

## Lewis County Beekeepers' Association: *March 2010 Newsletter*

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### *Upcoming Events:*

**Weds, March. 10:** LCBA Monthly Meeting, 7 p.m.,  
WSU Extension classroom, Old Chehalis Courtroom

***Speaker:*** Janet Brisson of "CountryRubes.com" will present:

**"Healthy Bees & Environmentally Friendly Varroa Control."** Janet will discuss how to monitor and manage your hives, bees and varroa mites using screened bottom boards, powdered sugar, and drone brood manipulations.

***Special Offer for LCBA Members:*** Janet will bring demonstration models of a special bottom board that she sells through her website, and which the Sherwoods also sell. *Scroll on down: at the end of this newsletter, I've pasted in Janet's preview of her talk, with information about her bottom boards and sales details.* As a special offer for LCBA, Janet is willing to let members pre-order without obligation to buy, so that she can bring down enough supplies.

***Brief business meeting:*** Janet's presentation will be followed by updates on LCBA projects (Apprentice course, 4H, nonprofit status, bees for "newbees," etc.). We'll also have Q&A on transitioning our bees from winter to spring.

**April, Date TBA: Hive-Your-Bees Workshop at the Sherwoods'**

About to hive your first bees, or just want to see how others do it? Jason & Heather will offer a workshop for those who want help hiving bees. Those who are going to pick up their bees and equipment could come to the workshop, then leave with bees & gear. If you'd like to do this, please be sure to order in advance to be sure materials will be in stock [contact information removed from online edition].

**Weds, April 14, Monthly Meeting, 7 p.m., WSU Extension Classroom:**

**Speaker:** Dr. Dewey Caron will share recent research into bee behavior, colony collapse disorder, and more. Dr. Caron retired after teaching bee science for 40 years at the University of Delaware and has settled in Portland. He is a font of bee lore and information!

**News and Announcements:**

***Want Bees & Equipment? LCBA members Jason & Heather Sherwood have hive building materials and pre-assembled hives, as well as smokers, waxed plastic foundation, and, of course, bees! To see their price list, visit: [2012 note: Sherwood Bees is no longer in business]. Among their sale items:***

- \* Package of bees: \$73 includes \$5 refundable cage deposit (they may be able to offer a discount for LCBA members);
- \* A Queen: \$20 for Italians & Carniolans. For exotics like Russians or Buckfast, the price depends on the number ordered, due to high shipping costs;
- \* Dove-tailed boxes **with handles**: Assembled unpainted, \$9 for Deeps, \$8 for Westerns (no frames);
- \* Certified organic powdered sugar in 1 lb. bags and bellows dusters to treat for mites—for those members in our group who would like to take an organic approach;
- \* Please order no later than March 31 [contact information removed from online edition.]

***February 2010 issue of the Western Apicultural Society Journal Is Available Online:*** WAS Journal Editor Fran Bach reports that the Feb. 2010 WAS *Journal* has now been posted on the WAS website. Go to <http://groups.ucanr.org/WAS/>, then click on "WAS Journal" and on the Feb 2010 issue.

***2010 Western Apicultural Society Conference, August 30 - September 2, 2010 Red Lion Hotel, Salem, Oregon:*** Maybe we can get a carpool of LCBA members to attend and report back? Fran Bach reports that details about this conference are available on the WAS website. For Preliminary Program, information about Salem, and a Registration form, visit: [groups.ucanr.org/WAS/](http://groups.ucanr.org/WAS/) and click on "Conference."

