

Lewis County Beekeepers' Association: *April 2009 Newsletter*

IN THIS EDITION:

- Notes from our April meeting and talk by Tim Giese: “Biodynamic Bee Symposium” (see below)
- LCBA News and Upcoming Events:
 - *Next LCBA Meeting: Wednesday, May 13, 2009, 7 p.m.* at the WSU Extension classroom in Chehalis.
 - *May Meeting Agenda:*
 - *Speaker / Discussion Topic: Bob, Norm, and Dave will describe their adventures in two recent local hive removals*
 - *Update: LCBA bee installations—how are members' bees doing? Troubleshooting Q&A*
 - *Update: Vader swarm removal / LCBA training opportunity*
 - *LCBA Logo Update*
 - *Update: Apprentice Beekeeper course available to start this month (see March minutes for details; for info re: Journeyman and Master courses, see www.wasba.org)*
 - *Treasurer's Report*
 - *Review of the minutes of our 4/8/09 Business Meeting*

Notes from our April 8 Meeting:

LCBA President Bob Harris donned “the symbol of authority”—his red bee helmet with antennae—and called the meeting to order.

Our New Bees: The major focus of discussion was the early arrival of the bees from Ruhls, which Bob, Peter Glover, and Gary Gorremans had picked up the previous day and distributed to LCBA members at Fort Borst Park. Questions and answers about newly installed bees follow the summary of Tim Giese's talk, below.

LCBA's new and returning members: Bob introduced new members: Aundrea Dennis, Tammy Edwards, and Chance Edwards, all from Rochester. Rejoining the group

were Darryl Roulst of Centralia, who already has ten hives, and Paige Steelhammer, another longtime beekeeper. Not at the meeting but planning to join are Laurie Corwin and Gary Skinner of Grand Mound. 34 members were present at this meeting: LCBA is growing. Susanne passed around a signup sheet for new and returning members who wish to receive the newsletter by email.

Apprenticeship course: Bob will order the textbooks from the Washington State Beekeepers' Association (WASBA) for distribution at our May meeting. 24 LCBA members have signed up to take the course. Also, Bob checked the list of those who have signed up to receive *Bee Culture* and *Bee Journal*.

April Speaker: Tim Giese re: Biodynamics of Bees

The Woogie Bee Business: Tim and Sharette have 600 to 800 hives and do pollination professionally. They support organic farms with no pollination fee in exchange for honey, which they then sell in Washington. They bring their bees to Washington in summer to harvest berry honey, then catch the fall bloom in California, where the fall rains yield native flowering plants like fiddleneck. This new honey flow helps their bees over-winter in the Sacramento, California area, where they maintain a biodynamic farm. In February, they do almonds; next is the citrus bloom in mid- May. After this, they do splits, make new hives, and then bring the bees to Washington to pollinate organic farms, and the cycle starts again. The Gieses seek natural, not hard chemical options for managing bee mites, parasites, and other problems, with little die-off. They strive for honey to be as pure as possible to sell back to an organic community.

Biodynamic / Demeter Bee Symposium: In March, the Gieses attended the Biodynamic / Demeter Bee Symposium in Santa Rosa, California, based on the philosophy of Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925), an Austrian who founded the movement of Anthroposophy, which gave rise to biodynamic agriculture and beekeeping. ***LCBA members who would like a copy of the 8 page Symposium handout, please contact Susanne (susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com), and she'll make a copy for you.***

Hobbyists Can Try the Biodynamic Approach: Tim emphasized techniques that he finds worth thinking about. Much about the biodynamic approach is hard for high-volume, commercial bee-keepers, but hobbyists could try these techniques in stationary hives. Comb/chunk honey is a niche market that LCBA could help fill. Chunk honey / comb honey can just be cut out of hives and has both pollen and honey. The wellness community will pay a high dollar for this because of its possible immunological benefits.

One room hive technique: Melissa Gardenstein has an approach that intrigued the Gieses: the German design of a one-room hive, just a one building structure, with no supers: all is top-down from gravitational pull, with 12 frames. Within these, the bees design comb as they choose. The hive has a side view window, so that there is no need to open the hive and disturb the bees while observing them.

Horizontal hive technique: They also described a top bar hive / horizontal long hive. Again, it is not built with supers: rather, it is horizontal with top bars across the hive, with following boards. Beekeepers can open these as the hive increases in size and add more bars, building out sideways instead of vertically. Sharette noted that there are free design plans available on the internet for building this type of hive.

Round “skep” hive: This is the most challenging hive type. It is the old, classic round beehive shape, a coiled rope shape. It must be turned over and scooped out, destroying the colony to harvest honey; there is no way to inspect for disease without destroying the hive. That is why this kind of model was made illegal. However, this update on the old design attempts to sidestep these problems by having removable frames which can be removed for inspection without up-ending the hive. The skep hive is covered with cow dung and supported by a wooden stand. It mimics the natural environment of the wild honeybee. It has no foundations of plastic: bees instinctively build foundation themselves. The philosophy behind this is that bees know what they are doing and should be left alone to do it. In this context, the comb works as a location for the dance vibration. In this and many more ways, this design helps bees by allowing them to re-create an environment very much like what is natural to them.

