

Lewis County Beekeepers' Association: *July 2009 Newsletter*

IN THIS EDITION:

- Notes from our June 10, 2009 meeting, including:
 - Jim Thielge's talk on Mason Bees
 - Update on Hive/Swarm Removals
 - Upcoming LCBA Events

- LCBA News and Upcoming Events:
 - *July LCBA Meeting: Summer Potluck!*
 - *Where: Bob Harris' Rose of Sharon Farm [contact information omitted from online edition]*
 - *When: Wednesday, July 8, 2009, 6 p.m. (not 7 p.m.!).*
 - *Please bring:*
 - *A chair, plate, cutlery, and food to share (whatever you like, though it was suggested that recipes involving honey would be appropriate ☺)*
 - *Bob will have a grill ready to go and will provide cold drinks.*
 - *July Meeting Agenda: This summer potluck will be mainly for socializing, with a short agenda:*
 - *Update: Southwest Washington Fair. LCBA has reserved a table; we need to discuss what to display, who'll staff it, & when.*
 - *Update: LCBA bee installations—Troubleshooting Q&A*
 - *Treasurer's Report*
 - *Review of the minutes of 6/10/09 Business Meeting*
 - *Mark Your Calendars! –*
 - *August 12 LCBA meeting: Bee Wrangler Norm Switzler's cool low-budget tools for hive/swarm removal, honey extraction, etc.*
 - *September 14 LCBA meeting – Jason Sherwood will demonstrate his honey extractor at his farm. Norm will bring extractors as well: LCBA members who want to extract honey can bring comb to this meeting.*

- *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, or call 880 8130. Have a “bee wish list”? Email that, too.*

June Speaker: James (“Kimo”) Thielges on *Mason Bees*

* James’ contact information: kimosabe@compprime.com

* For additional information, see James’ handouts:

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

* Blue Orchard Mason Bees.

If you missed these handouts, email Susanne (susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com) for a copy.

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

Notes from James’ talk:

James 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, James 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. James 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 mid to late March 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. James urges not bothering them so as not to interrupt their food and nesting cycle.

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Cleaning nesting blocks: James 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 5/16th inch drill bit and a bottlebrush, then knock out mud by tapping with a mallet, cleaning out the holes with a bottlebrush, and soaking 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, James noted that eventually the bees would stop using them.

Making nesting blocks: James distributed a handout with a template for making Mason Bee blocks (if you missed the handout, email 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 5/16th 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: James demonstrated how to lay a reed on a square of paper, pointing diagonally to opposite corners, then roll the paper around the reed, tape it up, and slide the reed out. James 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 straws insulated with liners for 75 cents. The advantage of the insulation is that 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: James 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, James 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. James demonstrated a hanging box with a metal overhanging roof. It's best placed on the east/southeast side of a structure or maximum morning warmth; then, when temperatures rise in late afternoon, the Mason bees are shaded and don't cook.

“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.

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

Notes from our June 8 Meeting:

Welcomes: LCBA President Bob Harris introduced new faces Teresa Audra and Nathan Coster of Shelton, as well as Bob Jenkins. Nina Downing from Mossyrock will join us at our July meeting.

Minutes from our May 13th meeting were approved. As Sarah Roebas, our Treasurer, could not attend, we deferred the Treasurer's Report for our July meeting.

Master Beekeeper Course: Bob passed out Test Sheet #9 for the Apprentice course handbook, which had been missing in the previous packet. Those who haven't yet paid can get a book for \$10 (families can share).

Farmers' Market: Chehalis Farmer's Market starts on Tuesday, June 16th. Norm Switzler and Tim and Sharette Geise are going to sell honey under the LCBA umbrella. Bob reminded us that to sell honey at the Farmers' Market, bottles must be labeled with “LCBA.” These can be handmade. Susanne and Sharette will talk about making labels with our new logo.

Magazine subscriptions: Bob checked to see if everyone who subscribed has received the latest *Bee Journal* with the three back issues: members had.

Members' contact list: The list of members names, phone numbers, email and snail mail addresses is ready. We discussed whether these should be sent in an email with the minutes, or whether it would be better to keep a closed list, as the Master Gardeners do. Those present agreed that it would be preferable that members call an

LCBA Board member and get individual contact information that way. If any LCBA member wants to contact another member, email Susanne at susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com, or call her at (360) 880 8130, and she will send the information you need.

