

Beekeeping 101 by Matthew Lucas

This is probably not an article that you were expecting to see in your Buckeye Trapper. I started trapping over twenty years ago and became a beekeeper last year. The rush that I have received being a beekeeper has reminded me of my first year as a trapper. I was overwhelmed by the wonderful people that I met when I first started trapping. Everyone was extremely helpful and truly wanted me to succeed. I have been lucky enough to meet the same high caliber type of people as a new beekeeper.

I started to get interested in bees when I noticed that my vegetable garden was not being pollinated. I was forced to hand pollinate my zucchini plants and realized that I hadn't seen any honey bees at my house in years. Thoughts of becoming a beekeeper started a few years ago while I was attending Honeyfest in Lithopolis, Ohio. Meeting local beekeepers and seeing their demonstration hives was fascinating. My interest was still high at Honeyfest a couple of years ago so I started asking about how I could get started in beekeeping. Everyone was willing to assist me and told me to join a beekeeping club. I attended meetings at a couple of different clubs before joining Scioto Valley Beekeepers in Circleville, Ohio.

My first step was to determine if I was allergic to bee stings. Everyone told me that getting stung is rare but I wanted to make sure that I would be ok if I did happen to get stung. I was highly allergic to several things, including bee stings, when I was young. I had grown out of all of my other known allergies and wanted to make sure that I was in the clear when it came to bee stings. I visited a local allergist and was cleared to become a beekeeper.

I started reading everything that I could find on beekeeping. I was amazed when I found out how important bees are to our way of life. One third of the food we eat is made possible because of bees. The almond groves in California pay commercial beekeepers to haul their bee hives across the country to provide pollination services for the almond trees. Local orchards pay beekeepers for their services to pollinate their apples and other fruits.

Beekeepers are like trappers in that everyone has their favorite way of doing things. You can ask five different beekeepers how to do something and you'll get six different answers. The people that you meet in a club are priceless. I have bothered many of my club's members and they have all been more than willing to answer my questions and help me. I am especially lucky because the Scioto Valley Beekeepers try to assign a mentor to all of their new beekeepers. I read all of the beekeeping books that I could get my hands on and quickly learned that the bees don't read the books. Bees don't always do what you think they should just like that old raccoon that manages to always avoid the trap you've set.

I ordered my hive components and started assembling everything in February. Hive components can be purchased from local vendors or on the internet. I purchased most of my items from either Conrad's Hive and Honey in Canal Winchester, Ohio or Simpson's Bee Supply in Danville, Ohio. I ordered my bees from Conrad's because of their location and their great reputation for quality bees. The bees will cost you about eighty dollars and the rest of the equipment will cost between two and five hundred dollars depending on how much you want to spend. There are many items that you don't need but you may want to have anyway.

The bees arrived, on April 8th, in an 8"x14"x10" box that was screened on both sides. I ordered a 3 pound package which I believe to be the norm. I watched a bee package installation DVD a few more times the night before I was going to install the bees into their new hive. I picked up my package of bees on Friday night and couldn't wait to get off of work on Saturday so that I could install my new bees into their new hive. Everything went as planned and my life as a beekeeper had begun.

The hive gets checked every week or every other week during your first year. A routine inspection takes less than an hour and that includes the time it takes to light the smoker. Most beekeepers only check their hives every three to four weeks after the first year. There are generally more inspections during a beekeepers first year because your curiosity gets the best of you and you need to learn how the hive works and what is normal.

Many new beekeepers don't get any honey from their new hive the first year. The bees are busy building comb and storing enough honey for themselves. The bees will need to have over forty pounds of stored honey in order to get them through the winter. Beekeepers don't get honey until their bees have their honey. Honey is usually harvested in September with an additional harvest in June if the bees are productive and weather conditions are right. I have been told that you can get over forty pounds of honey off of a single hive.

Honey bees are very self-reliant and don't need us for much once we have ensured that their water needs are met. You may need to supply them with some sugar water in the spring and/or fall but the time commitment is minimal. There are a few pests and diseases that must be looked for and treated as necessary. One animal that could be a problem for bees is skunks. Skunks have been known to be an issue for beekeepers. The advantage of knowing how to trap could definitely be beneficial with this problem. Knowing how to trap could make you a great asset for the other beekeepers in your area. Other beekeepers may ask for your assistance in eliminating their skunk problems and might let you trap other animals while you're there.

My trapping years have always started in September, ramped up in October and were in full swing November through February. Beekeeping starts requiring your time in March and continues until September with only one to two hours of time after that until the following March. The two hobbies seem to fit well together.

Some beekeepers are into beekeeping for the money, some for the fresh honey, some for the pollination the bees provide and others for the pure joy of watching the bees. The one thing they all have in common is their love for their bees.