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Top-Bar Beekeeping: Organic Practices for Honeybee Health

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Heather Harrell
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Farmers who seek a guide to hive maintenance told through a thoughtful personal narrative will benefit from the discussion of this topbar style of beekeeping. The first-person style of the book allows a window into the practices of the topbar beekeeper while conveying a wealth of knowledge and a well-researched comparison of hive practices. The book is appropriate for beginning beekeepers as well as those experienced but looking for information on natural and organic beekeeping practices.

The book's ten sections discuss optimal practices of an organic beekeeper juxtaposed with discussion of industry standard practices and their drawbacks. Each section contains stories of the authors' successes and failures as well as diagrams and pictures to explain everything from hive design to plant species for optimal pollination.

Chapter 2, "The Supercreature," contains a thorough discussion of the social and industrial structure of a bee colony for farmers inexperienced with keeping a hive. The following section, "Beekeeping Basics," discusses issues such as being stung, placing a hive, and trapping a swarm of bees for commercial use. The authors' familiar voices elevate the book from a simple how-to manual to a memoir of common mistakes and earned victories in the beekeeping process.

In "The Seasons," section, Crowder and Harrell deal with diverse problems in an accessible way. The chapter provides succinct answers to common questions that beekeepers would have. When contemplating dividing a hive, they suggest: "Ideally, the queen would be moved to a new yard altogether, but this is not absolutely essential." In addition to dealing with times of the year, the chapter addresses a common pest for hives: bears. "It is important to set up the bear fence first.," advise the authors. "It is inconsiderate to bees and bears to leave bees unprotected in bear territory."

Whether the reader is looking to start their own hive or simply increase their knowledge of honeybees, the book provides interesting and detailed discussions of all aspects of raising them. Crowder and Harrell offer not only advice on how to get started, but an in-depth discussion of all aspects of keeping a hive, from bee capture, breeding, and selection to honey processing. They have crafted a book that is both informative and engaging, filled with introspective advice and practical knowledge.

AUBREY BLANCHE (August 28, 2012)

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