

SOARING CAPITAL BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

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

THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 2020 MEETING HELD AT

7:00PM AT MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH

Lenny announced the next meeting to be held on the third Thursday in February (20th) – same time (7:00PM), same place (Maranatha Bible Church). Beginning in May, we are looking to switch to our active season meetings again at the Bee Yard off of East Franklin Street in Horseheads, between Hanover Square and Route 13. Our meetings in the Bee Yard are usually at 2:00PM on the third Sunday of the month, but stay tuned for more definitive dates/times as we get closer.

The annual upcoming Greater New York Bee Conference (formerly the Geneva Bee Conference) was announced. It will be held Saturday, March 21st at Finger Lakes Community College in Canandaigua. The keynote speaker is Vermont based living beekeeping legend Michael Palmer! He was one of the main speakers a few years ago, and it was a real treat to hear him in person. Lenny, Scott, Ed and Wes got to speak with him in person several years ago at an E.A.S. (Eastern Apicultural Society) conference and were impressed as well. He has a wealth of practical information. Several members have attended the conference the last few years with overwhelmingly positive feedback. People often carpool there. It is nice to have such a conference so close to us and for the relatively reasonable price of \$75.00 that includes a tasty lunch as well as snacks. Lots of vendors are there too. (By the way, if you haven't already, check out Mike Palmer's talks at the National Honey Show on their website. It is a major annual conference in Great Britain that attracts many American university experts. The videos are very well produced and educational too. I eagerly await the posting of each year's new batch of videos which are a fantastic source of accurate and fascinating honeybee information.)

Some recent developments that might be of interest:

There has been confirmation of Asian Hornet being found in Washington State. This may eventually become a large problem for honey bees in the United States.

"BT-40J", a strain of *Bacillus thuringiensis*, is expected to be on the market in a month or two. It can be used to treat comb to prevent wax moth damage. If it is ingested by a young wax moth larvae, it will grow inside of them and kill them.

An electrically powered "blanket" is now available for about \$40. It can be used on 5 gal buckets of honey to warm them/de-crystallize them.

2020 membership dues (\$10.00) were being collected at the meeting for folks that wanted to renew/join. You don't have to be a member to attend the meetings, and we like to have visitors/people attend who are interested in bees or learning more about beekeeping.

It seems like most people are having good winter survival so far. There may be several factors involved, including more management/treatment to keep *Varroa* in check; a great fall flow with lots of pollen and nectar; good winter weather with adequate cleansing flight opportunities. All of my colonies, with the exception of one that tipped over earlier in the winter seem to be going strong. A few members have experienced some loss already this winter – mainly from bears! It seems a little unusual that the bears have seemed to not have gone into hibernation around Thanksgiving, with at least some remaining out and active into late January!

Several beekeepers have recently finished an early winter oxalic treatment for varroa, during the typical brood break that occurs from about Thanksgiving until early in the New Year. An oxalic treatment at this time can be very effective against varroa, as there typically is little to no capped brood in the hive (all the mites are phoretic – on adult bees) and are susceptible to the treatment which can have a 90%+ kill rate on these phoretic mites.

Being in the middle of winter, it almost seems hard to believe it is time to start making plans for the upcoming active season, but that is just what we are doing.

The main presentation/discussion for the evening was regarding making up splits (usually dividing in half e.g. 10 frame colony going to two 5-frame colonies, or two deeps going to two single deeps) or nucs (typically 5 frames or less). The terms are often not used precisely and often interchangeably.

Making up splits or nucs can be used to help control varroa, help delay/prevent swarming, provide for a ready source of mated/laying queens in the apiary and allow one to replace any losses, or increase the number of colonies one has. They can also be produced for sale. One key to increasing your chances of successfully making a split is to do it at the “right” time of year. Consider taking your cues from the bees. When do the bees split - swarm? They split/swarm when they have a good population, mature drones are available and the weather is favorable for mating flights, when resources are good in the field (incoming nectar and pollen), and generally when there is enough time for the split to build up to survive the winter. In our area this is typically from May through mid-July. John mentioned that he looks to consider splitting when the dandelions are in bloom. Of course if you see queen cells started with eggs and/or larvae, you know that the bees think it is time to split! If you see capped queen cells, the bees may have already “split” – as typically about 75% of the adult bees leave with the old queen in the first “prime” swarm of the season. We beekeepers can assist our divides with resources to give ones made up as late as August a really good chance of making it through the next winter.

You can often times get a better idea of the number of bees in a hive by looking at the underside of a brood box. Just tilt it up to get a peek from below. It is often easier to see through the larger gaps at the bottoms of frames than down through the top bars. You may also spot swarm (queen) cells more easily too – as they are often built off/near the bottom bars of frames.

