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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. stahlmanapiaries@aol.com

“Where bees fly, so does hope.”

I appreciate the number of beekeepers that make comments back to me. When it comes to inspecting hives, those of us living in the south have a great advantage over those living in northern states. A friend Ken Hoover, mentioned that one needs to talk to him in mid-April about hive losses in Pa. He pointed out that losses will be at their worst between March and April and another pointed out that the 60 % loss figure I used really represented losses from March 2024 thru early February of this year. I might add that that figure of 60% + was reported by commercial beekeepers most of whom move bees for pollination. I have several friends that have bees in California on almonds and I will get with them to see if that figure being used is close to what they are experiencing. The Franklin County Beekeepers Association indicates a 22 % loss here in N.C. for winter losses. It is a bit confusing about the various numbers being reported.

A message back from **Duane Rekeweg**, a friend of many years and an Indiana commercial beekeeper.

We got a call a week ago from California asking if we had more bees to send. They figure they are 300,000 hives short for almond pollination this year. With our hives frozen to the ground we said no thanks. Our hives look good in California. No problems like many are having with losses. If anybody would have problems you would think we could do it with all the farm pesticides used here. Still too cold to do anything with hives here. Still in the high of 40 's here. Remember the cool springs in the midwest? Still enjoy your articles. My local club puts your full article in our newsletter.

As the weather becomes warmer bees begin to fly. For the most part it is a “good sign” but that doesn't mean all is good. Traditionally, beekeepers have had to deal with a number of issues as bees begin the new bee season.

In the south, a colony may look like this at this time of the year. Adjustments need to be made if one is keeping bees in Northern regions. When I kept bees in both Georgia and Ohio, I could plan on getting bee work done in Georgia and be back to repeat the process in April in Ohio. Bees swarm according to the climate conditions where they are kept. It was not unusual to have swarms in late January/February and March in Georgia and more like late March/April/ & May in Ohio.

Thus, pictures I am using will more or less show bees being kept in North Carolina.

I do keep up with a friend here that keeps about 60 hives of bees and sells nucs in the spring. I talked with him on Monday and he reported that losses have been small but one problem -- real strong hives need feeding and he found one of his strongest hives dead. It had died of starvation. I saw that in



Georgia when I had bees there. Bees especially in strong hives need a lot of food. It just reminds me to share that strong hives need attention just as weak hives do.

The perfect or optimum condition of a colony of bees that over-wintered would be:

- A colony would have started brood rearing with a good queen and bee populations grow daily. A common problem is a colony that has been rearing brood uses up a lot of that winter surplus honey. By spring, if they are not supplied with nectar and pollen, colonies could face starvation issues rather quickly.
- Another issue with strong colonies is they are most likely to be building swarm cells. That means beekeepers must inspect hives and develop plans and methods to prevent swarming.
- Colonies must have sufficient room to expand the nest area and honey supers must be available.
- And all tasks involved in keeping a colony such as this

requires the constant attention to details to keep it strong and productive.

It is important for a beekeeper to study weather patterns and let the weather determine the schedule of when things need to be done. Strong colonies can be split or some of the bees can be shook into packages for sale to beekeepers needing bees. This is something that happens in southern states due to warmer weather conditions,

Not all colonies look like the colony shown above. There are five questions to be answered by beekeepers when bees can be inspected:

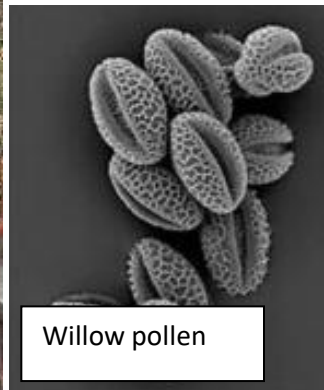
1. Does a hive have a colony of bees and if so, is the bee population worth trying to save the hive? If the answer is NO, then clean up equipment and order bees.
2. Is the queen present and is she building up bee populations?
3. Are there any signs of disease or abnormality? Checking for varroa mites is a must. I have seen some small hive beetles in hives that I have inspected.
4. Does the colony in the hive have sufficient stores to last until the next inspection. If not feeding is required.
5. Equipment is needed to manage bees successfully. Are frames and supers ready to be put on hives?

Nectar and pollen should be coming into hives. This is a close up of pollen (maple – not sure of the species) but it is possible to identify that it is maple pollen. Maples are beginning to bloom here in Raleigh.

A number of willows are blooming and it is one of the earliest of blooming trees. It's pollen grain is similar to the shape of maple pollen grains.



But with a microscope, the grains can be distinguished from each other.



unique and can be found in honey brought back to the hive.

Another early source for pollen is the common dandelion. Most of the honey collected from these plants are used to feed brood. Pollen grains are very

Anyone working with bees has an opportunity to observe bee behavior. Those working with bees should understand that bees go through a normal cycle of events. Knowing these events are important to understanding the honeybees response to what is happening in the hive. Much of this is biology and when opening a hive, there are many things one can observe.

A colony of bees is a highly organized social organism in which all members play certain critical roles. The three special members of a colony are queen, workers, and drones. A colony cannot exist without each playing a vital role in its survival. Like all living creatures they are born and they die. They must have food, shelter, and sex to sustain life – by the way this also applies to humans. These are referred to as “physiological needs” in Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs –

meaning they are essential for survival and well-being. I am not going into all the information about each individual bee. (female or male).

I am going to start with what you should see in a hive inspection: Lets start with a frame with drawn comb and bees working on it.



Queen bees lay fertile eggs and one should see eggs in cells at this time of the year. These are often hard to see in new wax comb. Eggs stand upright as shown here when newly laid and by the third day lay on their sides at the bottom of the cell. This is one way to help determine the age of eggs. **More than one egg per cell is not normal with a good egg laying queen.**

However, young queens may lay two eggs in a cell which may happen

from time to time, but **when you see more than a few cells with multipule eggs, it is an indication that the colony has worker bees laying eggs.**

Note how well eggs show up against black plastic foundation. They are nearly invisible against the light background of new wax foundation. A magnifying glass can be a good aid in seeing the bottom of cells.



This is Lynn Murray of Raleigh checking a frame. Often when working in shade, it is necessary to move to sun light to see the bottom of cells.

Next week, I will continue a section on hive inpections especially for newbeekeepers.