

SOARING CAPITAL BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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

THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2017 MEETING HELD AT

2:00PM AT EAST FRANKLIN STREET APIRAY

There were over 25 attendees, including members, new members and guests that signed-in for our first in the apiary meeting of 2017. It was not an ideal afternoon to work bees, bee-ing a little cool, cloudy and breezy. The bees however, were obligingly mellow when we did get into them.

Lenny Boulas, our president, acknowledged all of the familiar faces as well as the good number of visitors and new members. At Lenny's suggestion, we went around and introduced ourselves. There was quite the range of experience from someone who had started keeping bees 50 years ago (this was considered a "golden age" of beekeeping before tracheal and varroa mites when you could put honey supers on in the spring and come back and take them off in the fall), and was getting back into it due to the recent interest of a family member, to new beekeepers who had just gotten their first bees within the past week. It was wonderful to hear how finally getting bees was a life-long dream come true for at least one of the new beekeepers. Many beekeepers who had bees last year experienced some heavy/significant losses over the winter. Losing three colonies is a 100% loss if it was all you had and can be quite discouraging. In spite of some heavy losses, many of which are believed to be related to diseases transmitted by varroa, this activity that we enjoy has drawn us back again with the promise of a new season. Our club will try to help all of us look at what we can do to educate ourselves and step up our beekeeping to help keep those disappointments to a minimum.

Peter mentioned some of the plants that are currently blooming that can be important to honeybees at this time of year. Colonies located in different places can have access to different plants within their main forage distance of 2 miles (can fly upwards of about 5 miles if needed.). The plants also can bloom at slightly different times in different locations. In many places, there are currently a couple of shrubs – honeysuckle and Russian/Autumn Olive that can be very heavily worked by the bees. Both seemed to be in full bloom at this time. There is also some wild mustard, a yellow-flowered plant/weed that is in bloom. It is sometimes called yellow rocket. There was a dogwood that was blooming in the swampy area around the bee yard that honey-bees have been seen on in previous years. A tree that honeybees also visit is black cherry whose white flower groups look a little like a bottle brush. The black-locust tree, a legume, with grape like clusters of fragrant white pea-like flowers usually blooms around Memorial Day and can produce a significant nectar flow if the weather cooperates and there are enough trees for the bees. Another potentially important plant group just on the verge of blooming is the berry bushes – raspberries and blackberries. These produce nectar as well as pollen that the bees collect. The clovers are growing and should start blooming before the June meeting. Rob mentioned as a beekeeper one typically becomes interested in plants and flowers that the bees might be working, even if you didn't have much previous interest in them.

Jim and Sharon shared that their scale hive put on a little over 20 pounds this past week, after minor changes earlier this season. A scale hive can be a wonderful tool for gaining insight on what is going on for a colony on a daily, weekly or longer term basis. The major spring flow is on, and most overwintered colonies are populous enough to take advantage of it. In this area about 50% of a colony's winter stores are typically replaced by the end of May.

Lenny wanted to cover a lot of material before we got into any colonies to review for more experienced members as well as go over for new-bees (new beekeepers). He reviewed the major parts of the hive, including how to work a hive. Starting with a review of what to do if one gets stung - DON'T PANIC. You have about 5 seconds before the troops are coming. Don't drop the frame if you are holding one – you can set it down at an angle quickly in the box if needed. Scrape the stinger out as reasonably fast as possible – a fingernail works well, because the venom sac is often still pumping venom into you after the bee flies away. Then work to mask the bee's alarm pheromone by smoking the sting site, or as Lenny likes to do, rub the area with some plantain – there is a good amount growing around the apiary. If needed, step back from the colony to compose yourself and allow the bees to settle down. Also be aware of any stings received in clothing, especially if one is using gloves. Although the sting may not have gotten through to get you, the alarm pheromone will agitate other bees and encourage more stinging.

Lenny reviewed lighting the smoker and using it judiciously saying something like, you don't have to lay down a smoke screen like this is the Normandy invasion. Also make sure your smoke is cool, the smoker should not turn into a flame thrower and definitely don't light your hive on fire – as actually has happened before. Bees don't appreciate hot smoke. The praise of a larger smoke, with a guard to help prevent accidental burning were mentioned, along with lighting the smoker from the bottom, not filling it first and then trying to light it from the top.

If at all possible look to stand to the side or rear of a colony when you are working it – not directly in front of a colony – in their flight path. This is also important, but more challenging in a group inspection situation, since it limits the available space to gather around the colony and instructor.

You don't have to find the queen every time you go into a colony, although even experienced beekeepers usually still enjoy the thrill of spotting her. There are times you will want to find the queen but typically not every time. If you see worker eggs, you know she was around in the last three days. If you see young larva, you know she was around in the last 6 days.