***\* Minutes from our February 2010 Meeting***

**Speaker:** Robert Smith, our Area 2 WSBA representative, and his wife, Marjorie, came to visit with LCBA (on their wedding anniversary—beekeepers are dedicated people!). Robert covers Olympia south to Oregon for WSBA. We are only the second group to invite him to a meeting, though he has been the Area 2 representative for the past five years (the Cowlitz County Beekeepers is the other). Robert started beekeeping

in 1977 because he loves to eat honey: he paid \$90 for his first hive, which got robbed out, after which bees died of foulbrood (the law said to burn that hive and cover it with 18" deep virgin soil). Roy Thurber, who was teaching beginning beekeeping at Highline Community College, got Robert started over again. At one point, Robert had 31 hives; now he has a more modest ten, all of which lived through the 2008 winter. He now teaches Journeyman beekeepers: the Journeyman course helps train the next generation to teach the art of keeping bees.

Robert is also involved in the Western Apiculture Society, an international group that covers the west coast states and portions of British Columbia. He and Marjorie hold seats on the Nisqually River Council and are members not only of the Olympia Beekeepers Society, but of the South Sound Fruit Society, through which they try to connect to people who need bees for pollination. In addition, Marjorie raises sheep and spins her own wool. Robert was selected Washington State Beekeeper of the Year in 2009, at the convention in Seaside, OR: beekeeping groups can submit a nomination for the 2010 award to Paul Lundy at WSBA.

*WSBA Dues:* WSBA, our Washington State beekeeping association, charges \$1 for each dues-paying member: if an organization like LCBA paid that fee through our treasurer, we would all be members. Individuals can become members based on the number of hives they have.

*What does WSBA offer for dues?*

\*Research funding: Much of the funding goes to support basic research on beekeeping; these funds are allocated through an apiary advisory board.

*After reading the first draft of this newsletter, Jim Bach, WSBA Area 3 representative and last October's speaker, added, this funding comes from beekeeper bee hive registration fees collected by WSDA under statute Ch. 15.60 RCW. Other research funds come from several fund sources in the WSBA treasury.*

\* Grants to local groups: WSBA funds a grant program for local beekeeping groups: groups that are associate members of WSBA can apply for up to \$3,000, provided that the group itself can provide a matching amount. The grants can fund a range of projects, such as building a group honey extracting facility, or perhaps funding something like LCBA's "bee team" that does free swarm removals. Grant applications are available on WSBA's website and are approved by WSBA's executive board.

\* *WSBA Meetings:* WSBA usually meets three times per year, at different locations around the state. *Jim Bach adds, "WSBA has their board meetings usually in Ellensburg WA at the Bar 14 restaurant because it is centrally located for board members and many others from around the state. Its annual conferences are held in various locations in the state depending on a willing host local beekeeper association but also with centrality in mind. It has been held in Spokane for easy access by Idahoans, Yakima for centrality, Bellingham to encourage Canadian visitors, and Tacoma for centrality and the hosting skills of the Pierce County Beekeepers Assn."*

\* Annual conference: *The 2010 annual conference will be December 2 -4 in Seaside, Oregon.* This year's focus will be "sublethal effects of pesticides in hives" and "Causes of CCD." The convention brings cutting edge researchers from around the U.S. to help keep local beekeepers up to date. *For more details, visit the WSBA website: [www.WASBA.org](http://www.WASBA.org).*

\* *American Bee Journal: attention LCBA members! Your secretary was WAY off on this item in the earlier draft of this newsletter. Here is the real deal: WSBA members purchase their own bee journal subscriptions from the publisher: Dadant & Sons for ABJ and A.I.Root for Bee Culture. Subscriptions are **not** provided by WSBA, as the earlier version of this newsletter mistakenly reported!*

*Robert's Beekeeping Methods:* Robert explained his non-medicating rationale. Robert believes that if a hive is dying, why should we try to keep a weak group of bees alive? Isn't it for the best to help the strongest bees with the strongest genetics to propagate? (VP Norm agreed, commenting that he tries to get native / feral bees that have been in people's structures for generations—these are bees that are pre-adapted for our southwest Washington climate. Norm: "All my bees are special.")

