

Bee Chronicles

5 August 2025

This year is a failure in Sourwood honey collection.

From Eljay to Clayton Georgia most all bee keepers are reporting a poor crop.

The spring blooms came 4 weeks early. The sourwood started close to normal (early June), after a 4 week break after the Tulip poplar tree stopped blooming.

During both nectar flows the bloom was robust (lots of flowers). The weather was generally good. Not too windy, not too rainy, minimal hail. There were some isolated spot storms that could have affected your apiaries.

Bee populations on wintered over colonies were good. There was some swarming reported. This indicates that those populations developed well.

However, I collected very little spring honey above the requirements used by the colony to develop brood. Very few full shallow honey supers. The honeybee populations grew nicely.

I thought I was set for sourwood. But no! Off of bigger hive populations I collected less sourwood. The bees were working but all the nectar was going to population growth.

Some queens actually reduced their egg laying. You could see this in the brood area shrinking.

This reaction by the honeybees follows their practices during a Dearth Period.

Again, we should not have had a nectar dearth. Good flowers, good moisture, good temperature and plenty of forager bees.

I hesitated to syrup feed the strong colonies for fear of syrup/honey contamination. I did in-hive feeding on my nucs.

The nucs continued to develop well.

I stopped chemical varroa mite control in honey production hives in May. I did brood breaks in large population colonies in May and June as warranted by

moving the queen and a few frames to nucs. This was intended to reduce (but not eliminate) the mite count in the strong colonies. To date it has been 3 months since chemical mite control which I will restart now that all edible honey has been removed.

My objective now is to grow bee populations until the end of October. The goal is to have colonies brimming over in the hive boxes going into winter. I will feed syrup as fast as I can to build up the colony stores. I will feed powdered pollen substitute in a field feeder to achieve the same goal. The bees might not take in the pollen substitute if there is enough flower pollen (goldenrod). I just want the colonies to have as much food as they can gather.

WHAT WENT WRONG!

The only thing I can think of is the bees (collectively and individually) were SICK. They could not work as long (daily) or as hard (number of foraging trips) or live as long (4-6 wks) as foragers should.

The queen was doing her job laying eggs. The growing larvae required normal food supplies. But the foragers did not bring in enough volume of food to exceed the brood requirements which would have been stored as robbable honey.