State Licensing Number: We need to get our state licensing number within a few weeks. Peter Glover volunteered to take care of this and will update Board members.

Hive/Swarm Removal contacts: Norm Switzler gave an update on recent hive removals and invited those interested in coming along to contact him. To contact those interested in removing swarms or colonies, contact Susanne (360 880 8130 or Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com).

Hive Removing Adventures: Norm and Dave have done a good deal of “bee wrangling” since LCBA’s last meeting. Several calls came in from Hanaford Valley over the course of just a few days. In one case, the bees were in floor joists of an abandoned trailer, and they had to cut metal strips out and peel away parts of the floor to get the bees out. Dave dove in and grabbed them out. These were “mean bees.” Two miles up the road, the second call was for a hive in a pump house wall: in an hour, they got the wall cut out and the bees (“nice bees”) into a box. Howard came along to help on these.

The next day, Sunday, June 7, Norm and Dave spent about 5 to 6 hours starting at 2 p.m. tackling a big structure with two colonies. Bees were in a knothole with a week’s building time under their belts. They got a lot of bees, particularly a lot of drones, 150 pounds of honeycomb, and cut till they got to the brood, then put the capped brood in a box. Putting capped brood in the box will keep the bees there because of the pheromonal smell.

On Monday, June 8, Norm got a call on a swarm that turned out to be 20 feet up in a fir tree. He climbed up a ladder using a butterfly net and put the bees into a box with comb. The bees had been on this particular property for two years in a cinder block wall: to get them out would have meant killing the colony, so Norm had told the owners to call him if the bees swarmed. Later the same day, he got another colony, again in Hanaford Valley, in a four foot maple tree.

Norm fielded questions about recent removals: Jason Sherwood asked if anyone would take the bees out of a wall, hive them, and then give them to the property owners. Norm said he’d gladly do that, though most don’t want to keep the bees: they just want them taken away unharmed.

Feral bees and genetic diversity? Norm likes to catch feral bees because they are locally acclimatized and thus more adept at defending themselves against our local pests. He has never re-queened a colony unless the queen seems weak; in those situations, he puts in a local bee.

How long to wait before checking for brood if you catch a swarm?

Norm recommends three weeks to a month.

Should you feed a swarm when you hive them? If you have removed a hive that's swarmed and you can get the comb along with the hive, they will have honey stored, so you can leave them alone. If you do not capture comb along with the bees, though, you may want to feed them to get them settled and started in their new home.

Hive removing tools: Tim Geise asked if Norm would bring in his handmade tools, such as his butterfly net, to demonstrate. Norm said his operation is "pretty low tech": for example, he uses bamboo skewers to attach comb to the sides of a frame. Sharette Geise noted that once she put together a bee suit out of laundry bags and duct tape to remove a swarm (she still has the first hive she ever caught in their yard).

Liability issues: Norm doesn't charge for removals, though he will accept donations, and people often want to give something. He emphasized today, as at past talks, that it's crucial to tell people up front that getting bees out can mean property damage, and that he doesn't repair damage to structures. People tend to be fine with that: they just want the bees out without killing them.

Next removal? Gordon Ulmer has two hives about six feet off the ground in the wall of a building to be burned. Norm asked that anyone who wants to come along leave their phone number with him.

Odd and disturbing event: Jason reported that someone put a sponge in the entry tube to his observation hive. He is getting the sponge analyzed to see whether any substances had been placed on it. Members asked Jason to update us at the July meeting.

Southwest Washington Fair: Bob is working on co-locating LCBA with the Master Gardeners. The Fair will be August 18 to 23rd, and we'll organize volunteers for our LCBA table at our July meeting.

LCBA Summer Potluck! Bob Harris volunteered to host the July meeting at his farm. We will have a potluck: members can bring what they'd like, though honey-themed dishes would be fun and mission-appropriate ;) To give time for setup and eating, as well as the meeting, we'll convene at 6 p.m.. For directions, contact Susanne (see below).

Respectfully submitted,
Susanne Weil, LCBA Recording Secretary, susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com