*Got Queens? / Minnesota Hygenic Project:* Robert asked if any LCBA members are trying to raise their own queens. Two Olympia area groups are trying to do that, finding bees that are strong survivors so as to breed queens from them. If we want to try a queen breeding project, Robert recommends getting as many in the group as possible to participate and volunteer their best queens, then follow hygienic behavior trials, and then raise queens from the colonies chosen as strongest.

Robert noted that the Minnesota hygienic project is choosing its queens based on a special test: *use of liquid nitrogen to freeze kill the brood in a prescribed area of capped brood, then putting the comb back into the hive and note how long it takes the bees to uncap and remove the dead larvae and or pupae. The percentage of cells cleaned within 24 hours is the measure of the colony's hygienic behavior. Queen and drone mother colonies are selected for queen production based on the highest brood removal percentages.* Beekeepers who try the Minnesota program need to be willing to take about two years to develop a more hygienic stock. WSU, he added, is focusing on breeding gentle bees.

*Hygenic drones?* If one raises hygienic queens, is it necessary to raise drones from the same stock? How should we mate them?

Robert believes that artificial insemination is not as good as natural mating. The best approach is to bring in hygienic bees and then rely on the natural mating flight. The queens will mate 20 drones in good mating weather, and the more she gets, the larger the colony. Insemination, on the other hand, can create a "genetic bottleneck" that results in less resistant bees.

*Jim Bach comments, clarifying how I reported this in the first draft of the newsletter: "Hygienic queen and drone mother colonies are selected from colonies exhibiting those characteristics as well as 12 to 15 combs of bees coming through the northwest winters, and several other traits. The more drones with which the queen mates*

*will make her more attractive to the nest bees and a more populous colony is the result. Artificial insemination does have its drawbacks.”*

*Nutrition and Colony Collapse Disorder:* Robert observed that commercial beekeepers have the most severe problems, perhaps because of poor nutrition. We local beekeepers have primary nutrition, not sugar water: our bees get pollen that varies through the year, balanced nutrition, and minerals from local water sources. Local bees benefit from the whole year’s range of pollen, whereas commercial beekeepers move bees from state to state, putting bees repeatedly into monocrop situations.

*Stress and CCD:* Robert suggested that though we may think our rain in Southwest Washington is a stressor for our bees, our rain is nothing compared to hauling bees around from place to place, feeding them corn syrup between monocrops. Corn syrup is nasty: not akin to what bees would gather from different flowers.

*Today’s Nosema: Worse Than Yesterday’s Nosema:* The old Nosema Apis could be treated with fumagillen. The new Nosema, Nosema Ceranea, is more resistant. Robert asked how many of us have hives with Nosema Ceranea, which has traveled from Asia to Europe to Americas? A recent survey showed that it has been here for 10 to 12 years and is more virulent than the old Nosema Apis. The new strain requires three times as much fumagillen to kill. Robert reported a case in which one large scale Yakima beekeeper who tests regularly found that after treatment, his hives had three times as much nosema! Thus, the treatment did not work.

*Genetically modified seeds:* When bees eat pollen from plants grown from genetically modified seeds, this can kill bees. It may be less an issue in our area. However, those interested in learning more can check Capital Press, Oregon, which talks about genetically modified seeds’ impact on beekeeping.

*Genetic diversity:* Steve Shepherd has done research on genetic diversity among bees. Pure apis carnica semen from Turkey, as well as another semen from Italy, were frozen, and then used to inseminate American queens to broaden alleals in our bee genetics. Another possible way to improve diversity: Robert believes that the last good importation of bees was from far eastern Russia, where bees had been exposed to varroa and tracheal mites for over 100 years: the weak ones died, the strong survived.

*Over-wintering bees:* Robert suggests that our bees’ own honey is their best food source. It is important to leave them plenty of their own product to get them through the winter in good shape. Hives should have at least 80 pounds of honey going into winter. Come January, they will need it to raise brood, so they won’t starve in the rainy season because there is not enough food left.

