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# *STAHLMAN*

## *BEEKEEPING NOTES*

### *FOR 2025*

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Published free as a public service to anyone interested in honeybees. Email me to be added to my mailing list.  
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### **Approaching the End of Summer**

As I inspect my bees at this time of year, I notice changes as bees begin to prepare for winter survival.

**Signs one can observe** as bees move into the second phase of the beekeeping year are:

- No drone brood and very few drones are present.
- The brood is mostly capped worker cells. Very little open brood --eggs and young larvae are present.
- The bees are not drawing new comb.
- The bees have become more aggressive.
- Bees are hanging on the outside of the hive.
- And daylight hours are getting shorter.

Drones are a good sign to determine a colony's health and progress during a bee season. Drones exist in a colony for one reason – reproduction. They are unique because they have no physical way to gather nectar and pollen. In fact, they require a greater (in human terms) amount of cost to produce than worker bees.

However, I do not belong to the school of thinkers that drones are bad for a colony of bees. There was a time when beekeepers placed drone traps on hives so a colony would get more honey and used full sheets of foundation for brood production rather than let the bees build natural comb which would include a lot of drone cells.

Drones are needed for continuing the life of bees. Colonies with drones seem to be more productive however, there are exceptions to this – when worker bees become drone layers and queens begin to fail. The time to raise queens is early in the year before drone populations decline.

Thus, as honey flows end, and bee populations are at the highest point, the need for drones does not exist -- few are tolerated more as an insurance policy for survival.

**Bees are not capping honey comb and frames with foundation are not being worked.**

**I often see numbers indicating that it takes 7-9 pounds of honey to produce a pound of beeswax. A colony will store far more honey in drawn comb than on foundation that must be drawn. Foraging bees do not draw comb and comb building is done by younger bees. In the second phase of the bee season queens lay fewer eggs. Thus, the comb building bee population declines.**



**Comb in honey supers is usually drawn well just above the brood cluster and as shown here, some frames are drawn and some are not.**



**Drawn comb is an asset** and at this time of the year, beekeepers need to make decisions on what to do in a situation like this. If no honey flow is on, wax production by the colony almost comes to an end. Often honey in the comb is available for winter stores and feeding a colony with sugar syrup will stimulate the bees to draw wax and use the sugar syrup to fill cells and be capped over. **Note, feeding sugar will result in the honey in comb to become adulterated honey.** If a colony with comb like this has a late honey flow, the bees will fill drawn comb and cap cells, but usually not do much to frames with foundation.

## **Colony Morale**

**This is a time of the year when honeybees are under a lot of stress. Honeybees survive by storing honey for the winter season. Every colony must defend against robbing. Inspecting hives means dealing with a large population of bees – many of them hanging out in the hive rather than out hunting for pollen and nectar plants. Older bees are always more aggressive than younger bees. Thus, combined with fewer duties to do in the hive, more bees are available to defend the hive. Add hot weather and stressed bees that seemed calm earlier in the year, often become more aggressive. It does not mean that it is time to replace the queen.**

## Bearding



When it gets hot, bees solve the problem by moving out of the hive as shown here. It is not a time to think that something must be done. Honeybees have a marvelous way to deal with heat with-in the hive. However, one might add a super to provide more room or as I have discussed in earlier editions add room just above the bottom board with a slatted rack. Sometimes beekeepers become so worried about an issue like this that results in misguided meddling. The entrance to a colony should never be closed off in hot weather conditions. To prevent robbing, a large robbing screen should be used but colonies bearding outside a hive seldom have an issue with robbing.

Moving hives while bees are bearding is challenging. Closing a hive entrance during hot weather even at night is going to result in the possible loss of an entire colony of bees. An open trailer and a good set of bee gloves may be required if it must be done. All those bees for the most part will crawl all over individuals picking up and handling the hive. Applying smoke to get the bees into the hive is often done but when the smoke is not present the bees rush out in mass. The one best idea I have seen used is when a beekeeping friend had to move a hive much like the one shown in the picture above. He bought a bag of ice and placed it under the bottom board prior to loading the bee hive on his trailer. During the move he placed the ice bag at the hive entrance. The move was not a long one

but the bees retreated inside the hive and the colony in its new location survived with almost all of its bees.

One other important issue is that bee populations are rather large now but the bees are dying not being replaced as quickly as was the case when bees were finding nectar sources. I have been reading Keith Delaplane's book *Honey Bee Social Evolution*. I am finding some interesting things to consider about honeybees. His chapter on Senescence and Mortality fits right into what is happening in our hives. As I age, I see things happening to me. Many of my friends have passed and flowers are fading. It is natural in our world for all of this to happen.

“Reproduction is the currency of value in natural selection!” I have often been asked by beekeepers how long I keep my queens. I know that younger queens have a higher reproductive value than older queens but when does one determine it is time to replace a queen. Some beekeepers are at this time of the year replacing all queens thinking that this will result in stronger colonies in the spring.

I don't endorse this all-replacement plan. However, I am judging the performance of all my queens now. Due to large bee populations in hives, it is not easy to find queens to replace if I see a need to do it. In my way of thinking, spring queens bought in packages may have been poorly mated and have a good change of using all the sperm needed for reproduction. It is important to evaluate them based upon what a colony has done up to this point in time.

The first September issue will cover queen replacement and methods used to find queens. I have already begun by deciding that any weak colony needs to have a queen replacement or be combined with a stronger colony. I am not waiting until October to make those decisions. Remember that queens naturally reduce egg production at this time of the year, thus, my decision must be a careful examination of what a queen has done and is doing compared to what other queens are doing.

I am also going to share the wisdom of L.L. Langstroth from his book, *A Practical Treatise on the Hive and Honey-bee*. Copies of this book should be in every beekeepers library and if you don't have a copy to study this winter, I would highly recommend that as a goal for next year.