

Beekeepers Gazette

beekeepersgazette@bellsouth.net

March, 2014

What's in Bloom?

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

It is said often that if you keep honeybees, you will soon become a botanist.

Truer words have never been spoken. Beekeepers are always asking about and searching for nectar sources for their bees.

A beekeeper with numerous hives will likely be tempted to move his or her colonies to various nectar sources throughout the seasons to allow the honeybees better opportunities to make honey stores. An incomplete list of such sources would be Black Gum, Gallberry, Palmetto Palm, Chinese Tallow, Golden Rod and possibly Brazilian Pepper.

However a hobbyist beekeeper or as some say, a niche pollinator will never move their colonies out of their yard. This is fine.

Neighborhoods, subdivisions, parks and other developments provide nearly year around nectar sources that are wonderfully tasty.

Think of it this way; Home improvement stores, hardware stores, and garden centers are selling blooming flowers such as dogwoods, flowering pears, peaches, nectarine, various citrus and bedding and garden type plants year around.

Who could ask for more?

The only drawback is that small yards cannot support too many hives. That is why beekeepers with numerous colonies consider moving them to various locations.

So, my point is  there is almost always something blooming for the bees.

Whenever you hear a beekeeper ask what's in bloom, quite possibly each one is expecting a different answer. Remember this. There isn't any honey better than that from your hives.

To submit your articles for consideration, please e-mail us at

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Comments from the Editor

Here we are, in March already. By now, you have either done your splits or have a solid plan to guide you through the process. Hopefully, your swarms will be minimal. If not, there is no need to panic as a swarm will leave you with a young, vibrant queen that will make you proud. We've reached the time of year where **your** role has diminished and the bees will simply do their job. However, inspecting your hives periodically is still your job. That's what our subject matter covers this month, inspections. This subject is so broad that there have been countless articles, papers and opinions covering it. If you are a relatively newcomer to beekeeping, this issue should prove to be worth reading. Conversely you may have your own opinion that may differ from this newsletter's or know someone whose opinion differs from ours. Believe me whenever I say we are all correct. There is no right or wrong way to inspect a hive. As long as, whenever you close the hive, you understand what you have seen and you understand what you

need to do, and then you have been successful.

In past issues,  we have discussed the basics of promoting growth and making splits. That in itself has made you more proficient at inspections.

As you go through the process of inspecting your hives, take time to observe the activity going on in the hive. You'll see nurse bees tending to the queen, you'll see worker bees cleaning out cells for future egg laying or depositing nectar or pollen, you'll see foraging bees performing the waggle dance describing the location of floral sources and you'll see new bees emerging from pupation.

The activity inside your hive is amazing. Take time to enjoy it. Finally, as I point out in every issue, the Beekeepers Gazette is ever changing and is growing at a remarkable rate. We need your input and suggestions.

Let us hear from you.

Happy Beekeeping

Ray

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What to Inspect When You Inspect

This subject covers such a vast area, trying to cover it in one issue is somewhat intimidating.

Today, however, we will discuss how to inspect for general assessment and how to look for symptoms of illness.

Inspect your bees whenever the foraging bees are out of the hive. Whenever all the bees are inside the hive (early morning, late evening or poor weather), the task of inspecting is far more stressful.

Before we begin, light your smoker and always wear a veil.

Before you smoke the hive and before you attempt to open it, look closely at the front of the hive.

Look at the entrance of the hive. Is there any debris at the entrance? Dead larvae, mummies or excessive debris can signal health issues. Sawdust looking debris can be indicative of robbing bees chewing the capping's inside the hive.

Are the bees coming and going in a harmonious fashion? Are the bees bringing in pollen? If not, several things to consider are possibly; Lack of a nectar source? This time of year, there is more than likely something near you in bloom so this isn't likely a problem.

Next, if this is one of the hives you recently split, the chances are the foraging bees

returned to the parent hive after the split and the nurse bees in the split hive are satisfied with the pollen stores they have available because the new queen either hasn't emerged and/or hasn't begun laying. Without fresh larvae, there may not be a need for more pollen yet and you are probably feeding the newly made split, therefore the carbohydrates are being provided by you.

Lastly and what I deem most important, the queen is possibly not laying sufficient eggs, if any at all and there isn't much of a need for pollen right now. The bees store pollen to feed themselves and the larvae. Without significant larvae, the bees will bring in nectar instead of pollen.

While we are looking at the entrance, you will probably see a few bees with their abdomen pointing outwards and vigorously fanning their wings. They are spreading the pheromone that identifies their particular hive to aid the returning bees in finding their home.

Look on the ground around the entrance for excessive dead bees or excessive bees unable to fly or with deformed wings. There will normally be a few, but an excess can signify possible health problems such as Varroa Mites.

Now blow a puff or two of smoke into the front of the hive and wait a couple of minutes for the bees to settle down before removing the lid.

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Inspections Continued

If possible, do your inspection from the rear of the hive. The bees are far friendlier.