Mexican log hive technique: Sharette described the Mexican log hive technique: doors are placed on each end of a hollowed-out log. One end has a small hole for bees to go in and out. The idea is to put the swarm into the log and let the bees take it from there.

Modern bee diseases and “labor-saving” strategies: Many modern bee disorders have been traced to the labor-saving bee-keeping strategies that serve people, not bees. This was a major emphasis of the symposium.

Scheduled queen replacement: The symposium identified this practice as a concern, focused more on maximizing productivity in honey than long-term health of the hive. In the scheduled queen replacement model, queens are changed every two years for the health of the colony. Yet bees know when they need a queen and can create one when they need to: when a queen is made naturally, she is pointing down in the center of the hive, hanging vertically, complemented by royal jelly from day one. Should people stop manipulating this and let the bees choose the natural time frame for replacement?

Drones: Drones are not solely for reproductive purposes. They have parallels to our human sense organs, such as large eyes and feelers that serve added sense-functions. Do we handicap hives in modern bee-keeping by not fostering drones?

Swarming: Swarming is pivotal in raising queens naturally. Limiting swarms may contribute to bee problems.

Modern feeding issues: Sugar and pollen substitutes (such as soybeans) are coarser than flow pollen and are not what bees naturally want: they can compromise a hive. Honey has all that bee needs: Tim recommends going natural, letting bees feed on their own honey, supplementing only if they are running out.

Bee diseases: If a hive is healthy, bees will have their own resistance and should not need medications. While bees are regaining their health, some of the acid treatments could be used: these are seen as natural building blocks of life, so they would be ok to use to treat for mites (tracheal, varroa destructor). The biodynamic approach views foulbrood as stemming from bees not getting the right natural nutrition.

How does the biodynamic approach work? It starts with a philosophy of respect for the very being of the hive and the bees: “an organic stewardship based on heartfelt reverence.” Some tenets:

- * Respect the colony as an organism: it is not just an artificial construct out of which we take what parts we want.

- * Don't move bees unless it is necessary: we should not ship bees from one monoculture to the next.

- * No plastic or iron should be used in the hive.

- * Natural procreation and replacement of queens should be allowed.

- * Let them produce as many drones as they want.

- * Let the bees eat what they produce.

- * Plant gardens with support of bees in mind.

- * Avoid working with blowers and chemicals to harvest honey.

- * Not wearing bee suits allows being more in tune with hives, gentle with bees.

- * Focus on reverence and love for the bees so they can flourish.

Q & A: Is the biodynamic approach just a theory, or does it get results? Tim says it does; he would like to try some of these techniques, such as letting bees pull more comb and taking less honey. In his own business, he doesn't use a 100% organic approach because of practical necessities. For example, medications: he uses ApiGuard and formic acid. For mites, Tim did four treatments this year: he had 45% loss of bees last year and must help them thrive. He encourages us to find our own ways: consider the ideas and find what works for us as individual beekeepers.

Bob noted that the biodynamic debate within beekeeping has parallels with modern agriculture in the U.S. overall, which is monoculture and people-centered, rather than based on concepts of stewardship. Bees are particularly sensitive organisms, so perhaps the effects of monoculture are showing first in bees. Tim added that if we continue to abuse and neglect, we may not have bees anymore, and that will be a very hard adaptation for humans to make because of our large population centers. Biodynamic beekeeping goes a step beyond organic, which is a practice: biodynamics is a philosophy. Bob noted that it is very hard to be purely organic: one's own hive and garden could be, but the bees could fly to a neighbor's yard and ingest pesticides.

Tim said that one challenge for him in business is that he doesn't want to tell monoculture farmers that he won't help them pollinate. He and Bob emphasized that all we can control is what we do to, with, and for our own bees.

Business Meeting:

Minutes of 3-11-09 meeting were approved.

Treasurer's Report: Sarah Roebas reported that we have \$731 in the bank (or will once the new dues are deposited). We need a new official members' list—Susanne will email this to LCBA members before the next meeting.

New logo: Sharette Giese's design with "Lewis County Beekeepers Association" spanning the shape of Lewis County, flanked by a bright, flying honeybee, was the voters' choice. Sharette gets a dues rebate for winning the contest. Bob will get a banner for the Farmer's Market, stamp for the book, and make letterhead, all using our new logo.

Questions and answers about newly installed bees:

What if some bees won't leave their travel box? Bob and the mentors answered that inevitably, some will die; however, we can tilt the box on a slanted board adjacent to the hive opening, and pheromones should attract them inside to their queen.

Rebates for bee travel boxes: if LCBA members bring hive boxes back to Ruhl's, they will get a \$6 rebate (provided that the wire mesh on boxes was not cut). We don't need to return the queen boxes.

Checking for mites? Bob encourages us all to check the boxes for mites so that we can decide on treatment as needed.

Gas money for "bee drivers": would be appreciated!

Installations: bees are more docile when it's cooler out!

Still need bees? LCBA member Jason Sherwood reported that his bees would be available on April 22 in Onalaska.

Need Help? Call LCBA Secretary Susanne at 360 880 8130 or email Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com, and she will put you in touch with a mentor in your area.

Respectfully submitted,
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