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What to get your beekeeper for Christmas

I thought I would take a break from writing about honey bee colony management and honey bee biology this month and, instead, write a lighthearted season-appropriate article. Three years ago, I wrote a very brief article (one page) in *American Bee Journal* regarding what a person can get the beekeeper in his/her life for Christmas. I would like to do something similar this year.

Beekeepers have unique tastes. We also have unique needs (who else needs a smoker...). In the spirit of gift-giving, Christmas and Hanukkah provide us the opportunity to think of the beekeepers in our lives and get them a gift that can make a lasting impact or support their interest in bees. What follows is a list of items/opportunities that I think will appeal to many beekeepers. Hopefully, you can find something in the list that fits your beekeeper.

1) Books — Honestly, you will never go wrong when getting your beekeeper a new book. All beekeepers like books about bees. There are hundreds of books about bees. Perhaps your beekeeper is a book collector. If so, you might consider finding old editions of classic titles such as *The Hive and The Honey Bee* or *ABC & XYZ of Bee Culture*.

There are dozens of books about basic beekeeping, books that are foundational to the craft. However, there are at least as many specialist books about bees, their colonies, their behavior and ecology. These would be great gift options for the advanced beekeeper.

2) Subscription to a national bee magazine — There are two national magazines that address beekeeping-related topics. They include *American Bee Journal* (the one you are reading now) and *Bee Culture*. Personally, I feel you should subscribe to both. Both provide information that can be of great use to beekeepers. The subscription prices are not that high. Furthermore, your beekeeper will get one every month. It is the gift that keeps on giving.

3) Microscope — My wife and I were in Scotland in September. I was speaking at the Scottish Beekeepers Association's annual convention. I had a good time browsing the vendor area. Interestingly, a microscope company was there as a registered vendor. They were selling compound and dissecting scopes to beekeepers. Scottish beekeepers (and other beekeepers in the UK) really focus on being able to see and understand honey bee anatomy, diseases, and pests. As such, it is common to meet beekeepers

in the UK who own scopes of both types so that they can explore honey bee anatomy for themselves, conduct their own *Nosema* dissections, etc. I think that more beekeepers in the states should do the same. These days, you can purchase compound and dissecting scopes that are reasonably priced. You should consider purchasing one for your beekeeper.

4) Dissection Kit — Along with the scope, you should purchase your beekeeper a basic dissection kit. This will include forceps, small scissors, tweezers, a small magnifying glass, etc. The same vendor I mentioned selling microscopes at the Scottish meeting was also selling dissection kits. My wife and I left the meeting with a kit for me and one for her father (the other beekeeper in our family). Even if your beekeeper does not use it for dissecting bees, he/she will find a myriad of other uses for the different tools included in the kit.

5) Pollen Trap — I am a believer that you need to go out on a limb every once in awhile and try something you have never tried. Most beekeepers I know have never tried a pollen trap. Go ahead; expand your horizons. Get your beekeeper a nice pollen trap and encourage him/her to use it in the coming bee season.

6) Mead Kit — Mead kits make good gifts for beekeepers wishing to expand the list of value-added hive products they offer to consumers. The art of mead making is ancient. Some historians suggest that honey is the first sugar product that humans ever fermented. Mead is discussed in human literature (the “mead halls” in *Beowulf* as an example). I think its history alone makes it worth exploring. Furthermore, mead making appeals to the creative side of people, given the countless ways mead can be produced, flavored, etc. The mead making kits and how-to guides are relatively inexpensive, and could be good gifts for your beekeeper.

7) Trailer — Every beekeeper needs a trailer. For commercial beekeepers, this need is met only at the scale of a semi-trailer. Sideline beekeepers often invest in one- or two-ton vehicles for the benefit of the flat beds they have. Even hobby beekeepers should have a trailer. Why? All beekeepers need to move bees at one point or another. New and used trailers abound and make good gifts for the migratory beekeeper.

8) Ratchet straps — Many people have ratchet straps already but I feel that every beekeeper should have a few, maybe 10 – 15 or more, straps. Ratchet straps are extremely useful for a multitude of reasons. I find them nearly indispensable when moving bees. You can use them to secure a hive vertically (securing them around the entire colony from top to bottom) or use them to secure a hive in a vehicle. They are cheap, available a lot of places, and worth having.

9) Hive tool — I know you are thinking to yourself that your beekeeper already has a hive tool. My response to that is that a beekeeper can never have enough hive tools. Beekeepers lose hive tools all the time...all the time. So, go head and get a few more. They make good stocking stuffers.

10) Personalized hive tool or smoker — I spoke at a beekeeper meeting in Ohio a few years ago. I believe that it was a joint meeting between two local beekeeper clubs. After finishing, both clubs gave me a personalized item, one club a smoker with my name engraved

on it and the other club a hive tool with my name engraved on it. I have both in my office. I think personalized hive tools and smokers make great gifts.

11) Gift certificate for an equipment vendor or queen/package bees — Gift certificates from bee-related enterprises (equipment companies, producers of queens/package bees, etc.) will provide your bee enthusiast the opportunity to get what they know they want, but have been hesitant to purchase. Christmas is a great time of year to stock up on beekeeping knick-knacks. There usually are big sales around Christmas and New Year’s, making gift certificates given at this time usually worth more than the face value of the certificate.

