

## Lewis County Beekeepers' Association: *March 2011 Newsletter*

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### *Upcoming Events:*

#### **March 9: LCBA Monthly Meeting**

**Where:** Old Chehalis Courthouse

**When:** 7 - 9 p.m.

**Who & What:** *Insane Weather! How To Help Our Bees Make It Through?*  
*Norm Switzler, Jason & Heather Sherwood, and Roy Schaafsma will share ideas and take members' questions.*

**Also at our March meeting:**

- News of spring events
- Setting the date for our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual hive building workshop
- And . . . our traditional “Bee Q&A.”

**Date TBA: Our Third (!) Annual Hive Building Workshop at Rose of Sharon Farm.**

**March 16: Spring 2011 Apprentice Beekeeping Course begins, offered by WSU Lewis County Extension & LCBA—4 session course (description below):**

**Course Dates & Times:** Weds. March 16, 23, 30, and April 6, 6:30-9 p.m.

**Where:** Old Credit Union Building, Chehalis Avenue, Chehalis

(brown building on east side of street; watch for signs; 1 block north of Old Historic Courthouse)

**Taught by:** LCBA President Bob Harris & VP Norm Switzler

**Cost:** \$40 per person OR \$60 per couple

**How to Register:** Mail a sheet of paper with your name, address, city, day phone, email, plus a check (sorry, no plastic) paid out to 4-H SRT, to this address:  
351 NW North Street, Chehalis, WA 98532; Attn: Beekeeping Classes. ...or you can drop off your registration in person at the Extension office.

**Course Details:** This 4 session-course serves as an introduction to beekeeping for novice beekeepers, as well as a comprehensive refresher course for experienced apiculturists. The course builds basic beekeeping skills and covers: basic bee biology, equipment, seasonal management requirements, identification and management of pests, honey removal and processing. Special focus: beekeeping in the Pacific Northwest. Students get a workshop manual; those who pass the WA State Apprentice Beekeeper exam (open book test) receive a certificate. After that, they may work toward the Journeyman and Master Beekeeper levels.

**Notes from Our February 9 Meeting: Special Guest, Darren Gordon, House of Bees**

**Brief Meeting Notes: Before our speaker took the floor, we had a brief business meeting to discuss the following:**

- **Name Badges:** Bob has ordered LCBA name badges for members whose dues are paid. These may be available at our March meeting. The pins cost \$4 apiece: the club will cover half, and members will cover \$2.
- **LCBA Emails:** Several members have expressed a wish that the newsletter and informational emails be sent without members' emails being displayed, as way to cut down on spam. Susanne does not have "bcc" email privileges at the college, so Marie Panesko has volunteered to set up a Yahoo or Hotmail account for the club from which Susanne can send LCBA news and announcements. This will cost the club about \$20. Members thought this price very reasonable. Everyone thanked Marie, and she and Susanne will touch base to set this up.
- **Beginning Beekeeping session at the Master Gardeners' Gardening For Everyone, Master Gardeners, February 16:** Peter Glover and Susanne Weil were preparing to present this session, asked members for input, and welcomed anyone interested in participating.

**Our February Speaker: Darren Gordon, House of Bees**

***Darren is a beekeeper and gardener who operates a business providing seeds and advice to people who are interested in attracting more bees to their gardens, orchards and apiaries. He is committed to increasing habitat for honeybees and native bees, as well as sharing his knowledge about natural beekeeping, non-traditional honey bee hives and mason bee houses.***

LCBA President Bob Harris introduced Darren Gordon of Kitsap County Beekeepers near Port Orchard, and also from “House of Bees.” Darren, a self-described “newbee,” has been a beekeeper for several years now and has become captivated by alternate kinds of hives. He urged us to question him and promised that he would let us know what is subjective to his own experience. He is not a commercial beekeeper. What he covered at our meeting falls under the umbrella of natural beekeeping: natural comb hives, top bar hives, Mason Bees, and more: he also promised to let us “play with the toys” he brought along. *(After Darren’s talk, a “swarm” of LCBA members congregated around his unusual hives and other “toys.”)*

