

Apis m. Esoteria 26
Bees and Bears

Bear with me fellow Beekeepers.

What a tale I have to tell. These are just the bear facts. Three members of the club have met with Brer Bear and come back bearing tales of woe.

Brer Bear 7, Beekeepers 0

Just to review the facts: A bear caught in the act of destroying your bee hives may be shot in Georgia. You must turn the bear over to the game warden. If your hives are destroyed and you don't catch the culprit, take pictures with the date posted to the pictures and give them to the game warden. He might notify the DNR (Dept of Natural Resources) to come and catch the bear. You won't know if the captured bear is the culprit without paw prints or honey on his mustache. But it is one less bear in the neighborhood.

There is nowhere to relocate bears to, because there are so many bears, another one will immediately fill the empty territory. Also, there are documented instances of the relocated bear hiking home within a few days. They seem to be able to do about 20 miles a day.

The DNR bear trapper phone number is 770 535 5700. They are fairly responsive.

If you dispose of the bear, bury him deep and fast. You will need to know someone with a backhoe.

What is your alternative? A Big Dog! Or even a small yappy one. Bears don't recognize size, only ferociousness. You will have to feed the dog occasionally. So, maybe an electric fence system will work.

You have three choices of electric fence chargers, solar, car battery, or wall plug. Wall plug may require an extension cord. It is best to put the plug-in charger near the barn/house and run an overhead or underground insulated hot wire to the bee yard. The charger can send electricity for 6 miles. I like the idea of 3 hot wires with a ground wire (total of 2) between each. Hot, ground, hot, ground, hot. When the weather is hot and dry, you may not

have enough moisture in the ground to create a ground between the fence, bear, and earth ground back to the charger.

As the bear wiggles and squiggles to get through the five wires he will work the wire under his fur and fry his skin. He will usually back out. A buffalo will step forward when shocked. So be careful if you have buffalo in your area.

If you are more inclined to do a study on the types and frequency of bear visits, you can generally tell the experience level of your visitor by how messy he is. Young bears won't move your hives very far and then tear them apart and break everything. Older bears will pick up the stacked hive and move it to a comfortable location, set it down, dismantle it, and then dine on the bee larvae. Sometimes the honey supers won't even be bothered.

Bears can smell the grubs in the hive. Don't tell your grandchildren. "Winne the Pooh" is a lie. Bears do not directly eat honey. They are after the grubs. Bird feeders and outdoor garbage cans are prime bear food. Check with your neighbors to see if they are attracting bears. If they (your neighbors) won't change their ways you might...

You can tell the general maturity (size) of the bear by the diameter of the stools and how many pie plates the scat pile will fill. You might be able to identify which neighbor is feeding the bear by the type of bird food in the poop. Bears like dogs only poop 1-2 times a day. If you have 5 poop piles around your apiary, chances are you had 5 bears celebrating Thanksgiving. Again, scat size can tell you Mama, 2 cub twins, and last year's young 'un.

Remember there are lots of people living in this area who come from the concrete jungle. They think wildlife predation is cute. That is deer eating bird feed and gardens, bears eating cat food off the porch, possums and skunks on the deck. The only way to properly manage wildlife today is to thin the population using latent birth control techniques. My favorite technique is 150 grains of lead judiciously placed in the left ear during fall hunting season. The DNR can only stir the pot with relocation. Our countryside is carrying the maximum amount of wildlife for the food sources. This forces the critters to seek alternative food sources, which are always less than the best.

Safe and Happy Hunting.