

## SOARING CAPITAL BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2017 MEETING HELD AT

7:00PM AT MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH

We had several round tables surrounded by members and visitors at our well-attended October monthly meeting. The focus of the meeting was on final preparations for winter. A meeting sign-in sheet was circulated. Our president, Lenny Boulas also announced that there would be a group purchase of winter patties from Dadant as well as containers from Wixon's. If people were interested, they could sign-up for these items as well. Purchasing in bulk can help by cutting the costs for everyone, and also save shipping/transportation. Many club members use winter patties. They come in one pound patties and cost about \$1.25 each when purchased in quantity. Winter patties have a low protein content (so as to not stimulate brood rearing), and have two main functions - allowing the bees to eat the patties and save their honey for later, as well as potentially serving as emergency food if the bees run out of or can't reach their honey. Patties can work especially well with certain equipment – a deep inner cover provides space for them to be easily set directly on the top bars and still provide room for the bees to access them, as well as perhaps wintering in a single deep – where the extra food might make more of a difference than someone wintering with more honey – for example - two deeps.

There are several important factors to successfully overwintering a colony of bees. The conditions for success can be achieved using different equipment and configurations, however some conditions are important no matter what – and there are things we can do to increase the chance for our colonies to be alive in the spring. Often considered the three pillars of successful overwintering are: An adequate number of healthy bees with queen. Adequate stores – honey and pollen. The third pillar is adequate protection/equipment. The presentation/discussion can generally be divided into things related to each of these three areas.

Lenny canvassed the attendees regarding varroa monitoring and treatment. Controlling varroa falls into the first pillar category of having healthy bees. A colony going into winter with a high varroa level, or into fall with a high varroa and associated virus level will have a hard time raising healthy "winter bees" that will need to survive for several months. Only one member had recently checked their mite levels, and they decided to treat. Lenny was also considering a late season treatment to knock down levels in his colonies before winter. Another member mentioned using oxalic acid last fall in early November. Oxalic is only effective against phoretic mites (mites on adult bees, not those mites under wax cappings on developing bees), and most useful when the bees might well have little or no brood. They reported good success with it. Varroa is usually the biggest obstacle in ensuring that we have an adequate number of healthy bees going into winter.

We are fortunate in this area to almost always have a good fall flow that includes pollen – especially from goldenrod and also some from aster. This means that if we don't harvest too much honey, that the bees usually can expect to have adequate honey and pollen stores to be able to raise some bees over the late winter before the first pollen becomes available the

following spring. If your colonies are light in stores, feed them, or give them frames of honey from one of your colonies to get to your target hive weight.

More discussion was focused on the third pillar of equipment/adequate protection. This preparation begins in the fall. Look to reduce the entrance sizes on your colonies. Reducing the absolute total size can be important to allow the colony to more easily defend itself from robbing from other honeybees as well as more easily defend itself from any late season yellow jacket or hornet attacks. Late in the season the weather can be warm enough for bees to forage, they have a large population after the fall flow, and nothing to gather. This is a recipe for robbing. Preventing it before it gets started can save colonies. The other part of entrance management is preventing mouse access. Generally during the active flight season the bees can easily patrol the entire inside of their colony and keep out any mice, but come the cooler temperatures of fall, once the bees cluster, mice can become a problem. Not only does a honeybee colony provide a great place for a mouse to build a nest and be protected from predators and the elements, but breakfast lunch, dinner and snacks in the form of honey are also available. Help the bees by excluding the mice, including from any upper entrances.  $\frac{1}{2}$ " hardware cloth works well. It can be folded and inserted in the entrance, stapled directly to the box, or even attached to some  $\frac{3}{4}$ " blocks of wood for easy insertion and removal from the colony entrance.

Also, don't forget to remove any queen excluders for boxes you are leaving on the colony and that the bees to have any chance of using. Forgetting to do this can fatally trap the queen below if the cluster moves up.