*Gardening:* Darren began as an organic gardener and sought plants that are not invasives. (He asked how many brand new beekeepers were in attendance, and about a dozen hands went up.) He recommends the “Melissa {“Melissa,” Greek name for Bee!} Garden” website for help in gauging how much nectar can be produced by how much planting. Since weather conditions are not optimal in the Pacific Northwest, growing plants with bees in mind helps bees. Darren plants: borage, phacelia, minarda citradora, bachelor button, purple cone flower (also loved by butterflies and finches), catnip (in the mint family), cilantro, crimson clover, white dutch clover (cheap at the feed store), yellow clover (grows tall in its second year), coriander, lavender, lemon balm . . . these can all take off and take over, he commented, “but hey, we’re saving the bees!” Several members noted that these plants are good in pots, as well, which helps avoid the takeover effect. Darren noted that a manicured lawn is not good for bees: they need variegated growth (see nutrition, below).

*Hybridized plants & honey bee nutrition:* Darren commented that since many plants have been hybridized (e.g. sunflower) so not to drop a great deal of pollen on your table, we should beware of such alterations and instead seek plants with high pollen content. He packages Cecilia, buckwheat, clover, etc.: more “old school.” He encourages going to the farm store and buying a few pounds of buckwheat, which is great smelling and easy to plant. However, buckwheat nectar is only available to bees in the morning hours. Though Darren does not care for buckwheat honey, he observed that “bees love it.” Basil: a friend of his had basil flavored honey, and said that it had quite a strong taste. He is hoping to produce seed for next year and to try to get some monoflower honey out of melissa, etc. Before becoming a beekeeper, he did not realize how fast plants could “bolt,” but as they flower, they feed the bees. Cilantro: he had no idea that cilantro could be a fine nectar source for bees. Natural mitocides can be found in thyme oil, so that can be another helpful herb to grow: naturally occurring oils MAY help combat mites.

Honeybee nutrition was discussed at the Hood River beekeeping conference last fall, which Darren attended. For people who do not know about bees, it is hard to grasp why people would bring bees to a crop, and harder to understand how, after gorging themselves on that one nectar, bees could come home in bad shape. Darren commented that for bees, monocrop diets have the kind of impact that a human being would suffer by eating, say, nothing but cabbage.

*Mason Bees:* Darren sells both Mason Bee blocks and straws, and he deferred to Jim Thielges, our club's Mason Bee expert. Darren recommends Mason Bees for children, as they very seldom sting (the one person Darren knew who got stung by an MB had to grab and shake the bee for over a minute before it finally stung). The MBs are dynamic pollinators for the early spring blooms, such as apple trees, which flower before the honey bees really get going. For those who are daunted by the complexities of keeping honey bees, Mason Bees are relatively simple to keep, and doing so is a great way to help pollinators. One can make very rustic blocks, using parchment paper. Jim commented that a number 2 pencil is good to wrap the paper around. Darren passed around a jar of MB cocoons, very different from HBs. Jim commented that MBs are not only a good stepping stone toward keeping honeybees, but also, MBs are very efficient: it takes six mason bees to pollinate what it takes hundreds of HBs to pollinate. Plastic straws will be the last choice of MBs. Karen Strickland has observation hives for MBs: for details, contact Darren or Jim.

*Natural Comb Hives:* Darren asked whether anyone had a Warre or vertical comb hive: no one did. Natural comb hives require less manipulation, since the bees build their own comb in them, as if they were hollow trees. If you pick up the hive, it is completely hollow, with only bars in the top. With this, a beekeeper can imitate nature. If you look at a rotten tree, the last thing to go are the knots: that's what the bees build upon. In a natural setting like this, bees may not build exactly straight, so be prepared for unexpected shapes. Darren gets honey from about 15 Langstroth hives, but he has about five top bar hives just to watch. No two are alike; no two build out the same way. He likes to put swarms into the top bar hive. The bees build comb at an incredibly fast rate. He showed photos at several days' interval so that we could see how rapidly they build. Darren noted that contrary to rumor, you actually can inspect top bar hives. You have to cut comb from the side and run hive tool up the inside to inspect. He simply holds up the boxes in the air and can look up inside, see the swarm cells, etc. The bees can maintain hive temperature better, he said.

