

SOARING CAPITAL BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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

THURSDAY, APRIL 25, 2019 MEETING HELD AT

7:00PM AT MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH

There was a sign-in sheet for the meeting which had over 20 attendees again, including some soon to be first time beekeepers. So many questions and so much enthusiasm. What an exciting time!

As always, visitors/guests are welcome. You don't have to be a member to attend.

With pollen coming in, and spring upon us, it will soon be again time to have our meetings at the bee yard located off of E. Franklin Street (between Hanover Square and Route 13 – check out the website for a map). We have usually met in the field during the main active season – usually May, June July, and September – while having our annual potluck picnic in August. Lenny announced our first meeting in the field for this year – Sunday May 19th at 2:00PM at the bee yard. This is a great time to get some hands on experience with live bees and discuss/learn different techniques – weather permitting for getting into the bees, although we almost always still meet unless a total wash-out. We use a portable canopy to provide some shade/protection from rain. Please remember to bring/use at a minimum some eye protection (e.g. veil) if you have it, although we do have some extras for visitors/guests. Also bring whatever other personal protective equipment will make you feel comfortable. The bees have almost always been extremely gentle. Some people show up and work bees in shorts and a tee-shirt, while others have worn their suit and gloves.

It seems like the members who have been able to control/manage their varroa populations have had fairly good results in winter survival this past winter, including some who have experienced heavy/total losses previously. Most beekeepers would rather not treat for varroa, for a variety of reasons, and I have to admit, I have been slower to move towards treatment than most, but this is now the second winter, (2016/2017) being the first, that I have lost over 95% (over 40 colonies each winter) of my colonies – mostly due to varroa related issues. I have committed to monitoring and treatment as needed for this year. It is very discouraging to have to spend lots of time or \$ to try to recover from these heavy losses.

Since every colony pretty much has varroa mites, the question is are they likely to cause a problem for your bees? Well, it depends on how many you have, and the time of year. The standard way to find out how many you have is to measure their population. To the end of encouraging members to see how many varroa they have/if they are likely to cause a problem, members should monitor their varroa populations.

Scott explained our varroa monitoring challenge. If you monitor your varroa mite levels, once per month, for at least 3 months before our August meeting, on at least one colony, and share your results with the club, your name will be entered in a raffle – the winner to be selected at our August picnic meeting. (Prize to be determined, but potentially some equipment.) The alcohol wash is the preferred method, but one could also use the sugar shake. Lenny showed the approximately \$20

alcohol wash (can also use windshield washer fluid) container that he uses. Other varroa indicators to look at were mentioned including sticky board monitoring, drone brood monitoring, including examination of some recently capped drone that Lenny brought in. One should also be on the lookout for any signs of varroa transmitted viruses like deformed wing virus, hairless/shiny bees, or “bald brood” (uncapped bee pupae), or bees crawling aimlessly on the ground in front of the hive.

Our knowledgeable President, Lenny Boulas, brought up for discussion the idea of potentially purchasing a club extractor to be loaned out to members. An extractor is a relatively expensive beekeeping item, and is used only very briefly each year, so it might make sense to share one. He has done some research on a potential model – “Little Wonder” from Dadant. It holds 4 frames, either deep or medium, and extracts tangentially (as opposed to radially). It is manual with a hand crank, and has a stand/platform. It could fit in a car. Together with a filter screen and multi-tub set-up for handling the uncapping, it could be loaned out, and would need to be returned clean – remember clean-up with only cool/cold water so the wax bits don’t melt and stick to the metal. Total estimated cost about \$600.00. There was some discussion and questions. Lenny proposed discussing again at next meeting or two so that members would have time to think about it before we voted. On a show of hands, it seemed like many members who have had bees for a few years already have an extractor, so perhaps it would be mostly only be used by new members with only a few colonies. Erica mentioned possibly having a list of members who might be willing to loan out their own extractors.

