

## Lewis County Beekeepers' Association: August 2009 Newsletter

### IN THIS EDITION:

- Notes from our July 8, 2009 potluck meeting (follows News & Events)
- Mason Bees: New information & corrected notes from Kimo Thielges' June 10 talk at LCBA (important re: cleaning blocks, making nesting tubes, etc.)
- LCBA News and Upcoming Events:
  - *Next LCBA Meeting: August 12, 2009, 7 p.m.*
    - *Where: WSU Extension Classroom, old Courthouse building in Chehalis (351 N.W. North St., Chehalis 98532)*
  - *August Meeting Agenda:*
    - *Bee Wrangler Norm Switzler's cool low-budget tools for hive/swarm removal, honey extraction, etc.*
    - *Update: Southwest Washington Fair. LCBA has reserved a table; we need to discuss what to display, who'll staff it, & when. Also, news on parking permits for those staffing our booth.*
    - *LCBA bee installations—Troubleshooting Q&A*
    - *Update: LCBA Nonprofit Application status*
    - *Treasurer's Report*
    - *Review of 6/10 & 7/8/09 Minutes*
  - *Upcoming Events -- Mark Your Calendars!*
    - *September 9 LCBA meeting – Jason Sherwood will demonstrate honey extractors at his farm: address and directions TBA. Norm Switzler and Tim Geise will bring extractors too: LCBA members who want to extract honey can bring comb and 5 gallon buckets (see meeting notes, below, for tips on cheap buckets).*
    - *October 14 LCBA meeting – Jim Bach, former Washington State Apiarist, will speak about new discoveries re: Colony Collapse Disorder in honeybees. N.b.: This meeting will take place on the Centralia College campus, Corbet Theatre, 7 p.m.*

- *Curious about hive/swarm extractions? Want to ride along and watch this in action? Call Susanne (360 880 8130).*
- *Need Help with Your Bees? Call LCBA Secretary Susanne at 360 880 8130 or email [Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com](mailto:Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com), and she will put you in touch with a mentor in your area.*
- *LCBA Swap Meet—real or virtual! Got bee equipment to sell, swap, or give away? Email Susanne Weil, LCBA secretary, [susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com](mailto:susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com), or call 880 8130. Have a “bee wish list”? Email that, too.*

### **Notes from our July 8 Meeting:**

*Thanks:* We had a great turnout, meal, and fun at LCBA President Bob Harris’ farm. Thanks again to Bob and Sharon for hosting, and for the great door prizes!

*Potluck recipes:* If you’d like to share your potluck recipes with Susanne, she’ll compile a file and include it with our next newsletter. (Who made the honey butter? That was amazing, as was the pulled pork, the cake in the shape of a beehive, and many more great dishes! Thanks to the cooks.)

*Welcomes* were extended to new bee enthusiasts Steven Cummins, John and Candice Hobbs, Rob Jenkins, Maggie MacInnis, and Ed and Cynthia Wallace.

*Want cheap honey buckets?* Sharette Geise noted that low-cost honey buckets can be obtained at both Safeway and Wal-Mart, who will give away or sell at \$1 buckets that they use for frosting. The ones from Safeway are food-grade buckets. It’s a good idea to call ahead to be sure that they have buckets on hand, and be sure to ask for lids as well. One caution: avoid the garlic butter buckets, because the smell never goes away!

*Treasurer’s Report:* Sarah Roebas noted that as LCBA fronted money for the apprentice beekeeper course books and the *Bee Culture* and *American Bee Journal* subscriptions, funds are low. If you have not paid, please bring your payment to our August meeting, or contact Sarah at [revsarah@aol.com](mailto:revsarah@aol.com). The Treasurer’s Report was *approved*.

*Minutes from our June 10 meeting* were *completely forgotten* and will be dealt with at our August meeting.

*Application for Nonprofit Status:* Peter Glover reported that the Washington Secretary of State’s office has received our application for state nonprofit status. Once approved, this will give us the Employer Identification Number needed by our bank, and Peter will send the next stage of paperwork to the I.R.S. to secure our 501(c)3 nonprofit organization status. This will enable donors to itemize donations among deductions on their income taxes.

**Possible Fundraisers:** Bob is looking into getting t-shirts made with the LCBA logo embroidered on the front. Members seemed enthusiastic about this, so Bob will pursue it. LCBA would sell these at a slight mark-up, with any profit to go to the LCBA bank account to support our education/outreach programs. It was suggested that Also, Susanne reported that Copy Depot / Precision Printing will give us a volume discount on mugs and tiles with the logo or bee images; a number of members signed up for the various designs, and Susanne will get mugs and tiles made, as well as check on whether these could be sold at the Fair.

