

SOARING CAPITAL BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

MISSION STATEMENT: "To educate, promote and teach beekeeping and have fun."

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2017 MEETING HELD AT

7:00PM AT MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH

There were about 20 members that attended the meeting.

Our president, Lenny welcomed everyone and turned the meeting over to Burt, who described and passed around some sign-up sheets he created based on the discussions at the January SCBA meeting. One is for a swarm list, where one could write down info to be posted to our website, if one was interested in receiving swarm calls/e-mails, including how far one was willing to travel to get a swarm. Historically beekeepers have been willing to catch swarms for free. We get "free bees" (some would say the best kind of bees), and the often grateful caller gets the bees taken away. This can be a wonderful experience for both, with the caller getting to witness one of the true wonders of the natural world, and possibly learn a little bit more about bees and what they are doing. A package of bees is somewhat like an artificial swarm, although it is not often made of only related bees, it usually is available earlier in the year, and it usually costs over \$100.00. A natural swarm "prime swarm" is often is around the same size as a three pound package, although they can be larger or smaller. The bees are usually primed to produce wax and draw wonderful worker comb. Swarm calls can get tricky if the swarm is high in the air, or if the weather has turned poor after the swarm left, forcing them to use up the honey they are carrying with them and potentially creating a defensive "dry swarm". Usually swarms are quite gentle and a real pleasure to work with. Burt also passed around a sign-up sheet for members to list other websites they have for potential links on our website.

Reminder – Geneva Bee Conference is March 18. Program information was passed around. Last year was program with Mike Palmer and Tom Seeley as the main presenters. Fairly close. Often attracts regional/national speakers. There may be enough people going to carpool.

Lenny passed around two handouts for attendees to take. One was from an American Bee Journal article on a way to determine varroa mite density from a 300 bee sample. The other was an article on a discussion on treatment vs. treatment-free beekeeping.

Lenny shared that many club members seem to be experiencing higher losses this winter. This is concerning because we had a good fall flow of nectar and pollen, a mild winter so far with plenty of opportunities for cleansing flights, and usually winter losses actually show up in late winter early spring. Last winter, almost all members reported at most moderate losses, with almost everyone having at least one colony surviving, and some beekeepers reporting fairly low levels of losses. This winter some members have had total or extremely large % losses. The Finger Lakes Bee Club in Ithaca is also reporting concerns over higher winter losses this year. Is something new going on? There is speculation that it may well be varroa/varroa transmitted pathogen complex related.

Ed put up on the big screen looks at two excellent websites: NY Bee Wellness (beewellness.org) and Bee Informed (beeinformed.org). They track reports of colony losses as well as provide information to assist beekeepers in diagnosing colony loss causes.

If for some reason you have any colonies that are light in weight – running low on stores – and you think they might not have enough food to make it through until a steady supply of incoming nectar and pollen becomes available, consider doing something to prevent them from starving. The upcoming predicted warm weather provides a great opportunity to check on the colonies. If your colonies are light, please consider why – was too much honey harvested last fall? Were the bees not fed enough, early enough, to make sure that they entered winter with enough food? If they are light, it is better to take steps to prevent them from starving. The bees need to be able to be in close contact with food if it is to be used in the winter when they are clustered. If you have any frames of capped honey in reserve, or from a dead-out that is determined to have died from something other than American Foulbrood, you could place one or more frames – trade them out, so that the edge of the cluster is in direct contact with the honey. One could also add another box (deep or super) with frames of honey on top of the top box of the colony if it were available. If the cluster is at the top of the top box, and large enough to move up to the added stores, this can work well. In an emergency, dry sugar can be placed directly on the top bars, or over the hole in the inner cover (“mountain man/camp method”). Patties could also be used, being added under the inner cover, but it is important to remember that the cluster must be in contact with the food, as they can starve with it only inches away. Also be aware, that as colonies ramp up their brood rearing as spring approaches, their honey consumption increases dramatically. Sometimes the strongest colonies in early spring die from starvation during a cold snap that stops or slows incoming nectar.

Main Program: Examination of frames/combs/colonies that have died out since the first killing frost last fall until now. Several members brought in combs to be evaluated.

Lenny provided tweezers, alcohol wipes and magnifying glasses for each group to use in evaluating the combs. Before we split up to look at specific combs in smaller groups, Lenny presented some combs with some silken spider web looking material on them. The beekeepers who were not yet aware of what they were looking at were generally newer, and lucky. We were looking at wax moth larva waste, also known as “frass”. Lenny was even able to show members some of the larva. If you can freeze a frame with wax moth larva, it will kill them in 24 to 48 hours. Wax moths are often a problem when the combs are not in the care of strong colonies, and usually not a major issue the first thing in spring as the freezing winter temperatures have killed off most.

Wes reported on the results he received back from the USDA Bee Lab in Beltsville, MD for the sample that Lenny cut out at the January club meeting. The good news is that the results came back negative for American Foulbrood (AFB). It also did not come back positive for European Foulbrood. Lenny mentioned that some bees killed by varroa transmitted viruses present with tongues sticking out of the cells. This can sometimes be confused with one of the signs of AFB. Varroa mites were found.

We had combs at the meeting that evidenced several different causes/contributing factors for colony loss. Peter brought in combs from a colony that although it died in the winter, was actually doomed since last fall. This was evidenced by a few remaining capped drone cells. The colony had gone queenless, and “laying worker”. Colonies that lose their queens in the fall can often survive for much of the winter, but careful observation can often reveal the true cause of their demise. Some combs were brought in from a colony with evidence of mouse activity – chewing on the wooden frame, chewed comb and even a few bits of residual grass nest material, something bees wouldn’t bring into their colony. The mouse/mice may not have directly killed the colony, and the colony may even have been dead, or on that path anyway, but they can and do stress colonies to the point of death, and they sure can make a mess. Taking steps in the fall, like covering any openings with ½” hardware cloth, can help prevent their access and destruction. Other combs had evidence of small clusters of dead bees, dead brood, with not enough bees in the cluster to cover that brood, varroa fecal deposits (white crystalline) in cells, and varroa transmitted pathogens. It is likely that many of the colonies died from varroa transmitted pathogens. Without testing for varroa, how can one know if their levels are at a point where they likely will or won’t cause a problem? Members pulled out suspicious dead brood from cells, both open and capped, and examined them. Colonies dying can be disheartening and frustrating for new and experienced beekeepers alike. It can also be motivating to learn the cause(s) and figure out how to do better next year. Beekeeping can be challenging! As has been said by someone smarter than me: The smart person learns from their mistakes. The wise person learns from other’s mistakes. Thank you for everyone that shared/brought in combs.

Lenny also emphasized that the club will spend more time this active season on varroa monitoring. He mentioned 4 methods: Ether roll, powdered sugar shake, alcohol wash and sticky board.

Lenny reminded members that he is still taking orders for nucs for this spring to be purchased from Joel – expected early May pick-up date.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Next Monthly Meeting: Thursday March 16, 2016, 7:00PM. MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Meybaum,

Secretary