Several club members overwinter with screened bottom boards. Some have air circulation blocked off from below – e.g. setting on 2"x4" rim sitting on the ground, or on top of solid concrete block base. Others have the screened bottom mostly open – e.g. with the bottom board edges just resting on cinder blocks. The bees don't seem to mind, as long as there is not an active draft/breeze going through the colony. Protection from the wind either because of apiary location, or a wind break can help. Lenny often places a board at an angle against the entrance to help keep it free of snow and ice. It also helps keep the wind out.

Not 100% sure, but don't believe many or any members wrap their colonies. Sometimes this is just done for any solar gain when using black wrapping, and it does provide some wind protection if the bees haven't sealed everything up with propolis.

Using a deep inner cover (deep side down) allows the bees space to cluster over the top bars without bees directly contacting any solid surface above. As mentioned earlier, they can also provide a place to place patties, or during earlier warmer parts of the fall – baggie feeders filled with sugar syrup. Also mark your calendar to put the shallow side down in the spring – very shortly after the first forage becomes available. If you delay until even early May, the bees often seem very happy to fill the space with drone comb/brood. This can also be a good time to add some supers for any unusually early/productive spring honey flows.

Insulation – about 1" of 2" of rigid foam insulation above the inner cover seems to help prevent moisture from condensing immediately above the cluster and dripping back down on the bees. Wet bees can kill the colony. Condensing on the cool inside of the outer walls and running down and out the screened bottom board or entrance is ok. The aluminum backed insulation seems hard for bees to chew, but you may want to prevent their direct access to other types.

Providing an upper entrance, sized/screened to prevent mouse access, can provide a way for moisture to escape – much of it created by the bees converting the honey to energy and water vapor, as well as allow the bees an alternate way to get out for cleansing flights should the lower entrance be blocked by snow or ice. This upper entrance can also often be closer to the bee cluster so that the bees don't have to travel as far to get out.

There was also some discussion on honey harvesting. Most of us have, or will soon be completing the pulling of any honey we are planning to harvest. Dealing with “wet” (immediately after being extracted) supers was talked about. Instead of putting them away in that condition which can encourage robbing, mice and/or wax moths and small hive beetles, in addition to potentially mold growth, consider letting the bees clean them up and store them “dry”. Not only do you avoid some of the previously mentioned issues, but the bees can store the scavenged honey (maybe up to 1 or 2 pints of honey per super) where they need it for winter. One could always leave the “wet” supers out for the bees to rob, but this is usually not a good idea as it encourages robbing in an apiary. Consider putting them over an inner-cover and queen excluder (to prevent the unlikely, but possible movement of the queen and bees into the honey supers). In good weather the bees can clean up the residual honey in a matter of days. Unheated storage of empty brood comb and honey supers – exposure to freezing temperatures - will kill wax moths and small hive beetles. Also consider screening access to this equipment to protect it from mice as well as any wax moths/small hive beetles (1/8” hardware cloth).

Additional time was available for questions and discussions. Overall it seemed like a better than average season for most of the club members. What will this winter bring and what position will we find our colonies in next spring? Preparing for winter can help increase your chances for success. Several club members experienced several years without any colonies surviving before experiencing over-wintering success, while others have experienced mixed success, and still others some overwintering success right from the start. Keep at it and learn as much as you can from your own and other's experiences for better results. It is not unusual for new beekeepers to experience no/low over-wintering success for one or more years – especially with all of the challenges facing beekeepers today.

#### UPCOMING EVENTS:

Next Monthly Meeting: Thursday November 16, 2017, 7:00PM AT MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH – ANNUAL HONEY TASTING. Please bring some of your honey for tasting if you would like, or just come and taste some honey. Small plastic spoons will be provided. Taste the wide range of what local bees and beekeepers have produced. We might even have some comb honey, as at least one member was experimenting with it this season.

December – No official club meeting, perhaps an informal get together to talk bees,

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Meybaum,

Secretary