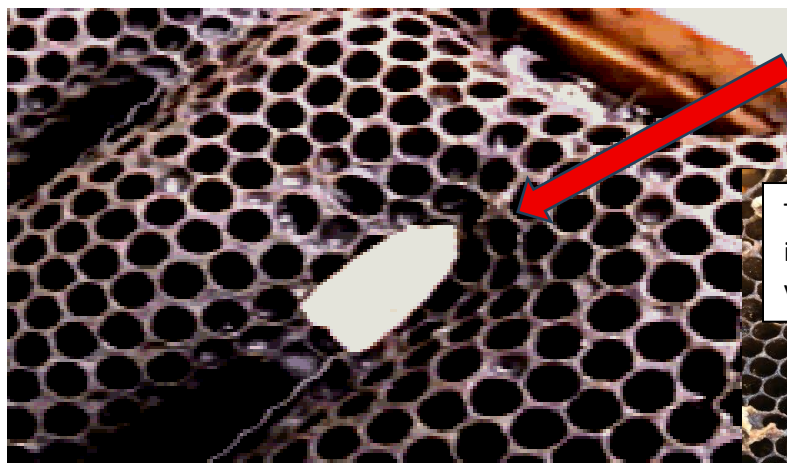
It was interesting to me that some frames still had comb in them. Brood frames were all destroyed by wax moth; however, I did find some honey supers that had drawn comb that had never been used as brood frames free of wax moth damage. That clearly indicated to me that wax moth prefer comb with pollen and traces of brood raised in the comb.

If you are concerned with recognizing a problem with wax moths let me repeat what I have written about them.

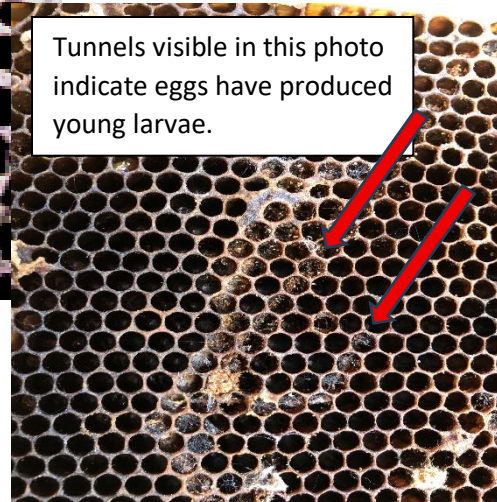
Prevention is based upon frequent inspections of comb. Stored comb and comb in weak hives are easy targets for wax moth. But first some facts:

The wax moth is a warm season pest and thrives in dark warm locations. The first sign may be a small grayish moth on the surface of comb. Adult wax moths are often seen in hives – they enter mostly at night. The adult moth deposits eggs in small cracks and other places in the hive – especially in corners and debris on the bottom board. After hatching, the larvae are quite active when they tunnel into the drawn comb near the mid-rib. The larvae grow to about an inch in size and during the larval phase (18 days to 3 months) depending on temperatures leave a silk web as they consume pollen and wax.

What to look for:



This is an adult wax moth. If you see any wax moths, the damage they can do has already begun. Eggs have already been laid.



Tunnels visible in this photo indicate eggs have produced young larvae.

The young larva begin to eat and tunnel through the comb as shown here. The larvae grow in size and the number of eggs laid depend on the number of adult female wax moth but one estimate I found searching the topic indicated each female wax moth can lay 50 to 150 eggs over a three-day period. It is interesting to note that female wax moths can not lay eggs if light is present. Thus, the dark interior of a bee

hive is perfect for wax moth growth.



This is what you should look for!

Any sign of silk like webbing in comb is a warning that wax moth damage is just beginning.

What not to do:

Place comb into a plastic bag or container thinking that the wax moth can not get to the comb is a big mistake. Adult wax moths most likely have already laid eggs on or in the frames being stored. Placing containers in a warm dark location only promotes the ability of the wax moth larva to thrive.



This is what can happen if nothing is done to prevent the damage the wax moth can do!

At this stage, a hive is not inhabited with bees – bees were weak and died or absconded. This hive has little value except for a person wanting to clean up the hive frames and boxes. Frames may be salvaged by installing new foundation. But all equipment will be marked by chewed out divots in wood left by the silk cocoons as shown here.



Control of this pest

The best advice from many beekeepers is to stop moth damage before it can be seen. Every colony is at risk, thus keeping strong colonies is the best defense. Strong bee populations prevent the adult moths from entering a colony and laying her eggs.

Frequent inspections are necessary in order to spot early stages of damage. If the bee population is small, I would suggest a beekeeper condense the bee population to a smaller hive. For example a double deep colony reduced to a single deep box. Or a single deep colony to a 5 frame nuc. Once this is done, the problem of what is causing the bee population problem must be solved. Queen replacement may be the solution. Adding frames of bees and brood might help a colony recover but if nothing is done – the wax moths win!

Stored Comb

Stored comb is at risk during the warm period of the year when wax moth are active.

- Place comb or comb honey in cold places – below 40°F.
- Empty comb can be stored if it is exposed to light. I have seen storage of comb under an open sided building stacked so light could enter each box. This was done by stacking boxes so each layer of boxes – the lowest box faced north and south and the next box above it was facing east and west – allowed light to enter.
- Many store boxes by fumigating them. Moth crystals are usually used but I suggest anyone choosing to use this method investigate the various products licensed and intended for this use. Of chief concern is the exposure of the wax comb intended to be used in honey production for any contamination that could be harmful. The following link will provide additional ideas:

[How To Treat Wax Moths \[8 Options For Beekeepers\] Bee Professor](#)