For new beekeepers with nucleus colonies or packages, consider going in every 7 to 10 days. This can be a good length of time to observe changes, without disturbing the colony too much. Also, one's confidence can be grown with the colony size by beginning working the colony when it is small. Michelle suggested making inspection/colony notes. I strongly recommend that as well. It is often hard to remember what one saw three inspections ago, or even when one last inspected. Often by reviewing notes, one can gain more insights into the life of the colony, and set goals for your next inspection. Questions can also be recorded for later research, or to bring to the Club meetings.

Keep the top bar towards you when holding the frame, so that you are looking down into the cells. Having the sun at your back can also help seeing into the bottom of the cells. Make sure that when your frames are being drawn out, that they are tightly pushed together in the center of the box. This is usually good advice in any boxes with brood as well.

Smoke a little at the entrance and give the bees ideally about 30 seconds to begin to engorge. Lift the outer cover and put in a puff of smoke. Turn the outer cover upside down and place on the ground behind the colony. Lightly smoke the inner cover hole. Remove the inner cover and lightly puff across the top bars before removing any frames. When one sets down the inner cover, be sure not to crush any bees. Also make sure that the queen doesn't happen to be on it – although that is typically a very rare occurrence. Begin by removing an outer frame if possible to create some space to remove and examine the other frames. One can set the removed frame on a frame rest, in a nuc box, or lean it against the hive to get it out of the way. Be careful not to crush any bees, especially the queen. Carefully replace any removed frames once completed. One could do worse than replacing the frames back in exactly the same order and position that they were originally. Often times the bees know best. This can be more critical with cooler temperatures and smaller colonies. If beekeepers move frames around, they should have a good reason, and there can be many, for doing so.

If one removes a box, consider setting it down diagonally onto the outer cover. One can also tip it up onto its narrow edge, with the frame end bars closest to the ground. If one has to remove a queen excluder, consider that the queen may, although not very often, might be on the underside of it. Place it squarely on top of the removed honey super upside down, so any queen can't get into the honey super.

One can often just tip up a box from the rear and look at it from underneath to get a quick idea of what is going on. How heavy is the box? If it is a brood box, any swarm cells (queen cells produced for the purpose of swarming) would typically be spotted. One can also count the number of frames of honey or brood this way.

There are a variety of configurations of equipment used for the brood nest. Some people use 8 frame equipment. Some people use only medium depth equipment. Some people use one, two or even three deep boxes for the brood chamber. In any case, it often takes most/all of the first year of starting a colony with a nucleus and foundation for them to draw enough comb and build up to survive the winter. One can often harvest at least a little honey, even if it is "crush and strain", although this does force the bees to draw out new comb again next year.

Lenny also brought in a "deep" inner cover which was left in the "winter" position (deep side down) a little too long into the spring from one of his colonies. This allowed the bees to build drone comb in that space. The drone brood allowed Lenny the opportunity to look for varroa mites, as they prefer to utilize drone brood to reproduce. The good news is that we were having a hard time finding any varroa mites, but everyone got a good opportunity to see drone brood and recognize the difference between worker brood and the bullet shaped capped drone brood.

Varroa sampling was also discussed and demonstrated with Rob and Lenny presenting. Fortunately there were no stings, and having a drone, which has no stinger walk on your hand can be a real confidence builder/positive experience for new beekeepers. Lenny utilized a

European made mite wash device. Rob took samples from an overwintered colony, by shaking bees from a frame into a plastic tub after first making sure the queen was not on the frame. We then said and learned the magic words: "Old bees fly away.", before scooping out about ½ cup of bees = approximately 300 bees. Alcohol, or windshield wiper fluid can then be used to cause the varroa to separate from the bees and fall to the bottom of the container. Surprisingly, but happily, we didn't find any varroa. The dead bees can be removed and the liquid re-used for another sample if desired. One can also use the sugar-shake method, although an adjustment for the number of mites found should be made, as this method is not as effective as getting all of the mites off of the bees and counted.

We also examined a nucleus colony, and did find the queen. The colony was looking fine. These inspections allow for beekeepers to get some hands on experience with bees, with plenty of guidance/suggestions. Sometimes it can be a little confusing and daunting for new beekeepers with so much information out there, and so many different options/opinions on everything from equipment to management. Sometimes understanding honeybee biology and one's goals/objectives can help determine good alternatives for how one wants to proceed.

Welcome to all of our new members and welcome to the wonderful world of honeybees and beekeeping.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Next Monthly Meeting: Sunday June 18, 2017, 2:00PM, East Franklin Street Apiary.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Meybaum,

Secretary