*Swarms:* In summer, swarms do happen with vigor: instinctively, the bees seem to realize that the survival odds are against them. John Edwards at Ruhl Bee calls our standard hive boxes "swarm boxes." Darren actually hopes the bees will swarm, so that he can capture them and transfer them to additional top hive bar boxes. He wants the experience of the hollow tree, the old way, seeing how the bees behave naturally. He got onto a "swarm list" online and was called to a house near SEATAC with a fruit tree, swarm on branch 5 feet off the ground, having come out of a large hollow locust tree stump in her yard that cranked out swarm after swarm, all summer long. On the day he visited, Darren easily caught them, textbook, just smacked the branch down into the box.

Darren had a nice photo of a swarm and described how the scout bees swirled around, looking for the perfect place for the colony to settle: the question is how quickly you can get to them and capture them. Once he hives them, he has only to watch: bees will come to the entrance and fan, as if telling the others “this is the place!” Norm commented that he caught a swarm out of a big old locust tree: the bees had built comb inside the hollow tree, about 14 feet high by about 8 feet wide, and Norm went in and carved out all the comb: it’s now in his front yard. Norm commented that they do 10 to 30 tear-outs a year.

*Strengths of feral bee colonies?* Darren and Norm agreed that feral colonies can thrive much longer than the one or two years they are reputed to. Regression: what we’ve done with honey bees is like what we’ve done with cows—given them an artificial environment with our pre-made frames that have larger cells. When bees can grow in a larger cell, they become bigger, whereas feral bees tend to be smaller. It’s possible that the commercially bred, larger bees, may be more susceptible to mites. If we can let bees build their own comb, their own size, then over time, progressively, they will become smaller sized. Darren likes to put bees he suspects are feral into the Warre hive. He doesn’t pose this as an answer to colony collapse disorder, but a possible positive.

*Got books?* Darren recommends *Honeybee Democracy*, Seeley’s book, as a good source of research on swarms. He experimented with size volumes where bees swarm. Bees instinctively know the right size, and the “democracy” refers to how the scout bees “win over” other bees to try out the new location.

*Must regular hive boxes be perfectly squared?* Darren also comments that one’s hives do not have to be perfectly shaped boxes. Bees will work with flaws and make them their own, for entrances and exits: they are adaptable. “So I encourage you: build it shoddy. Bees are used to that from old hollow trees,” Darren said.

#### *Q&A for Darren:*

*Q: How many boxes per swarm should you have on hand to start hiving a captured swarm?* Darren uses two, but then, you can always add boxes as the colony grows. Two of his Warre boxes are the same size, in volume, as one Langstroth box. You add boxes—hive boxes and super boxes—to the bottom, not to the top, as with Langstroth hives. In nature, bees start at the top and work their way down. That isn’t absolute, though: if you put a top super on a Warre hive, they might well go up, too.

*Q: Medication for pests?* Darren applies powder sugar for mites, but no medications. He notes that to medicate with powdered sugar, he has to be on top of it. He does, though, expect high mortality. He finds, typically, great vigor in the first year, but the second winter, they are likely to die out. Darren asks himself: what would bees do if we were not here? If bees have been here for many millions year more than we have been, pumping out 3 swarms per year, we’d have bees everywhere. They might “need,” in a way, high mortality, so that they don’t overpopulate. He suggests that if you’re going to

try the organic, top bar approach, you might consider expecting and accepting some mortality as part of the process.

*Q: How close can you place hives together when you capture swarms?* Darren doesn't feel that he has to separate the hives widely in distance. The swarms do not "rile up" the other bees. Sometimes, he noted, if there is a "secondary swarm," the queen may not really be ready to fly, may end up on the ground, and the swarm may return, then, to their original hive.

*Q: Do Mason bees and honey bees compete for food?* When asked about competition between mason and honey bees, he said no, and Jim agreed.

