

SOARING CAPITAL BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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

SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 2017 MEETING HELD AT

2:00PM AT EAST FRANKLIN STREET APIRAY

Twelve members and two guests signed-in for our meeting. There was at least one person whose name I noticed wasn't yet on the list – our President, Lenny Boulas - so there were at least 15 attendees. We want to make sure that everyone who is there that wants to be counted gets on the list.

The meeting began with a few questions before we got into the hives. The weather was OK initially, but it was predicted that it might not be as favorable later so getting into the hive sooner rather than later was decided as the course of action. The weather held out for the entire meeting.

Reversing brood chambers was asked about as well as requeening. The requeening was asked about in relationship to a nuc with a failed queen. As is often the case in beekeeping, the details can be important in trying to provide useful guidance for a particular situation. There was a concrete example of a queenless nuc in the apiary that will be discussed later. Lighting the smoker and the use of char cloth was brought up as well as the importance of getting a good "bed of coals" going in the smoker when it is started with the end goal of producing a good volume of cool smoke. Test the smoke on yourself – carefully, but if it feels hot to you, the bees probably won't react well to it either. A wad of fresh grass/vegetation on top of the other fuel in the smoker can be one way to help cool the smoke. Becoming good at lighting your smoker and keeping it producing large amounts of cool smoke are two of the hallmarks of transitioning from a beginning to intermediate beekeeper.

Lenny mentioned the possibility of several club members possibly going in on an order of frames to get a quantity discount price.

Lenny is also looking at having a SCBA presence at the Chemung County Fair this year, and plans to have a sign-up sheet for anyone interested at the July meeting.

The season is progressing from the spring plants/flows into the summer plants/flows. The black locust trees had another excellent year in many places this year. There were plentiful white blossoms that were not damaged by any late season frost, and the weather was generally at least decent for some of the bloom period around the end of May. I was in Ithaca around June 10, and the beekeepers there were reporting that they were just starting with their black locust bloom – later than in Horseheads by around a week or two. Blackberries and the other berry bushes seemed to have a good bloom around that time/shortly thereafter. The clovers are coming on including birdsfoot trefoil. The exact transition from the spring to summer flows is somewhat debatable, but I like to consider the clovers and sumacs as the first main summer flows. Sumac can produce a honey with a lemony characteristic, and is an important honey

plant for many of us. Look for the pale yellow-green dense flower clusters. Catalpa trees were also in bloom. It has very large heart shaped leaves and distinctive approximately foot long round “bean” pods visible later in the year that contain the seeds. Lenny’s bees have access to several catalpa trees and they work them hard. By the time of our July meeting, the basswood flows will likely be completed – they typically occur sometime around the Fourth of July. European Basswood, a close relative of our native American Basswood, has been planted as a landscape tree in yards and streets in some areas. It has a smaller leaf, and blooms a little earlier than the mainly found in the woods American Basswood. Both can be very important sources of nectar when they do bloom and the weather cooperates. I have seen lots of blooms on trees of both species this year along Hoffman Street in Elmira where I occasionally walk. Suburban or urban beekeepers are more likely to have the European Basswood within their bee’s foraging range.

The first colony we examined was a nucleus colony purchased this spring. The queen failed some time ago as evidenced by the presence of only drone brood (raised bullet shaped cappings), and multiple eggs in cells, and a dwindling population. The colony had gone “laying worker”, where unmated worker(s), only able to lay unfertilized eggs, which could only develop into drones, started laying. Unfortunately, the initial inspection was delayed for too long on this colony to catch the situation earlier, when it would have been easier to deal with. Giving a frame of eggs and very young larva sooner from another colony would have not only allowed the bees to potentially raise a replacement queen, but the presence of worker brood would also have delayed the onset of the laying worker situation. A replacement queen could also have been introduced. A colony that has gone “drone layer”/“laying worker” can often require more work that is worth it to attempt to correct/salvage. Dealing with one successfully can be considered at least intermediate or perhaps even advanced beekeeping.

One issue that came up was that of “queen cups” vs. “queen cells”. I think it helps to make a distinction between the two so that communication can be more specific. “Queen cups” typically refer to the empty bases of potential future “queen cells”. They are natural and common in colonies. Bees often build them and tear them down without ever using them. As long as there is no egg or larva in them, they are just “queen cups”. Once a “queen cup” contains an egg or larva it is considered a “queen cell” (open) and after capping - a “capped queen cell”. There are two situations where a queen might lay an egg in a “queen cup” and convert it into a “queen cell” – swarming and supercedure. In the one other situation where a colony raises a queen – emergency, any queens being raised originated as a fertilized egg in a worker cell. It is often a good idea, especially during the swarming season, to make sure that what looks like a “queen cup” is not actually a “queen cell”. One can look into the bottom of these or use one’s hive tool to get a quick look by partially tearing open the side of the “queen cup/cell”. Tearing a “queen cup” down completely may make you feel good, but the bees will just rebuild them if they want them. I’ll leave it up to you whether the potentially good feelings, but not much practical effect, are worth the effort. Once there is an egg or larva and one has a “queen cell” (open as opposed to capped), there is an urgency of determining what to do if one wants to avoid swarming, if they are likely “swarm cells”. If there are capped “queen cells” that are “swarm cells”, the swarm may well have already left, as in good weather the swarm usually leaves on the day after the capping of the first “swarm cell”. This is an important situation to understand and many beginning and

intermediate beekeepers may doom their colony by cutting out all capped and uncapped “queen cells” after their colony has already swarmed and leave their colony no way to end up with a replacement queen. Destroying capped “supercedure cells”, when a colony is trying to replace an old or failing queen, can have equally bad results.

The inspections provided an opportunity for attendees to get some hands on experience in inspecting a colony and looking at frames. By watching other beekeepers in action, one can learn what they do, and compare it with one’s own techniques. Tips can be learned as well. Confidence can be gained in seeing other beekeepers handle bees. Frames were passed around and the beekeepers handling the frames explained what they observed.

Lenny did share the story of recently being stung just above his eye from a particularly defensive colony. Fortunately it was not directly in his eye and he has a good tolerance for bee venom, but it was a reminder that a sting to the eye could be catastrophic, so please at least wear eye protection.

One of Lenny’s colonies that we inspected was from a late May 4-frame nuc. He was able to install it in a deep box with drawn comb with a medium (also with drawn comb) above a queen excluder. It has grown amazingly quickly. Most of the bottom deep combs had large areas of brood, and the colony was already starting to put some nectar/honey above the queen excluder. It really helps show how a strong nuc, in an excellent location during a strong nectar flow period, on drawn comb, with good management, can respond. This colony should be able to produce over 100 pound of honey this season (and maybe more) and still have plenty to make it through the winter. Beekeepers with foundation can expect a much slower build-up.

Lenny also shared the technique he uses to sometimes move more drawn out/filled combs in honey supers from the center of the box to the outside and moving the less drawn/filled frames to the center. This takes advantage of the natural tendency of the bees to like to work above the center of the broodnest, and can result in more completely filled frames in the box at the end of the season.

There were plenty of opportunities for questions and discussions before we wrapped up.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Next Monthly Meeting: Sunday July 16, 2017, 2:00PM, East Franklin Street Apiary.

Picnic – Saturday, August 19th. Time and location details to be announced.

Chemung County Fair (SCBA presence/info table)

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Meybaum,

Secretary