

Bone Dry Ridge

A little bit of everything farm



Fall 2011 news from Bone Dry Ridge

Hello Everyone

Fall is a very difficult time for bees. It is the season when all of us get very annoyed at Yellow Jackets, but this time of year they are deadly to honeybees. In the fall when it takes a while to warm up in the morning, the Yellow Jackets are deadliest to the bees. They are active at much cooler temperatures than honeybees, so in the early mornings they raid the



bee hives. They kill and eat the defenseless bees, the larvae and the honey. The severity of these attacks changes from fall to fall. This fall one was particularly bad. One morning as I walked by our hives I noticed, to my horror, thousands and thousands of Yellow Jackets covering the outsides of the hives. We could not just spray and kill the buggers, since that would, of course also kill the bees. We waited until nightfall, opened up the hives and removed all the Yellow Jackets we could find (there were hundreds on the inside of the hives),

then closed the hives up completely except for a very small opening for the bees to defend and use to come and go. This was not enough. The Yellow Jackets were still able to enter. The next thing we did was to close the hives up at night and not open them up until mid-morning, when the honeybees were more active. The Yellow Jackets were still winning. This was war and the Yellow Jackets were winning. At this time the Yellow Jackets had killed three of our five hives, so we decided the only thing to do was to remove the bees from this battlefield. After dark, (it is best to move bees at night) we took them to a farm, located just over 3 miles from us, "as the crow flies". When you move bees, you either move them no more than three feet or you move them farther than 3 miles, otherwise they get very confused. The new location was much better, just a few Yellow Jackets around that we were able to catch in traps. We are hoping these poor bees will survive the winter. One of the hives is strong but the other is weak. Only time will tell.

I have often tried to find redeeming qualities in the Yellow Jackets, since they are simply the only creatures I have a hard time liking. But to this day I have not come up with any. This fall I definitely was not in the mood to even try.

Over the years we have had anywhere from one to seven hives. We have caught many swarms right here at the farm. Living on a ridge has it's advantages. There is only one way out of this valley and that is over this Bone Dry Ridge. We just set up the empty bee boxes and hope a swarm moves in. It happens about 50% of the times. We will clean up the hives the Yellow Jackets killed and hope to catch swarms next spring or summer.

This summer, I received a grant from NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) for almost a thousand plants that help pollinators. For years I have wanted to completely cover the vineyard in low-growing flowering plants that help extend the season for our bees, so this grant was a great match. It was quite the back breaking job to plant about a 1000 tiny little plants. That is all the funds cover. Now it is done and I'll just have to wait for them to grow. Patience is needed when dealing with plants. It is good to remember the saying, the first year you seed, the second year they creep and the third year they leap. The seedlings I planted were many different kinds of thyme, which flower in the early spring and then again in the fall, and make them great season extenders for bees. Next year I will plant lavender and heather, which also extend the season not just for my bees, but for all the native pollinators.

As expected, we only had one calf this fall. Raggi had a little girl we call Abigail. She is of course absolutely adorable. She has the same color as her mom. Sky will have her calf in the spring and then we should be back on schedule, having calves only in the spring. Spring is a good season to be born. It is also lambing time and so I have my eye on everyone.



This summer was a nice lamb summer for me. The lambs came out just at the weight I like. If only I could order that every year. As many of you know, I bring the sheep down to the lowlands in the summer and they get to graze the fallow fields of neighboring vegetable farms. I move them in my trailer from one farm to another every two weeks or so. They are often grazing right along Independence Road, the main road in our community, so word has gotten out that my sheep and I are mobile. I have had people stop me on the road and ask me if I would bring the sheep to their farm fields. Many people live on acreage but don't keep animals, so they have fields laying fallow for years. It certainly is nice to be popular like this, and it gives me a chance to meet neighbors I have never met before. We now have many more options for summer grazing than we did before. A very good thing, since there are more and more sheep in the valley. A young farming couple, Drew and Zowie have moved into our community. They are farming for the first time and decided to do mostly chickens, but they also have a few sheep. I was of course very happy they chose Icelandic sheep and I have been helping them find their footing in their new endeavor. This summer we shared grazing areas and it was nice to do the chores with them. Things went so much faster. It does not take that long to move the sheep, but moving the shelter is a pain in the butt. I insist on giving my animals shelter at all times, so even if moving the shelter is a drag, it gets done every time.

Have a good Winter.

Your farmer and shepherdess *Selma*