

SOARING CAPITAL BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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

THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2018 MEETING HELD AT

7:00PM AT MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH

Lenny announced the next meeting on Thursday April 19th – same time (7:00PM), same place (Maranatha Bible Church). Beginning in May, we are looking to switch to our active season meetings, tentatively looking at Sunday, May 20th at 2:00PM at the Bee Yard off of East Franklin Street in Horseheads, between Hanover Square and Route 13.

Lenny again mentioned the Geneva Bee Conference – March 24th in Canandaigua. (There were several club members that did attend. Thought provoking presentations, good food, lots of vendors, good conversations, good time, and some ideas that will be incorporated into Club activities. Look for brief highlights at upcoming meeting.)

Lenny is looking to have some long hive tools available at an upcoming meeting. They are quite handy for helping lift frames straight up – and can one ever really have too many hive tools?

Locally made (\$5.00) hive bottom board scrapers were available. This tool can help with cleaning off debris in winter/early spring without having to lift off/separate the bottom board to clean it.

Lenny surveyed the attendees, and it looks like almost everyone who is getting new bees is planning to get nucs. At the April meeting, Lenny was going to do a presentation on Nuc and package installation for new/interested members, but might limit it to just nuc installation unless someone is getting a package, Peter will plan to talk about an optional piece of equipment – the double screen board - for attendees who are already familiar with nuc installation.

Several topics were discussed at the meeting. Lenny reviewed some information on varroa – the main problems for almost all of us.

Should one treat without testing for varroa? If one doesn't test before and after, how does one know how effective the treatment was? If one treats colonies that don't need treatment, how will one know which colonies to select from for encouraging varroa resistance? If we treat all colonies, aren't we just selecting for varroa that can do well with the treatments used?

Lenny also provided copies of a Dr. Dennis vanEngelsdorp handout that talked about "mite bombs" – untreated colonies that collapse from varroa, which can transfer their varroa to neighboring colonies and overwhelm them. Are any of us creating "mite bombs" for other colonies in our apiaries, or our beekeeping neighbors? What can we do to help prevent our colonies becoming "mite bombs", or protect us from any "mite bombs" in our beekeeping neighborhood?

Acceptable mite levels in colonies, as determined by testing, have generally decreased over time, meaning that a colony 20 years ago could have supported a higher mite population without showing major problems. Today, treatment thresholds are as low as 2 mites/100 bees in an alcohol wash test.

Lenny also reviewed some potential symptoms of varroa issues that do not involve actual testing.

Bees not actively foraging, when other colonies in the apiary were, and when there were lots of pollen and nectar available.

Shiny bees with no “hair” – varroa mite transmitted virus – Lenny had pictures.

Deformed Wing Virus (DWV) – varroa mite transmitted – Lenny had pictures.

Loads of bees crawling in front of hive.

“Bald Brood” – uncapped brood in the pupal stage is potential indicator.

Drone brood sampling – can use cappings scratcher.

Mites visible on adult bees, or in about to be capped brood cells.

Keep a look-out for these symptoms. Some of them may require immediate drastic action to avoid colony death, and even then, it may be too late.

Peter reviewed with attendees reasons for winter losses. Now is a good time to evaluate/try to determine reasons for losses, and then try to implement plans this year to try to prevent them from happening next winter. Consider at least protecting dead-out equipment from robbing and infestation with wax moths or small hive beetles. Totally sealed up may facilitate mold growth, screening may work better.

By a show of hands, there were roughly:

6 attendees without bees/looking to get bees/new beekeepers

6 first winter with bees beekeepers

3 2nd winter with bees beekeepers

8 3rd or more winters with bees beekeepers

There were also no beekeepers with 2 or more years of wintering bees without winter losses.

Reasons mentioned for loosing bees were:

Varroa and related issues

Robbed-out colonies

Moisture couldn't escape – dripped onto bee cluster.

Bees trapped in colony with ice covering lower entrance

Mice

Fluctuating temperatures/rapid temperature changes causing bees to break cluster, but fail to re-cluster in a single unit and multiple small clusters forming/later dying before re-uniting.

Starvation – rarely totally running out of food – mostly cluster not able to access remaining stores – sometimes from not abandoning brood.

There are other potential winter loss reasons, and things that can be done to help prevent them as well. Winter losses can happen until approximately dandelion bloom, if we get weather where the bees can't fly for an extended period, but have already ramped up brood production.

The three “keys to successful wintering” were briefly mentioned:

Bees: Good queen; Adequate number of bees; Healthy – no AFB, varroa under control.

Equipment: Mice excluded; Protected from wind; Adequate ventilation/upper entrance;
Reduce entrance/prevent robbing in late fall & very early spring – ok open rest of winter.

Food: Adequate; Properly placed; High quality – not crystallized and properly cured.

There were some weak late season made up (Aug.) nucs that Peter brought in that died. Lenny found at least one varroa on bottom board. Winter loss reason – starvation – did not provide adequate amount of capped honey for them to survive. Some frames from a dead-out were also brought in. There was capped/emerging dead brood. Likely cause = varroa related. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences on winter losses, so that we can all help minimize our future winter losses.

Lenny and Peter also gave a presentation on making nucs. If you get/have gotten a nuc in a four frame nuc box, strongly consider saving the box – in addition to being really handy for a hive inspection, it is also fantastic for making up a nuc for yourself. Having a nuc with a mated laying queen can be really handy if you need a new queen. You could also use standard 10 frame equipment – perhaps even making your own “follower board” from an empty frame and a piece of cardboard as Lenny dempnstrated.

What do you need to make up a nuc besides some empty equipment? There are many ways to do this, but since you are basically making up a small colony, you need the basics: A queen, or the ability for the nuc to get a queen (queen cell). Having a weak nuc raise its own queen may not be ideal to ensure a high quality queen. One also needs bees, typically also some brood to help hold the bees in the nuc. The bees also need some food, especially if the nuc is going to be kept in the same apiary as the donor colony, since the older field bees will return to the parent colony location leaving the nuc without an initial field force. The nuc should also have a greatly reduced entrance to assist it in guarding itself until it starts to grow and can defend a larger entrance.

Quick terminology review:

Queen Cup = empty wax queen cell base that can potentially be used by queen to lay in. Found in almost all colonies at any time of year. No need to take any action when these are seen. If you don't know what these look like, ask when we go to the bee yard.

Queen Cell = A queen sized cell with an egg, larva (“open”); or late larva/pupa (“capped”). These can be found during swarming season, or might potentially be a supercedure cell. The bees are up to something important – try to figure out what, make a plan, and take action if desired.

Swarms typically depart a colony, weather dependant, on the day after the sealing of the first “swam” queen cell. If one find capped queen cells, the colony may already have swarmed. Carefully evaluate the situation in developing your plan. Too many new beekeepers have destroyed all of the queen cells thinking they are preventing the colony from swarming after they have already swarmed and the beekeeper only succeeded in making the colony hopelessly queenless – no possibility of getting a replacement queen. Capped queen cells may not always be a welcome sign, but they may provide a valuable resource, if one were looking to make up some nucs,

With warmer weather hopefully soon upon us, things in the apiary will likely develop quickly. It won't be long before pollen and nectar will be coming in, supers need to be added, and swarming season will be upon us again.

Thank you again to our hosts at MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Next Monthly Meeting: Thursday April 19, 2018, 7:00PM. MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH.

May Monthly Meeting: Sunday May 20th 2:00PM at Bee Yard (off of E. Franklin Street, Horseheads)

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Meybaum,

Secretary