*Q: Can a top bar hive be done in observation hive fashion?* Yes: Darren says it is fun to have a Langstroth observation hive v. one of these, because his type shows the whole colony. Sometimes people seeing a Langstroth style observation hive often think that is the entire colony.

*Q: How should one take comb from a top bar hive?* Gary asked if you take off comb, should you just take it from outside to leave comb at center? Darren said yes (though, sorry, your scribe missed the details of this answer!). However, the queen had brood nest in bottom and two outer frames were mainly honey, but there was brood all through, so Darren was not sure how you'd do commercial honey with this design.

*Q: Is the Kenyan, v-shaped, top bar hive another viable option?* Darren says yes. To feed, put box in end board with float in top. These hives work well in hotter, drier climates, like Africa, whereas in our climate, bees can eat through comb and starve selves. He prefers the Warre box to the Kenyan design because with the Warre box, bees have more width, 8 to 10 bars on top.

Norm commented that the smaller bees he has on naturally built comb get out and work at 45 degrees Fahrenheit and seem to work harder than bees in Langstroth hives. Darren agreed, noting that Langstroth hive design is great for harvesting honey in quantity, but that the smaller bees may be hardier. Jason noted that another reason to use the natural comb is that there is no residual contamination from plastics.

*Q: When you stack many boxes in a vertical top bar hive, do you put more than one entrance?* No: bees still just come and go from the bottom.

*The Q&A over, the formal meeting ended, and LCBA members talked with Darren and checked out his "toys." Everyone thanked Darren for an entertaining and informative talk.*

**March Recipes: Feeling tired of winter yet? Warm up with some hearty soup—soup with HONEY, that is!**

### **Steamy Creamy Tomato Soup** (4 to 6 servings)

**Ingredients:** 2 cans (14-1/2 oz. each) crushed tomatoes in pureé

3/4 to 1 teaspoon hot sauce

**3 Tablespoons Honey**

1-1/2 cups half-and-half

**Directions:** Pour tomatoes in a large saucepan

Add half and half and 1/2 cup cold water

Bring to a boil, stirring constantly.

Add honey and lower heat to medium.

Cook 3 minutes, stirring constantly.

Add hot sauce and one teaspoon of salt.

Cook 2 minutes longer.

**Serve hot!**

### **Vintners Vegetable Borscht** (12 servings)

**Ingredients:** 3/4 lb. ground beef (can be omitted for a vegetarian version)

16 oz. canned beets, undrained

3 cups carrots, sliced

3 cups celery, sliced

3 cups onion, chopped

2 cans (14 oz. each) beef broth (can substitute veggie broth)

1/2 cup dry red wine

1 can (6 oz.) tomato paste

**1/4 cup Honey**

1 head red or green cabbage, coarsely chopped

Salt and pepper, to taste

Sour cream or plain yogurt, as needed

**Directions:** In large saucepan or Dutch oven, brown ground beef; drain off fat

Add beets and juice, carrots, celery, onions, beef broth, wine,  
tomato paste & **honey**.

Simmer, covered, until vegetables are very tender, about 1 hour.  
Add cabbage, cover and simmer 20 minutes longer.  
Season to taste.  
Serve: ladle into bowls & top each serving w/ spoonful sour cream.

**Butternut Squash Soup** (6 servings)

*Ingredients:* 2 Tablespoons butter  
1 onion, chopped  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
3 carrots, diced  
2 celery stalks, diced  
1 potato, peeled and diced  
1 butternut squash, peeled, seeded and diced  
3 cans (14.5 oz. each) chicken broth  
1/2 cup honey  
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme leaves, crushed  
Salt and pepper, to taste

*Directions:* In large pot, melt butter over medium heat.  
Stir in onions and garlic.  
Cook and stir until lightly browned, about 5 minutes.  
Stir in carrots, celery, potatoes, squash, chicken broth, honey & thyme.  
Bring mixture to boil  
Reduce heat & simmer 30 to 45 minutes or till vegetables tender.  
Remove from heat and cool slightly.  
Transfer mixture to blender or food processor; process till smooth.  
Return pureed soup to pot & season to taste with salt and pepper.  
Heat until hot and serve.