12) Custom honey labels or a business sign — My wife came up with this idea and I quite liked it. The idea is that you could offer to hire a professional design artist to work with your beekeeper to design a unique, snazzy label for his/her honey jars or a company sign that can be used to advertise the honey business. This could be a good long term gift if it helps increase revenue for the beekeeper.

13) Subscription to an online beekeeper training program — All good beekeepers realize that they need to continue learning about the craft. To that end, a number of good online beekeeper education programs are available. These online courses are offered by Penn State, NC State, the University of Montana, and more are springing up. My team and I are even in the process of moving our Master Beekeeper Program to an exclusively online program. You should consider getting your beekeeper a subscription to such a program. They are developed by professional bee educators, so the information provided in the programs is top notch and expertly delivered. These programs grant direct access to experts in the field and surely can help the beekeeper improve his/her management efforts.

14) Trip to a national or international meeting — I am a big believer in beekeeper meetings. All beekeepers would benefit by joining their local bee club and

attending their monthly meetings. They also should be involved with their state organization. These are a given. However, I also believe that beekeepers should try to attend the yearly national meetings and even the international beekeeper meetings. My knowledge of bees, bee science, and beekeeping began to expand rapidly when I started to attend national and international meetings. I find that beekeepers learn a lot when they hear the perspective of other beekeepers. At a conference, you might pick up on a new management style, discover a useful beekeeping gizmo, or even make valuable industry contacts that will expand your horizons. I have learned so much from other beekeepers and other scientists, even those from other countries where beekeeping management differs from how we do things in the U.S. I have a friend who says “everyone has something that they can teach you.” I think this is a good way to look at other people. Go ahead, register your beekeeper for a national or international bee meeting. Heck, get two registrations and go with him/her. You will not regret it.

15) Chance to meet beekeeper “idol” — You can give your beekeeper a trip to see his/her favorite bee guru of choice. Beekeeping is a small fraternity, but nearly everyone has someone who they admire in the craft. Call these gurus the “rock stars of beekeeping” if you will. You always can arrange a meeting between your beekeeper and their beekeeping idol.

16) Specialized beekeeping training event — I really like the idea of giving someone the opportunity to attend a training event on some advanced beekeeping topic. For example, I know that there are multiple queen rearing short courses offered around the country. This can include a focus on topics such as instrumental insemination of honey bee queens. There are short courses on honey bee diseases and pests, candle/value added hive product production, nuc and package bee production, etc. Some of these can be pricey but I am certain your beekeeper will appreciate the gift.

Philanthropic opportunities:

There are some individuals who do not need more gifts but rather take a different approach to "receiving" gifts. Those individuals use holidays like Christmas as an opportunity to make someone else's life better. Such opportunities exist in the bee world as well. For example, a number of non-profit aid organizations offer you the opportunity to sponsor bee hives for people in developing countries. World Vision, for example, does this. You can visit their website (<http://www.worldvision.org/> or <https://donate.worldvision.org/give/bee-hive>). Heifer International (<http://www.heifer.org/> or <https://www.heifer.org/gift-catalog/animals-nutrition/honeybees-donation.html>) does something similar. Other groups, such as Bees for Development (<http://www.beesfordevelopment.org/>), use donations to train beekeepers in developing countries. What a great way to give bees and a livelihood to others.

You also can donate money to organizations supporting bee research, extension and instruction. These can be universities, local bee clubs, state bee clubs, etc. A couple of such groups come to mind. They include Project Apis m (<https://www.projectapism.org/>) and the Bee Informed Partnership (<https://beeinformed.org/>). Organizations such as these use the funds to support bee research and extension, ultimately helping beekeepers everywhere. You can even donate to building and infrastructure efforts. For example, I know that there is a new bee research and extension facility at the University of Minnesota. We are building a new facility at the University of Florida. Many beekeepers have supported both efforts, and other initiatives like them. With some imagination and searching for an appropriate organization that matches your beekeeper's philosophy, there are opportunities to recognize your beekeeper through philanthropic efforts.

I hope some of these ideas prove useful to you this holiday season and that your beekeeper will be happy if he/she receives these as gifts. In the meantime, my family (Amanda, Mathias, Analy, Jude,

and Evenly Grace) and I would like to wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

December 2017 marks the end of my fourth year serving as a columnist for *American Bee Journal*. I have thoroughly enjoyed writing articles for the journal and its readers. Many of you probably have noticed that I was unable to provide articles as regularly as I would have liked during 2017. This was due to a few reasons. First, life is getting a bit busier at work. The Florida beekeepers successfully lobbied the Florida government to build a new bee lab at the University of Florida. Planning/design/fundraising/etc. for this building have taken a lot of my time. Furthermore, my lab has grown to the point that it has become harder for me to satisfy the

demands of work and stay on top of my articles for the journal.

Finally, and more importantly, my four children are getting older and their schedules are beginning to fill (exponentially it seems). Increasingly more of my time is spent on their interests. For these reasons, I plan to take a hiatus from my column in 2018. This will allow me to see the completion of the new lab at UF and package my existing articles, those written to date, into a book that I plan to finalize by mid-2018. I hope to begin writing new articles for the column in mid-to-late 2018 or in early 2019. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for reading my articles. I hope that they have made you appreciate honey bees more and made beekeeping a little more enjoyable for you. I wish you a productive 2018. Happy beekeeping.

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