Someone mentioned that Draper’s has two pick-up dates for packages this year. Most sources of new bees are sold out already. Some club members may have some mid-summer nucs available for sale.

Lenny did a presentation on some new research that he has come across. We are fortunate that Lenny is very interested in the latest and greatest research, and his ability to bring that information to share with club members. Here are some of the highlights:

Some work has been done at the University of Helsinki that may lead to a way to vaccinate honeybees against American Foulbrood. This technique may also be useful in dealing with some viruses that varroa spreads.

Spivak & Tarpy showed that a poor brood pattern may not just be the queen’s fault, but rather might be a sign of brood disease (especially varroa transmitted ones).

Randy Oliver (great guy and great website (Scientific Beekeeping) by the way) - pheromones of bees/colony change as it is collapsing, and mites transfer onto foragers instead of mainly being found on nurse bees. This may help spread varroa from collapsing colonies. Up to 50% of the drones in DCAs (Drone Congregation Areas) had varroa mites. Consider trying to take steps to reduce drifting between colonies. Randy is looking at mite inflow into colonies after they have been treated. One may have to monitor once per month, even after treatment, to ensure that colonies are not re-infested from collapsing neighboring colonies, especially late in the season.

Discussed varroa treatment options, this time especially focusing on Oxalic acid option. This treatment only kills phoretic mites (ones on adult bees) and does not kill any mites under the capped brood – which can be most (up to 80%) of the mites. If the treatment can be timed so that there is no

capped brood – e.g. after hiving a swarm/package, and before the first brood is capped – so about 7 days after hiving, one can get a very high 90% to 95% kill rate on the varroa. Timing is key. Late fall/early winter treatment (approx. Thanksgiving to Christmas) should also be highly effective as there is usually very little capped brood at that time. Also proper timing around making up splits/divides can work well. This is a good reason to understand bee biology related to developmental times of egg, larva and pupa for workers, drones and queens. If one treats when capped brood is present, perhaps 3 or 4 treatments every 5 or so days will likely be needed if using Oxalic acid.

There are various ways to apply Oxalic acid. Originally it was applied as a dribble in a sugar water solution. Today, it is more typically applied via vaporization (more effective, and less negative effects on bees). Peter demonstrated the VarroX pan vaporizer. One has to be careful of any burr comb extending below the bottom bars that might contact the hot pan. Lenny brought in his newly acquired vaporizer (comparable price of approx. \$150) that allows one to vaporize through a small hole in the rear of the hive, and greatly reduces the fire risk. We will look forward of a report of how well it works in practice. Be sure to follow safety instructions for applying via vaporizer – you don't want to be inhaling the vapor!

2018 was a good year. Lenny shared his honey production results from last year – his highest per colony average so far – of almost 200 lbs. (197 lbs.) per colony. It show what can be done in a good location, in a good year, with drawn comb, and while controlling varroa, with good management. It is nice to know what is possible. Although our area is not known for any single massive honey flow, in most local ocations we are fortunate to generally have a steady flow, with some definite peaks, from the large variety of sources we have – all the way from early spring through until fall, including an ample supply and variety of pollen.

This year, in addition to focusing on varroa monitoring and control, we will work to help members become more sustainable, by discussing and demonstrating various ways to make splits, so that one can go into winter with more colonies than one wants to have alive in the spring. This will allow for some winter losses. If one has additional colonies survive, one should have no problem selling them in the spring. At the May meeting we will discuss and demonstrate at least two techniques very applicable to hobbyist beekeepers to make splits in their own yard, one involving removing the queen to form a split, and the other technique where you don't have to find the queen. These involve a little more work, especially if you can't find the queen, but are both worthwhile improvements over a walk-away split.

Thank you again to our hosts at MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

May Monthly Meeting: Sunday May 19th 2:00PM at Bee Yard (off of E. Franklin Street, Horseheads)

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Meybaum,

Secretary