

Lewis County Beekeepers' Association: *March 2009 Newsletter*

IN THIS EDITION:

- **LCBA News and Upcoming Events:**
 - ***Next LCBA Meeting: Wednesday, April 8, 2009, 7 p.m.*** at the WSU Extension classroom in Chehalis.
 - ***April Meeting Agenda:***
 - ***Speaker / Discussion Topic:*** Tim and Sharette Giese will tell us what they learned at last month's conference on biodynamics and bees; Bob will lead discussion of bee installation and other issues swarming up for the new beekeepers among us.
 - ***Update: Vader swarm removal / LCBA training opportunity***
 - ***LCBA Logo Contest—the winning design will be announced***
 - ***Will LCBA join WSBA (Washington State Beekeeping Association)?***
 - ***Will LCBA join the Chehalis Farmer's Market?***
 - ***Apprentice Beekeeper course available to start this May—see minutes, below, for details.***
 - ***Want Bees? (for details, see February newsletter)***
 - **Contact John Edwards of Ruhl Bees, Portland**
 - **Phone: 503 657 5399**
 - **Online: www.ruhlbeesupply.com** (focus on honeybees); and
 - **www.orchardbees.com** (focus on Mason bees).
 - **Contact LCBA Member Jason Sherwood [contact information removed from online edition]**
 - **Notes from our March discussion: Now that you've got bees, how do you install them in hives and care for them?**
 - **Minutes of our 3/11/09 Business Meeting.**

Notes from our March 2009 Meeting:

Opportunity for LCBA members to take the WSBA Apprentice Beekeeping Course:

Before our discussion of how to install new bees started, Bob announced that he is now certified by WSBA as an official Apprentice beekeeper. He is now working on the Journeyman course and can help those who choose to take the Apprentice course.

Bob reported that the Apprentice course took him about 45 hours and is just a primer. In ten lessons, the apprentice course covers honeybees and products; beekeeping equipment; starting up with package bees; spring hive management; honey cultivation in summer; fall hive management; dealing with diseases and pests; handling honeybee stings; pollination; queens and mating; and more.

After completing the ten lessons, there is an open book exam: to pass, students need to score 80% or higher and can re-take the test multiple times until they do. Once a beekeeper passes, he/she gets a certificate as a beekeeping apprentice. There is a \$10 fee for the booklet and application form, plus you get a patch upon completion. The money goes to WSBA for bee research; it evidently helps a good deal now that WSU's budget is being cut.

Bob passed around a sign-up sheet; a number of people signed up. The books for the Apprentice course will arrive by our May meeting: members can take the book and ten test forms; Bob will have answer keys to grade them and can keep student files in the county extension office. No money will be collected until we are ready to place the book order via our club.

For details on the Journeyman and Master Beekeepers' courses, see the February 2009 minutes or visit the WASBA website (www.wasba.org).

Notes from our March discussion: Now that you've got bees, how do you install them in hives and care for them?

Picking up our bees when they arrive: Bob Harris and Gary Gorremans went to Ruhl Bee, Portland, on March 6th and reported that our bees probably will arrive in the third week of April. Weather in California is causing delays. This could change, though. When the bees arrive, Bob will get volunteers to go with him to Portland to pick them up. Bob can store the bees for LCBA members for a little while.

Still want to order bees? It is not too late to place a new order (\$75 for a package of bees plus a queen). John may be able to discount more for us and wants to help; also, Jason Sherwood offered package bees (\$65 for a package plus queen).

What kind of bees are we getting? Carnelian bees could be in short supply this year. Ruhl may have to substitute Italians for them. There have been many problems with Carnelian queens this year, and Italians may be better for new beekeepers.

Building Frames for Your Beehives: Bob asked who had frames, etc., but had not yet actually assembled their hives. A number of members fell into this boat. Bob volunteered use of his wood shop and paint rack an night of the week of April 5 for those working on building hives.

How Do Bees Get Shipped? Bob displayed a travel box and food (syrup) container. The sugar syrup is placed inside a metal coffee can with a hole in the bottom: vacuum suction keeps the honey from oozing out, and the bees climb up to eat. ***Queens*** travel with the hive, but segregated in their own wooden tab box that gets slid into a groove and hangs in the center of the cage. This is important because the queen is not yet queen of *that* package of bees: they won't recognize her pheromones yet. She'll claim them by exuding pheromones, and in a couple of days—roughly the time of the transit process—she'll have exuded enough to “own” the bees in the package.