**Chehalis Farmers' Market:** Beekeepers can sell their honey at Bob's Rose of Sharon Farm booth at the market, provided that they label their honey with "Lewis County Beekeepers' Association." Check with Bob ([Robert@RoseofSharonfarm.com](mailto:Robert@RoseofSharonfarm.com)) for details. Bob has ordered an LCBA banner to be used at the Farmers' Market and the Southwest Washington Fair.

**Southwest Washington Fair, August 18-23:** Bob is working on co-locating LCBA with the Master Gardeners; our fall-back is the Farm Bureau table. We will have informational fliers about LCBA and the fall apprentice course to be taught by Norm and offered through WSU Extension. We'll also have photos and a computer with a slideshow of hive removals and other bee imagery, as well as show and tell beekeeping items. This is a great opportunity to let community members know about LCBA.

**Demonstration Hive?** A member asked whether we would have a demonstration hive to display: Bob said not this year, but he's going to work on one this winter. We've been invited by the R.E. Bennett Elementary School to give a one week class on insects and bees for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. The demonstration hive could then be used at the 2010 Fair. All agreed that this would be a terrific educational display item.

**Parking Permits for Fair Volunteers?** The Fair is not likely to give out free tickets or parking permits for volunteers this year, so Bob and Susanne will work on getting a parking permit that could be shared by LCBA fair volunteers.

**Volunteers Needed for LCBA Table at the Fair!** A sign-up sheet for staffing our table was passed around at the potluck, but we still need people for whatever time they can manage between 1 and 7 p.m., Tuesday, August 18, through Sunday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>. If you'd like to help, please call Susanne at 360 880 8130 or email [susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com](mailto:susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com).

Respectfully submitted,  
Susanne Weil, LCBA Recording Secretary

**Note from the scribe:** *Jim (Kimo) Thielges emailed me with an interesting offer and report from BeeDiverse: this follows. After that, I've reprinted Kimo's June talk for LCBA with some important corrections he sent me.*

***Mason Bee News:***

----- Original Message -----

From: "Beediverse" <bees@beediverse.com>

To: "James Thielges" <kimosabe@compprime.com>

Sent: Sunday, July 05, 2009 9:40 AM

Subject: MASON BEES IN BRIEF JULY 2009

**MASON BEES IN BRIEF JULY 2009**

**SPECIAL! SUMMER POLLINATING BEES.....FREE SHIPPING**

Take this opportunity to provide a home for your summer mason bee pollinating bee species. Buy one or more Highrises for summer mason bees and your shipping costs as on the order form, will be reimbursed to you. Any order including the Highrise for summer mason bees is included in this offer. This is a time limited offer until 12 July 2009.

**CAN BEES SMELL?**

Watching bees is not just a spring event!

What can bees smell when they are searching amongst flowers for the presence of nectar and pollen?

I was told recently that pepper plants give off an odor when it is infected with plant eating mites- the odor probably comes from the dead plant cells surrounding the infected area. This reminded me of a great experience I had while conducting field research with bees pollinating blueberry flowers. During that research, I soon found out that for bees, odor is a very powerful way of finding food.

I was interested to see which species of bee was the better blueberry pollinator by the amount of pollen deposited on a flower. I knew that this would be difficult data to collect. But the scenery was beautiful; research was done under sunny conditions and the lounge chair looked very comfortable. I had big plans of lazing away my waiting time on a lounge chair because this data would be difficult to get. I set up a lounge chair so I could see bees visiting previously-bagged flowers. The idea was to time a bee on a flower, and when it left, collect the stamen with the pollen. I bagged about 50 branches in different areas of the field and set up my lounge chair, stop watch and other equipment. I removed the first bag, turned away, looked again, and there were already 3 bees present on these flowers. I was amazed. Within 10 mins interest diminished and most flowers had been visited. I thought that this was a chance occurrence. I watched at station 2 and the same thing happened!

Bees visited previously bagged flowers within 10-15 secs from the time the bag was removed. Bumble bees, mason bees, and honey bees all came to these flowers. I filmed these bees feeding and gathering nectar and some of this footage is now on my DVD 'All About Mason Bees'.

In the final analysis, individual bumble bees deposited more pollen grains than the other bee species. Mason Bees and Honey bees deposited about the same number of pollen grains, about half the number that bumble bees deposited. This means that two visits by a bumble bee, and three visits by honey bees or mason bees will pollinate a blueberry flower.