Two queen hives were one of the things discussed. Several club members have had this happen - sometimes multiple times. Two queens in a hive are often a mother and a daughter. In Lenny's experience, this situation usually reverts to a single queen in 4 to 6 weeks on its own. It can occur in around 18% - 30% of hives during at least some times of the year. It is often missed by beekeepers, as once we find “the” queen, we stop looking for a second one. Some indicators that you might have two queens were mentioned including an over-populated colony compared with the others in the

apiary; brood above and below a queen excluder; bees coming and going equally from both sides of the landing board; and perhaps open brood on both sides of a colony, with a frame in the middle of honey/pollen. A colony with two queens could easily be divided by placing one of the queens with adequate resources (brood, food and support staff (workers)) into a new box on a new stand, and replacing removed frames with drawn comb or foundation.

The main division technique that was discussed/focused on was removing the queen from an existing colony, along with adequate resources and placing her into a new box at a different location, either at the same apiary, or moving the nuc to a new location > 2 miles away. Remember that most of the older adult bees (> approx. 21 days old) will likely return to the original hive location if <2 miles away. Maybe give this nuc with the old queen a couple of frames with mostly capped brood, as well as another good stores frame with pollen and honey (preferably uncapped honey or nectar). All three frames should have the attached bees go into the nuc with the queen. One might even give a shake of "extra" bees from an additional frame. Replace the removed frames with drawn comb or foundation. If one places the nuc into a 10 frame box, consider placing the frames against one side with the honey/pollen frame on the outside and using a "follower board" for the nuc. As Lenny described, this can be as simple as some cardboard stapled to an empty frame. A "follower board" helps a new, smaller colony by limiting the space that it needs to patrol/protect and can help it build up faster. One will need to check frequently – maybe once per week – to make sure that additional frames are given as needed for it to expand. If one used 3 frames: two with mostly capped brood, and one with mostly stores, consider a fourth frame of foundation, or drawn comb. The drawn comb would allow the queen a place to start laying immediately if the support staff of workers could take care of additional brood.

This technique does involve finding the queen in a fairly populous colony, which can prove challenging. Try looking for her between the hours of 11:00AM and 3:00PM when most of the older foragers are out of the hive. Also use as little smoke as reasonably possible. Look especially on frames with eggs, or with emerging brood that has eggs on it. You can catch the queen by hand, or with a queen catch to transfer her, or you can just use and transfer the frame she is on. If you can find her this plan has several advantages:

The parent colony will not have any new brood to take care of after 9 days, other than keeping it warm, and still has almost the entire field force, so it can focus on honey production, at least for a little while.

The parent colony has all of the resources it needs to raise good quality queens: a large population including lots of foragers to bring in nectar and pollen and lots of nurse bees to raise the new queens. This technique also works especially well if the bees have started queen cells in anticipation of swarming and only gotten to the eggs/young larvae stage in them when one removes the old queen. If possible, ensure that at least one relatively new frame (non-black wax) has some eggs/very young larvae as this will make it easier for the bees to chew down the cell walls around some worker cells and build up queen cells around the larvae.

You will likely end up with multiple queen cells on multiple frames at the original location. This will give plenty of options for making up nucs. Be aware, the original location colony with the

queen cells may well swarm, and potentially more than once, with one or more virgin queens each time, if all of the queen cells are left. Tony and I have both had this experience. I'd suggest making up at least one additional nuc with one or more capped queen cells – be gentle when handling frames with queen cells – no shaking of bees off of them. This additional nuc will give a little assurance to make it more likely that you end up with at least one newly mated/laying queen. If either fails to get a mated laying queen, or one only desires the single additional colony, one can combine them later with newspaper. The original hive may have the resources to make up from 4-10 smaller/weaker nucs if desired. One could also eliminate all but one or two very nice queen cells, and take your chances on the lone queen emerging, successfully mating, and returning to begin laying.

When you make up additional nucs with queen cells, make sure that the queen cell(s) will be protected and kept warm by the bees – the ones in the middle of frames among other brood are less likely to get chilled in a small nuc if the temperatures get cold. Also be careful with damaging cells off of the bottom bar by crushing against a bottom board or slated rack. It is possible to “cut off” capped queen cells if one is careful and “attach” them to a different frame – preferably not on the periphery, and preferably near/over some capped worker brood. Give these nucs the resources to succeed. The smaller they are, the longer they will take to build up. Manage the entrance sizes on any smaller nucs carefully so they can protect/defend themselves. In a good year like 2019, smaller nucs made up in late May had a chance to build up to make some honey from the fall flow.

This plan is relatively simple, has lots of options/flexibility and usually results in good quality queens.

For folks feeding sugar blocks or winter patties, they have been disappearing quickly. The generally strong colonies going into winter as well as warmer temperatures, have allowed them to consume them fairly rapidly. Be on the lookout for potential spring starvation issues come March/April.

Thank you again to our hosts at MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH for allowing us to meet in their building.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Next Monthly Meeting: Thursday February 20, 2020, at 7:00PM, MARANANTHA BIBLE CHURCH – main topic “Other techniques for making increase.”

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Meybaum,

Secretary