

2026 Stahlman Bee Notes

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Early Summer Beekeeping



The honeybee cycle of life adapts to the four seasons. Now that winter and spring are behind us, our management of bees must change as well. In many areas of the U.S. honey flows are in full swing. I note that most of the honey produced in the U.S. comes from those state boarding Canada.

Robbing is going to be an issue where the honey flow slowed or ended. Finding supers to add to strong colonies will be an issue for some. I have pointed out that the diversity of what bees do or need is based on where colonies are placed. It is all Location, location, location.

Bee populations: honeybees are reaching peak population levels.

- Swarming is an issue earlier in the season and it is still a possibility.
- Trying to inspect a hive at this time of year is made more difficult because colonies have so many bees.
- Finding queens in hives without queen excluders is extremely hard and upsetting to a colony of bees.
- By nature, when egg laying begins to decline, bees do not build comb unless the food supply continues with the need to store nectar and pollen.
- Temperatures during summer can be very hot making it uncomfortable to work bees. It is also uncomfortable for bees. Thus, a colony can be more aggressive than earlier in the season.
- Problems such as weak hives are easier to spot. Thus, management techniques such as feeding, replacing queens, and equalizing hives can be carried out to save bees before the fall season.
- Raising queens becomes more difficult due to the reduction of the drone populations.
- The bees still require honey stores. It takes a lot of stored honey just to feed the current population of bees, let alone the young bees still being produced by the colony. In fact, brood rearing continues here in Raleigh up to November or a bit later.
- Bee populations at this time of the year should cover 20 deep frames in a double deep hive. When honey supers are removed, the bee population will be more densely packed in the reduced space.

Ventilation Issues:



Crowded bees begin to move outside the hive when it is hot. This is normal and it is also normal to



see bees hanging below the bottom board or to the sides of a hive. This is an indication to you -- the bees could use more room. Adding supers is one easy solution. It could also be a time to make colony increases. With no prospects of more room and no foraging opportunities, a colony like this could easily starve.

There are many different opinions about hive ventilation. Years ago, I used 8 penny nails between the inner cover and top super to provide a way for air to escape from a hive and provide ventilation. Some may use popsicle sticks but nothing large enough to allow robbing bees to enter the hive.

We do know that honey bees can exist with small entrances to hives. Current teaching is to remove entrance reducers for the summer season to allow more air circulation into the hive. Studies by Seeley have indicated that bees prefer smaller entrances to swarm boxes and nesting locations. Entrance reducers should be used with weak colonies.

Honey bees prefer evaporative cooling

In order to reduce high air temperatures inside the hive, bees collect drops of water which are positioned in the hive and the bees fan their wings to circulate air. The evaporation of moisture will achieve a decrease in air temperature. Scientific studies done in England indicate that there are two main air flows inside a hive. The first enters the bottom of the hive on the left and flows upward and curves toward the left side. The second air flow also enters the hive from the bottom board but the air is directed to the right side of the hive and flows upward and reaches the openings at the top of the hive. This allows the majority of the frame area to be ventilated.



In the case of a hive with no “upper ventilation” the bees move hot air out the front entrance. Note two groups of bees fanning at this hive entrance. Clearly the collection of water and air movement during very hot days is important to a hive of honey bees.

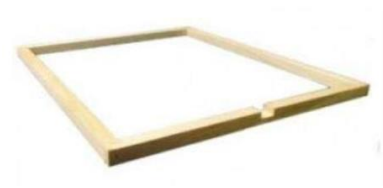
An **upper entrance** created by moving a super back an inch gives an opening both to the front and back of the hive.



I know of several beekeepers who feel adding an upper entrance to a hive helps bees returning with nectar and pollen. Nectar coming into the hive does not need to be transported up thru the brood chamber.

An “**Imirie Shim**” developed by George Imirie is simply a rim placed on a hive. It serves the same purpose.

Placed between the brood chamber and honey supers, it is designed to increase honey production and reduce traffic in the brood area. It provides another opening for hot air to escape from the hive.



How much summer ventilation a hive needs depends on many factors: local climate, the size of your colony, wind exposure, and sun exposure. I personally like some shade for my bees.

Others have noted that hives set in the sun will have less chalkbrood, small hive beetles, and Varroa mites. Working bees in full sun for me is not much fun.

There are some management techniques I use to reduce hive populations during hot summer heat. One is to make artificial splits. Brood breaks do two things:

1. Bee populations are reduced. House bees (younger bees) will still be able to restore the bee populations. There are techniques that can be used such as letting the bees raise a new emergency queen or cut down all queen cells and then when all brood has emerged, reunite the old queen to the hive in a nuc made up for that purpose. Any queen used to requeen a colony (even the old queen in a nuc) should be caged for a few days to let the bees become accustomed to her smell.
2. With hive losses currently around 50%, it makes sense to me to anticipate that some of my hives are not going to survive the winter. Dividing a strong hive to make up more hives is very doable with the time left before winter sets in. Splits made up with new queens offer better results than letting the colonies build up with the time loss of raising a queen. Remember splits reduce the number of bees available to provide for brood production. Thus, the hive with a queen will progress much faster than a hive allowed to raise an emergency queen. This is similar to the way bees reproduce naturally by swarming.



If one wants to make up hive increases -- now is the time to do it. Fall and winter are only four months away. I have seen hives made up with two frames of brood and a good queen put into a single deep hive body build into strong colonies during this four-month period. It does require feeding and checking the progress of the queen's egg laying ability.

Single deep hives can be overwintered successfully.

The above photo is a picture of my bee barn and yard where I made up new colonies years ago. The colonies are on pallets for easy moving. Any business must consider inventory and for commercial beekeepers, the number of colonies are important. I think the same principle applies to hobby beekeepers. Make up a colony or two each year to replace the colonies that die rather than buy package bees in the spring to replace dead-outs. If one gets too many hives, sell a few.