After removing the lid and before blowing more smoke into the hive, access the appearance of the bees on the tops of the frames.

You should be able to tell where your brood is the densest. The frames with plenty of larvae and eggs will have the most bees. The frames with mostly capped brood will have a few less. You should be able to look between the frames for new, white wax.

Now, give the hive another puff or two of smoke. Keep in mind; too much is as bad as not enough. Smoke the hive sparingly. Using your hive tool, loosen the ends of the frames. Be gentle. The bees will, at times react negatively to the vibrations you are causing.

Starting at the outside wall or the second or third frame in, gently remove a frame. The outside frames usually have fewer bees and provide an easier beginning point. Also, if you start in the middle, you could risk injuring the queen or never finding her.

You can lean the removed frame against the stand on its end. .

Look for the queen. If you do not see her, do not panic. Many bee-keepers have trouble finding the queen. You should consider marking your queens with a dot of paint.

Not only does this help you find her, but it also confirms the queen you are looking at is your original queen.



Sometimes they replace her by raising their own.

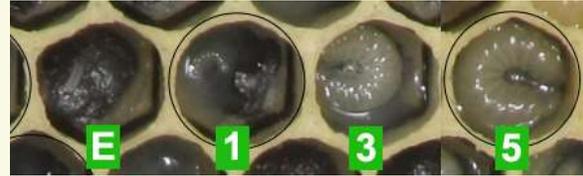


Image showing four of the honey bee development stages. The labels represent; E = egg, 1 = young larva, 3 = middle larva, 5 = old larva. Image can be found at

<http://www.extension.org/sites/default/files/EggYoungMiddleOldLarvae.png>

If you cannot find your queen, look for eggs. When you find eggs, you know your queen is okay and has been in your hive a couple of days ago. If you cannot find your queen, and see no eggs, then you need to assess what is wrong. Either the queen is dead or she has stopped laying or is a defective queen and cannot lay.

Here is another point to consider; the bees replace their queens frequently. In Florida, every 9 months isn't beyond expectation. If you find a brood-less hive then close it up for 10 days and then recheck it before buying a new queen. There is likely a virgin or a young queen in the hive that is not yet laying. Believe me, the bees know what they are doing and will usually fix the problem themselves.

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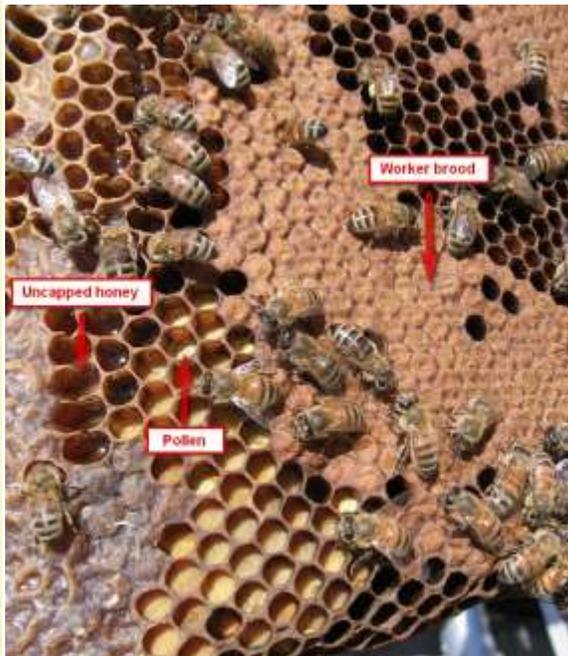
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Inspections Continued

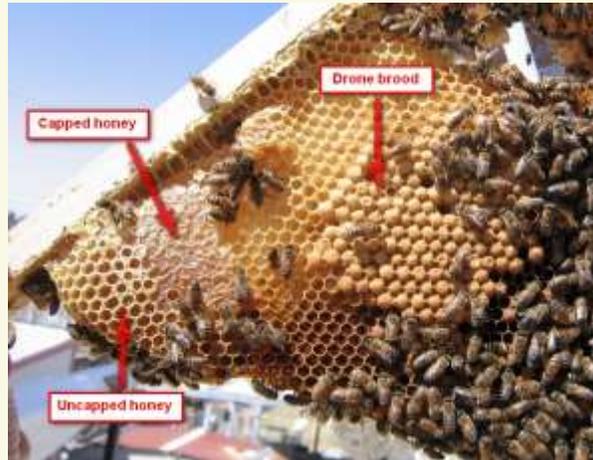
When you are holding a frame for inspection, be sure to hold it over the hive. This is so that if queen should fall off, she would fall back into the hive rather than in your yard. If she falls into the grass away from her hive, she may not find her way back in.

You also need to look for larvae with a pearly white color and having a moist appearance.

Notice the laying pattern. The laying pattern should have a mostly solid appearance. This applies to larvae as well as capped brood. There will usually be a few open cells that either the queen didn't lay in or the bees have removed the larvae or pupae for hygienic reasons.