Extracting Bees from Their Package: The first time new beekeepers do this, it's “nervous-making”: after that, you get used to it. The box is screened, and you need to be sure not to cut the screen out with a knife, or the box will be ruined for re-use. Instead, here's what to do, step by step:

- * When you get them home, the bees will have been in transit for 4 to 5 days. They will be stressed and need to calm down before being extracted from the package.

- * Make a 1 : 1 mixture of sugar and water (one pound sugar to 16 ounces of water). **DO NOT GIVE CORN SYRUP!** Read the package in the supermarket and be sure you are giving pure cane sugar. Bring it almost, but not quite, to a boil, so as not to let the sugar carmelize. Carmelized sugar can give bees dysentery.

- * The ratio of sugar to water that you give bees in the spring differs from that in the fall. In spring, it's a 1 to 1 sugar to water ratio for the first time you feed your bees. Also, it is a good idea to put in Fumadil-B (antiviral for Nozema and helps combat dysentery). In fall, you would use a 2 to 1 ratio of sugar to water.

- * Let the sugar/water mixture cool. Then put it into a squirt bottle and spritz it over the screen in the box. **Do NOT** paint brush over the screen—that hurts bees' feet.

- * How much to squirt? Do not drench them, but give a good amount. The spray distracts the bees and calms them down. They will spend the evening grooming each other clean and thus feeding on the sugar water mixture. Spray the bees a couple of times per day until you can move them into their hive boxes.

- * Put the box in a cool, dark place. **Do NOT** put the bees into the boxes you have made for them right away.

- * Monitor the bees. They will make poop: that's normal. There will probably be about a quarter of an inch to half an inch of dead bees on the bottom of the box: that too

is normal because of the bee lifespan. If there is over a half inch of dead bees, that could be a problem, and you may need a new package.

* Put the bees into the hive as quickly as is practical—but this is weather-dependent. Do not move them in the pouring rain or if it is snowing. If they stay in their cage for 3 to 4 days, that is ok.

* Will the bees attack you when you approach them? Probably not. Bees are defensive, not offensive, by nature. Once they establish their colony on your property, then they may become defensive.

* LCBA bee mentors—Bob Harris, Dave Smith, Roy Schaafsma, Norm Switzer, the Gieses, Jason Sherwood—are willing to help. Call Bob and he will set you up with someone.

* On “hiving day,” at about 10:30 or 11 a.m., aim not to have the hive open for long. First, pry the plywood off the top of the package box. Spray the bees down. Then rap the box down onto the ground once sharply, so that the bees drop to the bottom of the box. You need to do this quickly and sharply, or the bees will be all over the place. Once you’ve sprayed them, they’ll be sticky, even sticking to each other, so less mobile.

* Next, take the feeding can out so that you can access the queen box. The queen must be put into the hive first. Take the queen box out and put it into a warm, safe pocket. Then you can put the feeding can back into the package or put the plywood back over. Keep the rest of the bees in the package till the queen is inserted into the hive.

* Your foundation box should be aligned with ten frames in. Pull out five frames between the center and edge to increase a gap.

* Next, inspect the queen box. Pop the cork out and be sure that she is alive (see below about what to do if she’s dead). Have a piece of hard candy or marshmallow on hand: there should be a piece of candy or marshmallow at the bottom of her box for the other bees to eat through. It should take a couple of days for the other bees to eat through this and get to her—this also helps the bees get used to her so that they will not kill her. The other purpose for the candy is that if an attendant bee has died, it will fall to the bottom with the candy and not on top of the queen. If there is no hard candy or marshmallow, insert one.

* Put your thumb over the top of the queen box so as to be sure not to lose her—she will not sting you. Put the queen box, candy side down, between the foundation screens, then push the screens together. Use the metal tab attached to the queen box to cover the top of the queen box AND to suspend the box between the frames.

* Once the frames are back in place, squirt with the sugar to water mixture.

* Now to the rest of the bees: rap the package box again. Then dump the bees in around the frames. Gently wiggle the frames in so as not to crush the bees. You will have to leave one frame out because of the queen box.

* Not all the bees will shake out. Put the box in front of the hive, and the bees will follow the scent of their fellow bees and go inside the hive. They will immediately cluster around the queen box.