*How to feed after this mild winter, facing a potentially rainy spring:* Given that we have had a mild winter and bees are already foraging, will they be raising brood already and thus in danger of starving if we have a rainy spell? Robert and others emphasized that if we start feeding bees now, we need to keep doing it: the more food,

the more brood they will raise, and the greater their need will be. If we do feed our bees, we should not yet put on top feeders with liquid syrup, because the bees can't reduce the liquid in the syrup at this time of the year: there's too much water in it, and it can ferment, then leak down into the colony, where it can cause hygienic problems. One option is to make the bees a hard candy: use 5 pounds of sugar, 2 cups of water, heat at at least 250 to 260 degrees, pour in a lid, and let it solidify. Then break up the sugar into chunks, and feed the bees that: it is like a nutritious candy bar for them.

Robert was thanked for his very informative presentation and Q&A; LCBA wished him and Marjorie a happy anniversary :)

**Brief business meeting:** Vice President Norm Switzler took over for President Bob Harris, who will be studying to be deputized in the Lewis County sheriff's department so that he can serve as chaplain; no one currently is serving in that role. Bob will be back with us beekeepers this summer, and in the meantime, Norm will serve as our interim president.

*WSBA corporate membership?* Norm asks LCBA members to consider whether we want to join WSBA. We will vote on this at our March meeting. We heard some good incentives to join from Robert; if members have concerns or objections, please bring them (or email them to Susanne at Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com ahead of the meeting in case we can get questions answered before the March meeting).

*Join the LCBA Bee Team for Swarm / Colony Removals!* Once spring rolls around, LCBA will begin to get calls from Lewis County residents who'd like bees removed from structures on their properties. LCBA does this for free: Norm, Bob, Dave, Jason, and others have been doing it. If you'd like to join, or simply ride along and see how it's done, contact Susanne (360 880 8130). Norm is planning to do more documentation on how the removed swarms over-winter, hoping to figure out what the best dates are to remove swarms and hive them.

*More Beekeeping Q&A (because let's face it, we're about bees, not just business!):*

*How can you know if your hives have enough honey?* Norm and Jason suggest leaning carefully on the hive: if it tips easily, that means it's light, and if it's light, there's not a lot of honey in there. If it feels heavy, there is probably enough food.

*Jim Bach suggests, "Lift the rear of the hive to determine an estimate of its weight. One needs to know how much it weighed in the fall with 60+ lbs. of honey in the top deep box. Better yet one should open the hive on a 55F. or higher day in late Feb. or early March and see if the bees have at least four combs full of honey remaining. Always save honey from last years production to put into those spring hives that are light on stores. No honey? Use one to one sugar water to feed the bees. One cell of honey and one of pollen is necessary to raise one bee to emergence."*

*Question about the hard candy idea:* Norm suggested putting small staples (NOT nails!) in the top of a telescoping cover and leave the mixture of sugar and water to harden there: then place that telescoping cover on the hive, and the staples will hold the candy in place so that it does not drop down into the frames. Of course, to do this, one needs to have an extra telescoping cover handy. Jason added that he has seen the hard sugar candy put in top feeders: there is no issue with cold in quickly putting it in. Also, one could break up the hard sugar mix and put it on top of the frames. It's important to be careful what to put into a hive, though, because what bees do not consume can develop mold: it is important to monitor what they are eating. Some put leftover Christmas peppermint candy in; Norm says he would not do that, but bees do need sucrose.

*Protein vs. carbohydrates:* The food patties give protein; the syrup gives carbohydrates. Both kinds of food are important. Jason re-emphasized that if you start feeding, keep feeding, or you will starve the new, young brood: they will not have a consistent food supply outdoors at this time of the year.

*Splitting hives?* Jason and Norm urged that we not split hives until April or May, when good blossoms are available and brood is developing well. When it hits the 50s in temperature, the queens will probably start laying. Come April, have an extra box and some comb (or other food source) situated near your hives in case of a swarm, or in case a feral colony that you weren't aware of is lurking nearby.

