

## Lewis County Beekeepers' Association: *June 2009 Newsletter*

### IN THIS EDITION:

- **Notes from our May 13, 2009 meeting, including Norm Switzer's talk on Hive Removals; Questions on LCBA Members' New Colonies; Summer Events**
- **LCBA News and Upcoming Events:**
  - *Next LCBA Meeting: Wednesday, June 10, 2009, 7 p.m.* at the WSU Extension classroom in Chehalis.
  - *June Speaker: Jim Thielges on Mason Bees. Jim is also a honeybee keeper and will gladly answer questions about both types of pollinators.*
  - *Still Need Bees?* LCBA member Jason Sherwood reported that his bees would be available on April 22 in Onalaska. As of June 1, Jason still has bees and queens for those in need. . . .
  - *Need Help with Your Bees?* LCBA bee mentors—Bob Harris (360 219 6458), Dave Smith (291 3456), Roy Schaafsma (274 8616), Norm Switzler (330 1788), Tim and Sharette Giese (748 8884), and Jason Sherwood (985 2211)—will answer questions.
  - *Returning Ruhl Bee Boxes—reminder!* When 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).
  - *June 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting Agenda:*
    - *Speaker, Jim Thielges on Mason Bees – see above*
    - *Update: LCBA bee installations—Troubleshooting Q&A*
    - *Update: Southwest Washington Fair LCBA Table*
    - *July meeting topics and speakers: Harvard Robbins? Honey extraction demonstration?*
    - *August Meeting: LCBA potluck and tour of Jason Sherwood's beekeeping operation, including his honey extractor?*
    - *Treasurer's Report (and possible fund-raiser?)*
    - *Review of the minutes of our 5/13/09 Business Meeting*

**Notes from our May 13 Meeting:** LCBA President Bob Harris was ill, so Vice President Norm Switzler did double duty, serving as speaking and running the meeting (way to multi-task, Norm!).

***Hive Removals:*** Norm reported on recent hive removals, starting with the one done on Monday, May 11 in Winlock. When Norm, Dave Smith, Bob Harris, and Peter Glover arrived on site, they learned that bees had not just occupied a barn, but also a shed, with other infestations. Norm needed to use a knife and split the hive, then move it away from the house and into the field, because the caller's wife is very allergic. Once in the field, they used a saw and removed 2 and a half feet of comb and filled an entire box.

The major job was extracting bees from the barn wall. The LCBA crew had been told that there were open studs, but had *not* been told that there was cabinetry in front, as well as a particle board layer between the would-be removers and the bees. There was also a slider door container which had been waxed and closed by the bees. The LCBA crew had to cut out each of the combs. Norm commented, "They were indignant . . . the worst I've dealt with in years. Let's just say these were Bad Girls." Then there was the top of the tack room: these bees were not on ground level. "It was a goat rodeo, I'm telling you," Norm reported. The combs were not quite big enough for frames, but were fanned in a catty-corner formation, difficult to stow away.

In the end, though, the intrepid LCBA hive removers took four colonies out of two structures. Norm will see how well they do: the removers spotted a lot of eggs and larvae, and made sure that each had drones for breeding. They left the owner with twenty pounds of honey in combs.

*How do people who call for swarm or hive removals think about the bees?* Norm noted that in general, he is welcomed with open arms to get the bees out. Most people don't want bees killed, and most are willing to fix the damage themselves. Norm clarifies that all he is there to do is remove the bees: he is not responsible for fixing damage incurred during the removal, and he makes sure that homeowners know this.

*What about stings?* When bees sting, they leave a pheromonal deposit on their victim: this draws other bees. You can smoke away the pheromonal deposit odor, but this can be hard to do in the midst of a hive/swarm removal. It's best to have a washcloth, water, and towel ready to clean yourself off, if that's feasible. Norm also noted that different colonies have different severities of stings: this could relate to individual bees. Norm was asked whether bee stings are as bad as those from yellow jackets or hornets, and he answered that this really varies by colony. Jason Sherwood agreed, noting that younger bees may be less potent.

*What's the impact of bee stings on pets?* Norm says that usually, bees will sting a dog or cat in the head, and they can swell up. It's best to keep pets well away from a hive or swarm to be on the safe side. However, some animals fare well around bees, whereas other individuals become targets for unknown reasons. Norm had one red rooster that his

bees would go for, while his other red rooster and Bard Rock hens could do whatever they wanted without seeming to annoy the bees.