Have a great summer!  
Margriet Dogterom, PhD for Beediverse Products

***Notes from our June Speaker, James (“Kimo”) Thielges on Mason Bees  
Revised After Corrections!***

**Update:** Kimo is creating two new Mason Bee handouts, which will be available at the September Gardening for Everyone event. The first handout will be about Osmia bees (i.e., blue orchard, summer, horned-face, etc. mason bees). The other will be “Nesting for Mason Bees” (blocks, straws, liners, binder blocks, etc.). The goal is to introduce more valuable pollinators, and to provide alternatives to raise them. These handouts should complement the ones we received in June.

\* **Kimo’s contact information:** [kimosabe@compprime.com](mailto:kimosabe@compprime.com)

\* **For additional information, see Kimo’s handouts:**

\* **Mason Bee Websites (also has a book list);**

\* **Blue Orchard Mason Bees.**

**If you missed these handouts, email Susanne ([susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com](mailto:susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com)) for a copy.**

**WSU extension ~~ Mason bee information ~~ <http://www.cahe.wsu.edu>**

***Corrected Notes from Kimo’s talk on June 10:***

Kimo got involved with beekeeping while studying at the University of Hawaii and later experienced the different style of beekeeping in China, where honey can be colored, flavored, or watered down, yet is still regarded as “pure.” He had just returned from a class reunion in Hawaii and passed around some very dark Hawaiian honey for LCBA members to taste.

After dealing with mites, Kimo cut back on honeybee hives and became more interested in Mason Bees. In the late ‘90s, his son was looking for an Eagle Scout project, and they began work making blocks for Mason Bees. Since then, he’s worked with the Lewis County Master Gardeners at Gardening for Everyone events, regularly having a booth at their spring show and sometimes fall as well.

***Mason bees and honeybees: a symbiotic relationship:*** Like honeybees, Mason bees are an important natural resource for pollination. They seem to lack some of the problems currently plaguing honeybees (bacteria, viruses, fungi, and now CCD). Mason

bees work symbiotically with honeybees: they are cool weather bees, doing their work early in spring, and as they end their life cycle, the honeybees begin.

***What Mason Bees pollinate:*** Mason bees pollinate fruit and nut trees, berries and flowers; like honeybees, they are attracted to blue, purple, and yellow flowers. Mason bees work on single bloom flowers, whereas honeybees easily extract from double blooms. Mason bees don't make honey, but they pollinate better, with a 95% success rate: a Mason bee can pollinate 2000 blossoms on a good day. For honeybees, pollinating is a secondary purpose, whereas Mason bees are designed to collect much more pollen than nectar.

***Stinging:*** Mason bees rarely sting unless people bother them or if caught in clothes. When they do sting, the site doesn't swell; it's more like a mosquito bite, with no stinger left behind. People tend to confuse Mason bees with houseflies. Mason bees have 4 wings, houseflies only 2: Mason bees buzz, whereas houseflies have a humming sound. Unfortunately, people who confuse the two may swat and kill a pollinator.

***Range of Mason Bees:*** Whereas honeybees move blossom to blossom, foraging over about a 2 to 3 mile area, Mason bees move tree to tree, ranging roughly 100 yards, the size of a football field. At night, they return to their nesting boxes (see below).

***Nesting boxes for Mason Bees:*** Unlike honeybees, Mason bees are not social: they do not live together in hives, though they can live in neighboring nesting boxes without commotion. Kimo recommends putting nesting boxes as close to the bees' food source (trees, bushes, whatever you have: see above) as possible. He recommends 250 nesting tubes per acre. Without available man-made nesting boxes, Mason bees tend to like cedar siding shingles for the small spaces available (Bob quipped that they also like electrical outlets in barns. . . .).

***Life cycle:*** Mason bees thrive in our cool, damp Northwest climate. When the daytime temperature hits 55 degrees for several days in a row, that will trigger their release; the same trigger as for blossoms. They emerge in late March to early April and have a 6 to 8 week life cycle; the males emerge before the females and so are all ready to impregnate the females when they emerge. Bob Harris noted that he has consistently seen Mason bees out about 3 weeks prior to the emergence of his honeybees, and that they did great work pollinating his fruit trees.

The Mason bee's nesting hole is like an apartment: the females lay eggs, make pollen balls with nectar, and use their stingers to put them in and seal off the tube with mud, hence their nickname "mud bees." The females live in the back third of the tube and the males in the front two-thirds: if predators get in, the females are protected, and enough males will be left to ensure a next generation. The female marks nesting cells with pheromones. They will lay an egg a day, laying along the inside of a tube until it is full, then move to a new tube and lay more.