* Next, put the hive's top feeder on with feed, put the cap on, and leave it for three days (Bob's recommendation) to a week (Jason's recommendation). It's best for the bees to release the queen on their timetable. Tim Giese noted that the bees need enough time not still to be identifying with their old queen: they need time for pheromones to work, so they'll feed her. She can't feed herself. Norm noted that once they accept the queen, they will start building comb.

* When you check the hive after 3 days to a week, check the queen box—be sure she isn't in it. If she's not out, dump her out, and gently put the final frame in, taking care not to crush her. Align the frame and put the top back on the hive: leave it alone for ten days.

* ***If the queen is dead***, the bees will stay in the hive, but they will not be happy. They will get loud and grumpy. If that happens, call Ruhl Bee (see phone number on first page of this newsletter) and/or our bee mentors for help, and Ruhl Bee will send a new queen in the mail for free. If it's your fault that the queen is dead, you will have to pay about \$18 for a new queen, plus \$24 to have her shipped. Jason will have extra queens in late April, so you might check with him (see phone number on first page of newsletter).

* ***Do you need to put on a bee suit each time you open the box?*** Norm says that if you hear a nice, comfortable hum, probably you don't, but if you hear an angry buzz, suit up. Jason suggested at least wearing a veil to protect eyes and face. Sharette noted that if you have long hair, it's a very good idea to tie it back or wear a hair-net, as well as to wear a veil: if bees get tangled in your hair, they will get nervous and aggressive. Tim noted that there are lightweight half-suits that go on as easily as a windbreaker. Bob doesn't wear gloves. Overall, the veterans advise doing what you feel comfortable with: if you are nervous, the bees may pick up on that. Overall, remember that speed is your enemy in handling/dealing with bees: be slow, deliberate, gentle, and calm.

* ***Do bees smell fear, as dogs do?*** There was no consensus about this: some think yes, others were not sure. Some noted that bees do not like perfumes or colognes, so it's best not to wear them around your bees: same goes for face and hand lotions. Also, some bees don't like certain individual humans or animals: it can be idiosyncratic.

* ***Feeding the bees:*** bees will go through a gallon of feed in a week to ten days (the 1 to 1 sugar to water mix). You need to have the hive top feeder on the very first day you put the bees into the hive from the package.

* ***Is the sugar to water mix fully digestible?*** Yes, but Bob and Tim believe that honey is the best food; next best is pure cane sugar. Some dilute honey and use that instead. If you have the resources and can put comb into the new hive, that is great—if not, the bees can only use what they have stored in them or get outside if you are not feeding them. Some don't feed at all—the Gieses don't—but some do. Tim says that he would rather leave more honey in the hive and let them feed over winter. Some commercial beekeepers would rather feed sugar water because they can sell the honey; Tim thinks it's better to save honey for the bees than to maximize profit.

* ***To do the physical act of feeding,*** you can use a bag and pour feed into the top feeder. You can also use a gallon Ziploc bag, cut slits so that the feed will drip, then pull it out and replace it at need.

* ***How to help the bees venture out of the hive and then back in?*** Jason uses pre-built cups and ladders to help them walk out. You can put in small twigs. Tim and Sharette will loan insert feeders. There should be instructions on this inside your package bee box, and Bob recommends checking *Beekeeping for Dummies* (in the LCBA travelling library box).

* ***Outside water sources?*** This is not critical on the first day, but within 4 to 5 weeks, the bees' numbers will grow exponentially, and so you will need a dedicated water source. The source needs to be shallow or the bees will drown! You can put gravel into a shallow tub so that the bees have a place to stand. Bees will take over a bird-bath. Making your own water source will help with non-beekeeping neighbors: bees like pool water, wader pool water, hot tub water, etc. Bees are creatures of habit, so have your water source set up in advance. You could include a mineral or salt block because chemicals attract bees. Norm suggests sea salt. Roy uses dilute mineral water. Tim suggested not to stress too much, noting that bees made it for a long time without us: "don't love your bees to death."

* ***Can it get too hot for bees?*** If you have hives in the direct sun and they get very hot, you can use an insulation pad to help cool them off.

Minutes of March 2009 Business Meeting:

- ***Minutes of 2-11-09 Business Meeting Approved***
- ***New Members Introduced***
- ***News:***
 - ***Gift to LCBA***
 - ***LCBA in the Centralia Chronicle***
 - ***LCBA receives first two "swarm calls: LCBA training opportunity***
 - ***Master Gardeners Monthly Meeting presentation – update***
 - ***Gardening for Everyone – update***

- *Treasurer's Report*
- *Discount Bees from Ruhl's*
- *Update: selling honey at Chehalis Farmers' Market*
- *Logo contest*
- *LCBA joining WSBA? Agenda item tabled for April meeting*

Minutes of 2-11-09 Business Meeting were approved as presented.