*New Queens:* Bees will prefer a queen they made themselves over an introduced queen. If you do introduce a new queen, be sure to check your hive and cut out supersedure cells. Also, do not simply drop the queen in: she will be alien to the workers, who may kill her if she has not subdued them with her pheromones, which takes a few days. Introduce the queen in a queen box. The bees will only convert eggs up to 24 hours old to queen cells, so after two to three days, you can release the queen and stop seeking/ cutting out supersedure cells.

*Jim Bach comments:* "Alternatively find the old queen and kill her by rubbing her on the screen of the new queen cage. You are transferring her pheromones to the vicinity of the new queen and she will be more readily accepted."

*Top bar hives:* The theory behind a top bar hive is that the bees can generate cells of the size that they want, that is natural to them: foundation determines size. One possible advantage is that bees' own self-generated cells may be healthier; one possible detriment is that the top-bar design is difficult for beekeepers to manipulate and inspect. However, it is possible to build in an observation window to monitor a top bar hive.

### **General information items:**

- ***Need Help with Your Bees? 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.***

- **LCBA Swap Meet—real or virtual!** Got bee equipment to sell, swap, or give away? Email or call Susanne (see above). Have a “bee wish list”? Email that, too.
- **LCBA T-shirts and caps:** Queensboro has lowered their prices on LCBA T-shirts, long-sleeved shirts, caps, etc. They offer an unconditional 10 year guarantee and will replace items if they get torn or broken. To order online, visit <http://www.queensboro.com> and use our LCBA logo number: **11342127**.

Respectfully reported,  
 Susanne Weil, LCBA Secretary (*Janet Brisson's special offer follows:*)  
 Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com  
 (360) 880 8130

JANET BRISSON SENDS US THIS PREVIEW OF HER MARCH 10 TALK, PLUS A SPECIAL SALE OFFER FOR LCBA MEMBERS:

Janet Brisson and her husband Mike have been a self-sufficient family and organic farmers for over 30 years. In 1995 they were forced to become hobbyist beekeepers due to lack of pollination as bees were losing their fight against the insidious Varroa mites. Horrified to discover that even the most organic-minded beekeepers were driven to use some type of chemical to save their bees, the Brisson' researched and started building and using screened bottom boards along with intensive drone brood management to reduce their chemical use. After 10 years and various adaptations of SBB's, they re-discovered using powdered sugar as an effective way of detaching Varroa mites and have been chemical free since the beginning of 2005. One final modification of their screened bottom board to make using powdered sugar easy, the Brisson' developed their product, the Country Rubes Combo Screened Bottom Board, that has become nationally available to beekeepers and is now carried by Sherwood Honey, Bees & Supply in Onalaska, WA.

Janet's program "Healthy Bees & Environmentally Friendly Varroa Control" will discuss how to monitor and manage your hives, bees and varroa mites using screened bottom boards, powdered sugar, and drone brood manipulations.

**Club Special:** We will be bringing our Blems or seconds, screened bottom boards that have been slightly repaired or have a crack or knot and a plain white 'sticky board'. These SBB's are weatherproofed and totally functional, but because of the defects, we don't feel comfortable selling them to our distributors. We will be selling Blems for \$30.00 plus your local tax. We can take cash or checks. For charge cards, we are asking that you preorder on our website, Countryrubes.com (Scroll down until you see Washington State Preorder page). Please feel free to order and if you are not completely satisfied with our product, we will return your charge at no cost. If you wish to purchase our First Quality screened bottom boards with the Gridded 'Stickies' for \$35.00+tax, please email me at [rubes@countryrubes.com](mailto:rubes@countryrubes.com) or call 530-913-2724 and let me know how many we should bring and you may prepay via credit card on our website or at the club. Again, there will be no obligation to purchase. The weatherproofed SBB's are ready to go on your hive. These boards are not paintable. For Unfinished Paintable SBB's with Gridded 'Stickies', also \$35.00+tax please contact me as I usually don't bring these along.