After those 6 to 8 weeks, the female Mason bees will seal up their nesting tubes. Once the eggs are laid and the cells are capped, the eggs hatch, the larvae eat the pollen/nectar mixture left behind by the female over the next month. They eliminate waste in the corner of the cell, rest, and once they grow to be pupae, they make their cocoon and wait to emerge. Kimo urges not bothering them so as not to interrupt their food and nesting cycle.

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***Cleaning nesting blocks:*** Kimo recommends an annual cleaning program. When the bees emerge, give them a clean new nesting block and put the old ones into a cardboard box. Then you can clean out the old blocks when you bring the bees in in the fall. You can clean the holes out with a brad point 5/16<sup>th</sup> inch drill bit: a brad point achieves a sharp, clean drill cut, whereas a regular drill bit leaves burrs in the drill hole. Once you've cleaned out the holes, knock out mud by tapping with a mallet. Next, soak the blocks in in a warm water solution with a bit of bleach. When asked what would happen if one never cleaned the nesting blocks, Kimo noted that eventually the bees would stop using them.

***Making nesting blocks:*** Kimo distributed a handout with a template for making Mason Bee blocks (if you missed the handout, email [susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com](mailto:susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com) for a copy). An ideal block size is 4x4x8 inches (though there's nothing wrong with making them longer than 8 inches). The holes should be 5/16<sup>th</sup> of an inch (use that size drill bit), and you should drill to within half an inch of the back of the wood block. Do not use treated wood: arsenic and other chemicals will kill the bees. If you want to buy nesting boxes, Gardener's Supply makes a nice bamboo Mason bee box.

***Making nesting tubes using reeds and sheets of paper:*** Kimo demonstrated how to use a ¼ inch dowel, or #2 wood pencil, to roll and make a paper straw in which Mason Bees will nest. Do not use a reed: it is not strong enough for rolling purposes, as it will crack and fall apart. First, lay the dowel or pencil on a square of paper, pointing diagonally to opposite corners, then roll the paper around the dowel or pencil, tape up the paper, and slide the dowel or pencil out. Kimo puts these paper straws in a coffee can, and this has worked well for his bees. One warning: do not use plastic straws, because plastic promotes condensation and fungus.

***Insulated straws:*** Ruhl Bees's Mason bee outlet sells foot-long wax-coated cardboard straws for 75 cents. They can be cut in half to make six inch straws, or "crimped" at midpoint to make two six inch straws. Regular cardboard straws and liners are available through Knox Cellars ([www.knoxcellars.com](http://www.knoxcellars.com)). The advantage of using

liners for insulation is that they are useful in health cocoon management. You can slit the tube and see if there are healthy cocoons or not. Another way to see how the bees are doing is to use an observation box: Kimo demonstrated a box with a glass top.

***Predators, disease, and pesticides:*** Birds can be a threat, as can other insects, such as wasps and hornets. Mason bees can fall prey to disease, like honeybees, though they have not fared as badly as honeybees have in recent years. Do not spray pesticides around your Mason bees' feeding and nesting area: if you have to spray, do it lightly, and do it either well in advance or, or well after, the bees' nesting season.

***Helping Mason bees over-winter:*** The Mason bees' worst enemies, though, are extremes of temperature, wind, and rain. The best ways to help them seem to be to keep their nesting boxes in cool, dry places and clean their nesting boxes when they emerge in early spring (see above). Though some books urge not putting Mason bees in wild, open spaces, Karen Strickland, Ph.D. in pollinators, says this is exaggerated. Their shelters can be put in open places and the bees will be fine, but she recommends bringing them in in the fall, ideally in October. She recommends a storage shed or garage, cool and unheated, to protect them from freezing. They can be left out during the fall in winter in climates that are not extreme, but even here, Kimo recommends storing them in cool, dry shelters or putting them in a refrigerator at 35 to 38 degrees Fahrenheit.

***Capturing wild Mason bees:*** You can hang a cell box (block) in a tree to capture wild Mason bees. Kimo demonstrated a hanging box with a metal overhanging roof. It's best placed on the east/southeast side of a structure: this way, the box catches the warming of the morning sun, but has shade in the afternoon to prevent cooking of eggs/larvae.

***“Oregon Berry Bees”:*** Oregon Berry Bees are in the same family as the Orchard Mason Bee. Karen Strickland has posted an update on these bees, plus photos, on her blog: <http://oregonberrybee.blogspot.com>. These bees were flying around as of mid-June: watch for them on blackberry bushes. For information about these bees, check [www.pollinatorparadise.com](http://www.pollinatorparadise.com).

Questions for and answers by Kimo are incorporated into the notes above. All present thanked him for a very informative talk and great handouts!