Here's a picture of worker brood... Image can be found at;
<http://mistressbeek.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/beelesson-workerbrood.jpg>



Here's a picture of drone brood... Image can be found at;
<http://mistressbeek.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/beelesson-dronebrood.jpg>

A frame can typically have an arched shape of stored nectar, pollen and brood. Usually the brood will be close to the pollen nectar because the bees are constantly feeding the larvae. You can see this in the pictures. Pollen is usually orange or yellow in color but can vary depending on the flower source. It can sometimes look like dry powder in a cell, but sometimes it seems moist. Once you have examined the frames, place them back into the hive gently the same way you took them out.

Before you close the hive, move the frames tightly to the center. This will give you room to work the next time you inspect it.

Now that you've finished inspecting your hive, I hope you have a better understanding of the wonderful circle of life inside of your colonies

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Questions and Answers

This month's Q&A will field questions relating to last month's issue regarding splits and swarms. We received several good questions; however they seemed to follow a pattern.

Q. I'm getting ready to split the one hive that made it through the winter. It has two deep hive bodies. I want to move the top to a new base and then mix and match the frames from both.

Question 1: How far apart should the two be to prevent robbing?

Question 2: Can I put a medium box on top of each or should I wait a month? They are both full on honey and I hope brood....when I get done. Jim C.

A. You have a great question. This time of year, robbing normally isn't an issue. The bees have a fairly good nectar flow to work from, so they are busy with that. My suggestion would be to split both boxes equally with everything. I.e. eggs, larvae, sealed brood, bees, honey and pollen. Make sure there are plenty of eggs in the queenless box. If you can't locate the queen, make sure there are eggs in both boxes.

Move them as far apart as reasonable. If you can, leave the queen in the box not being moved.

The foraging bees will more than likely return to the original hive, but this isn't a problem.

There will be sufficient feed in the hive moved while the nurse bees create a queen cell. New foragers will emerge in a couple of days.

Do not open the queenless hive for 25-30 days while the bees make the new queen cell.

The bees could possibly abandon the new cell or ball the young queen.

Good luck and let me know how you do.

Q. I'm an active member of the Jacksonville Bee Association and really appreciate and look forward to your newsletters.

I took this picture Monday of my bees bearding on one of my hives. I've been feeding them most of the winter and have added honey b healthy to their sugar water over the last few weeks. I thought this was a swarm at first but noticed bees going into the hive.

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Questions and Answers Continued



Eventually the last 1/3 of the bees took flight but just circled the hive. I looked in every direction to see if I could see a distinct swarm leaving the yard and could not. It just looked like random flight.

I went into the hive the following day and was happy to see it was full of bees! Each frame was covered with bees with many drones on each. I could not find the queen (I'm now in favor marking queens) but did find several capped queen cells and went ahead and split the hive.

I made sure I had at least two capped queen cells in each hive. That night I

Put the new hive in the location of the original hive as it had fewer bees than the original hive. The next day the forages were returning to the original location and by the end of the day I had bees coming and going in both hives. So far everything looks good. My question is when should I go into the hive to check with for the new queen(s)? If I do not find the queen would it be late to purchase a new queen and introduce her into the hive? Kent F.

A: Wow. That is an incredible hive considering its February.

More than likely, excessive bearding such as this was on one of those incredibly warm days we have had and the flight you refer to was merely an orientation flight.

Now to answer your question, it sounds as if you have done everything correctly thus far.

My advice is to leave a hive splits alone for around twenty five to thirty days. (4 or 5 for the cell to hatch, 3-5 for the new queen to mate, 3-4 for her to begin to lay and 10 – 11 for the initial eggs to be capped. These numbers are only for illustration and could vary +or-)

If you open the split too soon, the bees could get anxious and could possibly ball (attack) the queen. Good luck.

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And Finally

Some changes have been made to the Beekeepers Gazette that I hope you will find helpful.

Our web page, www.unklerays.com will have the current issue of the Gazette as well as back issues beginning with issue 2. (Issue 1 has been retired)

We need your ideas for future issues

If you have a subject you would like us to consider

If you have something going on in your bee yard or club you would like us to consider

If you have questions that you would like answered, let us know.

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online at Beekeepers Gazette

The Editor
Ray Claxton

Dates to Remember

Thursday, March 6th will be training and testing for the University of Florida's Master Beekeeping Program

Friday and Saturday, March 7th and 8th is the University of Florida's Bee College.

Details for both at www.ufhoneybee.com

Saturday, March 15th, Clay County Extension Office with the help of NEFLHBA will have a Beekeepers Short Course.

For info, contact the David Nistler at the Clay Co. Extension Office at 904-269-6355 or dnistler@ufl.edu

Saturday, March 22nd, Nassau County Extension Office will host a Beekeepers Short Course.

For details, contact Amanda Burnett at the Nassau County Extension at 904-879-1019 or mandab@ufl.edu

Saturday, June 7th, the Jacksonville Beekeepers Association will host a Beekeepers Short Course.

For Details, contact Marilyn Young at jaxbees@jaxbees.com

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