

2026 Stahlman Bee Notes

Published By-Monthly by Dana Stahlman

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Are you Stressed because your bees died this fall or winter?



All the bees in a colony are important for the survival of the hive. Female bees both workers and the queen, determine the success of the colony with tasks and duties that lead to survival.

The drone is required for reproduction. A good strong hive during early bee season will have all three present which is a sign that the colony may be preparing to swarm. Survival is important in the honeybee world just as it is with every other species.

I read both The American Bee Journal and Bee Culture Magazine. I found an interesting article in ABJ this month that really caught my attention. Judi and I have visited Europe and of course, I seek out beekeepers and learn a bit about how bees are managed in Europe. Great emphasis is placed on the breeding of queen bees. The ABJ article is the first in a series titled "Interview with Dr. Ralph B uchler" a longtime head of the Bee Institute in Kirchhain, Germany. One project in Europe is aimed at obtaining a population of varroa-resistant bees within 10 years. He discusses the role of biotechnical methods as a way of keeping bees.

His warning: If we continue with intensive chemical treatments against varroa, we will never have a chance to escape high varroa pressure, because with this system we really provoke selection for very aggressive varroa-virus combinations.

In other words, we are dealing with a pest able to survive our treatments and those mites that live become resistant to the chemicals we use. It will be a continuous result that requires a change in how we manage bees.

I can share an experience I had in Ireland two years ago because it ran counter to my own beekeeping experiences and what I was taught. The Irish beekeepers have also



- It is hard to find a beekeeper in Ireland that has a large number of hives – 50 to 100 colonies would be large. Bees for the most part are located in regions outside the small villages and cities. Locations are controlled with fences mostly to keep sheep out of the apiary. Laws in Ireland protect livestock from bees and humans. In visits to beekeepers I made, not a one had colonies or hives in their backyards but out on the moors. If one wants to keep bees in Ireland it is mandatory to register with the Department of Agriculture and all hives must be inspected.

[Inspections: The DAFM conducts inspections based on risk factors and complaints. Inspections may cover honey hygiene, labeling, and the use of animal remedies.](#)

combated varroa mites by restricting imported bees and selecting breeding stock *Aphis mellifera mellifera* called the Irish Black bee or the Dark European honey bee shown above. They have now found that they have a bee that is surviving and producing great honey crops. They are already using something called “Biotechnical methods” and in addition they control their mating stock. Ireland is a small

country with a small population of people. Beekeepers have joined together to regulate what, who, and where bees are kept and managed.

How they do it:

- They have developed a national breeding plan, selecting for resistant bees to varroa. Thus, the bee called the old European black bee living on the islands were selected and in the last 10 years, the varroa problem has been reduced considerably.
- They changed their method of keeping bees. They have eliminated the use of chemicals – In fact use of chemicals in most of Europe is highly controlled.
- They manage bees by taking advantage of population bee cycles. Bees are encouraged to build up for gathering honey. By mid-summer something remarkable happens. Beekeepers use “Brood Breaks” Just as the honey flow begins, queens are either placed in small three frame queen excluder cages left in hives or removed from the hive – in most cases this is not for increases.

I also note that some are suggesting that we have to make a revolution in education. It is time to reconsider who you buy queens and bees from. The best thing to do is find

someone selling good queens. Someone local with a reputation of having few colony losses. In a way, you are selecting the stock. A good start is the hallmark of good beekeeping and bees brought and sold by package dealers not selling their own bees are generally in the business to make money. Once you accept and take a package or nuc home, the bees and most likely mites are yours. Just keep in mind that if the bees die, it may not be your fault. It could be the quality of queens that come with bees. It could be varroa mites. But whatever it is, a beekeeper must be able to do something about the issue if caught early. Just because packages and nuc's have health certificates, is not a guarantee that queens are properly mated nor pest are not present. All that certificate can say is it may be healthy and apparently free of American foulbrood. Check this statement with your local bee inspector for the truth of the statement I made.

I am working now with two colonies of bees that have not been treated and have survived. I do feel it might be possible to raise varroa resistant bees. However, when I find a good queen, I can only expect to keep her for a few years. If queens are marked, one can discover just how often the bees replace their current queen. Most beekeepers might find that surprising.

I have been considering what is called "biotechnical methods." This is not a product that can be put into a bee hive but it is a management tool to control varroa mite reproduction cycles. So far, beekeepers are using acids, hard chemicals, and maybe no chemicals in their hives often with losses they can not understand because they are doing whatever they learn or are taught about keeping bees alive.

There is one issue all beekeepers need to be aware of – **the density of bees near where they keep bees**. Disease is spread easily and quickly by robbing bees. If mites are in a neighboring beekeeper's colonies, it is only a small matter of time before your bees are exposed to the mites. Thus, if one is just starting to keep bees, it would be a good idea to scout out who keeps bees near where you intend to place your bees. Your bees survival may depend on how many bees are within 2-3 miles of your hives.

Another issue is bee foraging areas. The density of human population has an effect on honey bee survival. If bees must be fed sugar syrup to keep them alive spring thru summer to fall, the hive location is not good. Thus, the selection of where bees are to be placed is more than just selecting a spot in your own yard.

Now is the time to plan how you intend to keep your bees alive and profitable. March is a month that is somewhat like a bomb going off. Bee population growth is rapid and beekeepers must be prepared to managing that bee population. Some will see swarms – I am thinking maybe a little later this year because of weather issues. But believe me, boxes and frames must be available before your bees need them. Feeding is also an issue.

Hive inspections should be more than picking up the back of a hive to determine its weight.

Thing to investigate:

- **Weak hives need help. It is more than feeding them. Have you ever thought about combining/uniting colonies.**
- **Feeding bees – shift from dry feeding to liquid food.**
- **Swarming will last thru to summer but now is a time to take action to prevent it if you follow conventional beekeeping practices.**
- **Making increases: Those making increases will need more equipment.**
- **It may be a bit early but raising queens is something to investigate.**

A PowerPoint presentation for this issue is attached to this publication:

It is titled April but by the time April arrives, information included on the PowerPoint presentation will be late information. Getting it now will give you time to think and prepare for this bee season.

I hope you enjoy the power point. More power point presentations will be added to future issues.