*The Mary's Corner Hive:* This was an overhead job. Norm had been told ahead of time that a six foot ladder would do, only to find that the bees were actually *twelve* feet up and, just to make matters challenging, on top of an electrical service. Bob and Norm had to “pull like crazy” to get the comb down, wearing full suits, with honey raining down all around them. Norm now wants to devise a strap to hold his hat down. They had to wash clothes, tools, etc. They advise washing carefully at home, taking care because bees will be in your sleeves, socks, and any other travel-ready folds in your garments. . . . All ended happily, however, with all the bees tucked into one box.

*Videotaping?* Norm was asked whether a hive removal could be videotaped. It could, Norm answered, but that didn't happen this time. Photos may be available at our June meeting. Sarah Roebas reported that she went along on one of Norm's and Dave Smith's hive removals, and said that they were great and very educational to watch, as well as very gentle in their approach to the bees. Norm uses skewers through drilled holes in the frames to hold comb onto the frames and fill the box. He noted that it's safest to suit up, because bees really don't care for people destroying their homes.

*Would hive removal be easier if you smoke the bees?* Norm answered that there are two schools of thought. Some think it's possible to smoke the bees too much, and that it won't stop the sting/pheromone threat. Norm tries to spray them with sugar water.

*Is it best to wear leather gloves for hive removals?* Norm thinks not. He uses rubberized gloves—that is, gloves with rubber bottoms, cuffed to the shoulders. He got these as throwaways at work; Jason noted that Dadant sells gloves like that. Norm likes the tighter grip for overhead work, and he finds the plastic easier to clean than leather, though he noted that many beekeepers do use leather gloves.

*How should we clean the veil from the beekeepers' helmet?* Norm: just wash it; if you hang the veil in the shower, almost everything will wash out.

### ***Questions on LCBA members' new colonies:***

*Has anyone with a new hive put on a second hive body yet?* No one had. The *Beekeeping for Dummies* book advises five weeks until putting on the second hive body. Jason noted that when bees have drawn comb on the 7<sup>th</sup> frame, that's when he puts on his 2<sup>nd</sup> hive body. Norm agreed, noting that it is important not to let the bees get cramped. You don't want them to go away to find a new space. If the brood space is congested, the bees will want to swarm.

*Should we still be feeding the sugar water mix to our bees, or should they be finding their own food?* Many are still feeding the bees. We've had a late spring, and there may not yet be enough natural food (this was as of the 5/13 meeting). The

recommendation: just move the division board feeder up to the top of the 2<sup>nd</sup> hive body once you add that.

*Why do some hives build comb above the frames?* Norm said that bees will tend to build comb as close to their food source as they can. He would rather let them feed off natural comb and have them forage. He doesn't want his bees dependent on sugar water, and he is not selling honey. Of course, not everyone has access to comb with honey. One additional concern for those of us still feeding sugar water: beware of fungus build up and be sure to clean it away if you find it.

*Top feeders vs. division board feeder within the hive:* Jason prefers the division board feeder inside the hive to top feeders, thinking that the top feeder may be far for the workers to go. Still, he noted that the top feeder has the advantage of not interfering in the hives themselves.

*How should we ventilate our hives in hot weather?* Norm suggested that we prop the top covers of our hives up with small pebbles, one on each corner. This should not provide too large an entry for other insects, but should provide some cross-ventilation in the hotter months. Another beekeeper suggested placing nickel coins at each corner for a snug and even fit.

*The Ziploc Feeder Bag Option:* Gary Kalich noted that if you fill a Ziploc bag with syrup and simply lay it on top of the frame, all you need do is cut a couple of small holes and let them drip. The bees will drink it down in a week. He has had no mold problems using this method. Also, it's easy to adjust the amount of feed by the size of the Ziploc. Gary noted that pictures of this approach are easy to find on the Internet (try Google Images and search for: bees AND "ziploc feeder").

*Why do some bees build between frames instead of staying true to frames?* They may do this to keep warm. Jason suggested, for those with plastic inserts, cutting the comb between the frames, unless there is brood on the other side. If there is, then wait until you are ready to add a second hive body, and then you can afford to lose some brood. Jason rolls plastic inserts with hot wax and sprays sugar: he doesn't use paraffin, but rather, melts real beeswax, 40 pounds at a time. He'd be glad to help people roll some wax: just call (see number under Mentors, above). With this approach, Jason hasn't had a significant problem, though he noted that some bees will build between frames no matter what you do. Jason suspects that not enough beeswax is put on the frame material at the factory.

*Black frames vs. white frames: advantages?* With black frames, the larvae are much more visible than they are on white frames, which is why Jason recommends them.