**Curried Honey Sweet Potato Soup** (makes 8 cups; serves 4 to 6)

*Ingredients:* 1 Tablespoon olive oil

1 onion, diced  
4 medium-sized cloves garlic, peeled  
6 cups (48 oz.) chicken or vegetable stock  
1 lb. sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks  
1 medium russet potato, peeled and cut into chunks  
2 teaspoons salt

***6 Tablespoons Orange Blossom honey, divided***

1 medium red bell pepper, seeded and diced  
2 to 3 teaspoons curry powder  
1/2 teaspoon pepper  
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger  
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro, optional

***Directions:*** Heat oil over medium-high heat in a soup pot.  
Add onion and sauté until translucent, 2 to 3 minutes.  
Add garlic and sauté 1 minute.  
Add stock, potatoes and salt.  
Cover and simmer until potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.  
Puree mixture in batches: then put soup back over low heat  
Add 5 Tablespoons of the ***honey***, then:  
Add bell pepper, curry powder, pepper and ginger.  
Bring to a simmer, taste and adjust seasonings.  
Microwave remaining 1 Tablespoon ***honey*** for 5 seconds on High.  
Serve soup drizzled with a little warm honey & sprinkled with  
chopped cilantro (optional)

***Enjoy!***

***For our March recipes, thanks once more to the National Honey Board!***

***Visit [www.honey.com](http://www.honey.com).***

**LCBA NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

***Want Bees? Call Heather Sherwood: [contact information removed from LCBA website, as the Sherwoods are no longer in the bee business – 2012 note]***  
Heather is based in Onalaska and has hive building materials and pre-assembled hives, as well as smokers, wax and plastic foundation boards, and, of course, bees! To see a price list, visit: [www.sherwoodbees.com](http://www.sherwoodbees.com). To reserve bees: call or email, and Heather will send an invoice; then you can send a check, but fyi, bees are not reserved till Heather gets the check. A package of bees is 3 pounds with a queen in a cage. April 25 is the target pickup date for those buying bees from Sherwoods—BUT the weather in California has been bad, too, so it may be later: more news at our March meeting. They will only have Italians and Carniolans, since the Russians were a failure. They have 400 packages reserved, including nucs that will be available, and Heather is sure they will sell out fast. Supply is an issue this year.

***Want to Try Hop Guard? Here's a message from Heather: "I have just learned that Hop Guard Mite treatment has been approved for WA and OR. I have placed an order that would cover the treatment of 75 hives and should hear about delivery by the end of the week. Please let me know immediately if you are interested, as I expect them to go quickly. The price should be around \$2.00 – \$2.50 per hive, depending on my shipping cost." Call or email Heather at the contacts above.***

***Want to buy used frames?*** A visitor, Brandon, had boxes of frames that he acquired from an old beekeeper, quite old, probably no contamination, is willing to sell them. If you are interested, call Brandon, 206 947 4483 (in Toledo). \$25 per box of 50 sheets with wire.

***Need Help With Your Bees? Don't Bee Shy – Contact a Bee Mentor:***

- If you'd like to be connected with a honey bee mentor in your area, call Susanne at 360 880 8130 or email [Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com](mailto:Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com).
- If you need help with Mason Bees, check with Kimo Thielges ([kimosabe@comprime.com](mailto:kimosabe@comprime.com)), or Ted Saari ([KNT98632@q.com](mailto:KNT98632@q.com)).

***Would You Like to Volunteer as a Bee Mentor?*** Bee mentors take calls, answer questions, and may visit members' bee yards. If you're interested in serving this way, please call Susanne at 360 880 8130 or email her at [Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com](mailto:Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com).

***Free Swarm & Colony Removals by our "Bee Team."*** If you – or someone you know – has bees in a structure and wants them removed but not killed, please call a member of the Bee Team (during winter, we would not remove bees, but we can get you on our calendar for spring). This service is free, though we accept donations to support our educational programs.

***Can You Help?*** Want to ride along on a removal? It's fun, free, educational, and saves bees from the exterminator! Call us (360 880 8130) or email [Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com](mailto:Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com) – it's a great experience!

***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—bee happy!

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