New members introduced:

Judy Nichols, originally from Wasilla, Alaska, is an ex-Alaska Master Gardener and now lives in Winlock. Linda Gorremans, Gary's wife, has become an LCBA member. Scott and Lindsay (sorry—I missed your last names!) were introduced, too. All new members were welcomed.

LCBA News:

Gift to LCBA: Sherry L. Jorgenson gave a \$25 donation to LCBA. We agreed that our standard practice upon receiving gifts will be to send a handwritten thank-you note. Susanne will do that as LCBA secretary.

LCBA in the Centralia Chronicle: Cathy Hall of the Chronicle covered LCBA in the Life section and wants to write again, covering our progress over the last year. Bob will be sure that our new logo is included in the next coverage.

LCBA receives first two "swarm calls"/LCBA training opportunity: Two city residents seeking to have bee swarms removed were referred to LCBA by the WSU Extension office. Norm and Dave will take care of both. The first is in a crawl space under a woman's kitchen down at Mary's Corner in Onalaska: this one really is not a training option.

The other swarm removal could be a training opportunity: a two-story home in Vader, off exit 59, is being demolished; the second floor has a wall full of feral bees. They are content to wait until the third week of April and will pay. Everyone who goes for the training will have to "suit up." Bob will send the information to Dave and Norm, who will set it up. Tim Giese suggested that the removal be pushed back as far as possible because of temperatures: there is a better chance for bees to live. Tim can donate comb honey to help the feral bees survive. Bob wants to put the sample bees under the microscope to see if they are diseased so that a diseased swarm would not be given to LCBA members or others.

There will be an update on this swarm removal training opportunity at the April meeting.

Bee Culture and Bee Journal Discount Opportunity: Bob announced that we can get a 25% discount for club members to subscribe to these two magazines. *Bee*

Culture is aimed at the hobbyist; *Bee Journal* is more scientific and focused on business beekeeping. Since we are saving 25% on bee orders from Ruhl's we can put that toward orders for the bee journals. Bob passed around a sign-up sheet for those interested.

Gardening for Everyone – update: On February 14th, Bob, Norm, Sarah, Peter, and Susanne staffed an information table at the Master Gardeners' Gardening for Everyone event. There was considerable interest. Also, the "Mason Bee Guy" had an informational table and gave away Mason bee wood blocks.

Master Gardeners Monthly Meeting presentation – update: Bob gave a one-hour presentation on beekeeping at the February Master Gardeners' monthly meeting, followed by a three-hour session with this year's MG trainee class. He got great questions and recruited two new LCBA members who'll join us after their MG training is finished.

Treasurer's Report: Sarah Roebas reported that with the \$200 start-up grant from WSU and the Farm Board, plus \$276 in dues and the \$25 donation, above, LCBA now has \$501 in the bank. We need a new official members' list—Susanne will do this during her quarter break from teaching.

Selling Honey at the Chehalis Farmer's Market – Update: To sell honey at the market under the LCBA umbrella, you need to have labels with "LCBA" on them—our new logo, for example (see below). Even just a sticky label with "LCBA" on it will do. Bob will have an apiarist label and assumes liability for the club. If LCBA buys an association membership to the Farmer's Market, a \$40 cost, then we don't need separate tents: everyone can sell from Bob's tent. Dave, Jason, and the Gieses have honey to sell, as does Bob. Bob would just ask that the dates get picked in advance: if there are four people selling, for example, use alternate weeks. You can have your own label on as well. For anything over \$200 gross sales on a given day, 5% would be donated to the Market. Tim would like to sell, but wants to donate the proceeds to LCBA, possibly for a mentoring fund. Bob is interested in 4H outreach. (***Question: did we agree to spend \$40 for the LCBA Farmer's Market membership?***)

Logo contest: Sharette Giese brought 16 great designs to the April meeting; results of members' vote will be announced at the April meeting. Sharette wins free dues for 2008-09. Brandy DeMelt designed a colorful, distinctive logo for patches. We will need to talk about how to get these made up (maybe to put on our bee suits? :)

Respectfully submitted,

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