*Species differences:* Each type of bees have their own attributes. For example, the Italian bees (which many new LCBA beekeepers now have) are very gentle. Some bees are more hardy. Italians are reputed to give better honey, whereas Carniolans give better wax, and Caucasians produce better propylis.

*Can bees be encouraged to swarm into a box?* If you buy a small vial of pheromone—Dadant carries these—you can spritz an empty box, and scout bees may find it and lead a swarm to the box. Jason has used pheromone in boxes to lure swarms, but it didn't work: instead, bees flocked to an old horse trailer with abandoned comb. It's possible that old comb may be the best lure, so save discarded comb for the future.

*Ants in hives?* If you are having problems with ants in your hives, Norm suggests putting the cinder blocks on which the hives rest in buckets with oil or detergent to stop the ants from climbing up. Norm noted that any kind of oil works. Some use boric acid, sprinkling this on the ground or near the ant run. It's good for the big carpenter ants, not the little ones. The boric acid is abrasive on the ants' exoskeletons. Another suggestion: sprinkle ditumaceous earth around: this will be taken into the ant nest. In general, bees will not let the ants in, but if they do let them in, then the ants take on the scent of the colony, and they can come and go with impunity. If the hive is strong and the guard bees are at work, this should not be a problem.

Jason and Norm noted that small ants sometimes get between the telescoping cover and the hive bodies, but generally not very many. If they start to overwhelm the colony, then you have to intervene. If this happens in an established colony, something else is probably seriously wrong.

*Hive extractions: how do you know that you've got the queen?* Norm answered that you don't always know. However, the workers can feed royal jelly into an egg and create a queen as long as a viable egg is available. Jason has queens for sale, fyi.

*Is LCBA just about honey bees, or can we talk about Mason Bees? Do honeybees and Mason bees get along?* Yes, honeybees and Mason bees do get along: they don't compete. However, hornets and yellow jackets can be very bad news: they can get past guard bees and steal honeybee larvae for food. Jim Thielges was suggested as a June speaker (*see above Upcoming Events: he has agreed to be our June speaker*).

### ***Summer Events and Topics for upcoming LCBA meetings:***

\* *Top bar feeder questions* can be fielded by the Gieses. Supplies for this approach, such as hardware cloth, are available at Sunbirds. You need a sealed bottom board with an insert. See [www.beesource.com](http://www.beesource.com): this has blueprints for observation hives and more.

\* *Observation hives:* it was suggested that LCBA acquire an observation hive for educational purposes.

\* *Anyone interested in bumblebees?* Jason has some bumblebee boxes that he built from internet plans. Norm noted that bumblebees like birdhouses. Jason once read that if you build a bumblebee box, you need to let it weather for a year because they don't like the new wood odor.

\* *LCBA Swap Meet—real or virtual!* Do you have bee equipment to sell, swap, or give away? If you do, email Susanne Weil, recording secretary for LCBA, at [sweil@centralia.edu](mailto:sweil@centralia.edu). Alternatively, if you have a “wish list” of things you need, email too. Jason will sell nukes for \$90.

\* *Special summer meeting for swaps and extraction demonstration!:* We discussed having a “swap meet day” this summer, possibly along with a pot luck. Jason would be willing to host an extractor demonstration at his farm in Toledo; Judy Nichols would also be willing to host a summer meeting.

\* *As a prelude to the on-site extraction demonstration* at Jason’s, Norm could do a demonstration of an extractor at our June or July meeting, provided we covered up the table.

\* *Southwest Washington Fair:* We have a table and will need to talk about what to display and who’ll staff it when at our next meeting.

***Business Meeting:***

***Minutes of 4-8-09 meeting were approved.***

***Treasurer’s Report:*** Sarah Roebas asked that members pay for magazine subscriptions and the apprentice WSBKA class, as funds are leaving the bank faster than they are coming in. Update at our June meeting. It was suggested that LCBA might develop a few colonies to sell to recoup expenses.

***Returning Ruhl Bee Boxes:*** Judy Nichols brought back two boxes, as did Scott Potlock, for return to Ruhl Bees. When 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.

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

***Need Help?*** LCBA bee mentors—Bob Harris (360 219 6458), Dave Smith (291 3456), Roy Schaafsma (274 8616), Norm Switzler (330 1788), the Gieses (748 8884), Jason Sherwood (985 2211)—are willing to help those who are installing bees for the first time.

Respectfully submitted,  
Susanne Weil, LCBA Recording Secretary, [sweil@centralia.edu](mailto:sweil@centralia.edu)