Apis m. Esoteria 36

Managing for Sourwood

Start Managing an established hive to maximize sourwood honey collection in March. You need lots of bees so manage the queen to keep her at max egg laying.

As population grows keep them busy pulling wax as it requires the most bees for one task. Foragers bring in nectar, storage bees make and store honey, wax builders pull comb. To pull a lot of comb there should be enough bees that they are standing shoulder to shoulder as they work. You will need to feed any colony syrup and pollen patties to get a 10-frame hive body drawn comb and filled with stored honey. Then the bees will work on a honey super.

The first year you lose a lot of honey to comb drawing. Then every time you reuse that drawn comb you get more honey. This is the advantage of centrifugal honey extraction.

Starting with the second year of beekeeping, sort your frames by color when getting honey supers ready for the spring nectar flow starting with black berries and then tulip poplar. Hold the lightest (whitest) comb for the sourwood flow.

Depending on timing of the tulip poplar nectar flow (May) you may not want to go to a double deep colony in the first 6 months of a new colony (Package or Nuc). When the colony has pulled out 10 frames of comb and are nearly completed filling it with brood and honey, it is time to go to work on honey supers not the second hive body. You can feed pollen substitute during honey collection. Pollen patties placed above the brood area top bars will keep the queen stimulated to maximize egg production. This will keep the most forager bees in the pipeline for normal attrition due to heavy workload.

You would prefer that the queen in a single hive body, does not go up and lay eggs in a honey super. If this does happen just make sure the queen is down in the hive body and install a queen excluder. Let the bees hatch out. They can go through the queen excluder to do their normal work. The only damage done is a little wax darkening in the brood area. This will not hurt you spring honey.

A queen excluder is a honey excluder. Honeybees come in small, medium, and large size. A large bee full of nectar cannot go through a queen excluder. I drill 3 each 3/8th inch holes in the lower edge of the finger grip on a honey super. Make sure the holes are clean and not "fuzzy". The bees will use it as a "back door" to bypass the normal hive entrance. This speeds up honey storage. When it comes time to remove the honey super for honey extraction, I place duct tape over the holes.

When you draw new comb, honey is diverted from storage to wax building. It takes 7 lbs. of honey to make one pound of wax. Use sugar syrup to make the wax and it will be pearly white. There will be no inadvertent pollen contamination to make it yellow. When the sourwood starts to flow all the nectar will go to honey production.

If you don't have enough new comb for sourwood, during tulip poplar flow, on the second super, alternate frame of foundation with frame of comb. The bees will pull the comb and start filling it with tulip poplar honey. Once the frame is drawn out take it out of the honey super and let the bees rob it clean. Place the frames you want to rob in an empty hive body away from the apiary. The honeybees will be attracted to the smell of the open honey cells. That honey will go back into a hive, and you can store the clean drawn white comb until sourwood. The more drawn comb in the sourwood super, the more sourwood honey collected.

If you have open frames of tulip poplar honey at the transition to sourwood, leave them in the first sourwood super (or last spring flow) so the bees can finish capping them over. Mark the unfilled frames that will have sourwood placed in them with a felt tip marker so you can separate the two types of honey at extraction time.

You want to put sourwood honey in the lightest preferably white comb you have. Dark comb will stain the honey darker. Sourwood is the lightest honey that can be collected. You might be able to use light comb for sourwood 2 years, then draw out new comb for the sourwood and use the old sourwood comb frames for spring flow honey.

If you have a choice, place all pulled comb in the first sourwood super. Then place partially drawn and foundation frames in second super. The sourwood season may be so short you only get one super. Don't waste the honey drawing comb early in the nectar flow.

Honey super removal can be fast or slow. I prefer slow and thorough. I do not use chemicals to drive my bees down out of the super. A little too much temperature on that workday can cause the chemical smell to get into your honey. A bee escape allowing the bees to wander down over 2-3 days is too slow.

I puff all my hive entrances in the apiary at one time with very little smoke. Then I remove my supers and stack all of them on edge and blow the bees out with a leaf blower. I then stack the supers with a hive telescoping cover as a bottom and another as the top to keep the bees out while I take them to the honey house.

When it comes time to extract your honey look at every frame against a 300-watt shop light. Separate the lightest looking frames from the darker. Extract the lighter ones first. Scrape the extractor down with a rubber spatula to get most of the light honey out. This is more work but maximizes higher quality honey. Then change the honey catch bucket before

extracting the amber colored frames. You could come up with three colors of honey each tasting differently. Pollen provides the color and the flavor to honey.

After the sourwood season ends and you have removed all your honey supers and extracted the honey, place the "wet" empty honey supers back on your weakest hives. This will help the weak colonies store more winter honey with less work. Balance the colony populations "equally" across the entire apiary. If you are not using double hive bodies, put one honey super on each hive for the bees to put excess winter food in. Treat for varroa mites and start feeding sugar syrup. July and August are dry months. October is the driest of the year. There are very few flowers blooming until the goldenrod starts in September. Hence, you are in a nectar dearth, and the bees cannot put up much honey for the winter. Help them out.

When you pulled the honey supers you reduced the space in the colony, making it overcrowded.

Right after the end of nectar flow the colony experiences the most intense desire to swarm. Stop this before it happens. The hive is full of food, the brood chamber is full of bees, the honey area is full of honey, and the population of bees is at the high point of the year.

Pull off extra bees and 5 frames brood and food with the "old" queen. Without a queen the colony will not swarm, leaving the most foragers in your bee yard. In July and August all these workers that did not swarm can draw comb and make honey for the winter. The old large colony will grow a new queen. There are still plenty of drones in July and August to get a well mated new queen. This queen will have 3 months to get settled in before fall and winter. Next spring, having laid eggs already she will start next year as a 2-year-old and lay eggs more vigorously than the 2-3 year old queen you put into the nuc.

This is a good time to expand your single hive body colonies into double hive bodies. Outside of the brood area remove every other drawn frame that probably has honey and pollen in them. Replace them with foundation. Use the every-other pattern of comb/foundation. Set the removed frames in the center of the new hive body using the alternating pattern until you run out of drawn comb. Feed the colony like crazy and they will draw out most of the empty frames and fill them with honey for the winter. This replaces the need to put a honey super on for them to store winter honey. Next year you will start the spring with a double hive body colony with 60,000 bees instead of 30,000. You will collect more honey next year.

By the end of sourwood season, you would like to have one nuc for every hive that you used for honey collection. This is the result of swarm management before and after nectar flow. These winter over nucs will be your replacements for any hives that die during the winter. If

you don't need them, you can always sell them (give away) in the spring. Or you can keep them as sources for new queens later in the year.