

Lewis County Beekeepers' Association:

November 2011 Newsletter

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Upcoming LCBA Events:

- **November 9 meeting: 7 p.m., Old Chehalis Courthouse.**
 - * *LCBA Goes to the Movies!* We will watch *Bees: Tales from the Hive*, a 54 minute film journey inside the life of a hive, featuring amazing close-up footage of queen mating flights, wasp invasions of hives, swarm behavior, and the life cycle of the honey bee. BYOP (bring your own popcorn).
 - * After the film – brief business meeting, beekeeping Q&A.
- * **December 14, 6 p.m.: our 3rd Annual Holiday Potluck at the Newaukum Grange – mark your calendars! Directions & things to bring will be in the December newsletter.**

Notes from LCBA's October 12 Monthly Meeting:

Our new president, Norm Switzler, introduced our new officers – Vice President Ted Saari and Treasurer Jon Wade. Jon and Norm reminded those present that October is dues month: Jon Wade took dues and encouraged members to fill out the new membership form and brief survey.

Suggestion box: we would like to set up a suggestion box for future topics, speakers, and members' questions. Watch for this in November!

New meeting space? We tried going without our tables for most attendees, and we fit better into the space, but not all were here, and some need tables when they'd like to take notes. Alternative meeting places might be the Methodist church on Market across from Les Schwab, or the Methodist church at Bishop & Jackson. The Veterans' Memorial Museum has an upstairs meeting room with plenty of room. We'll follow up and bring more information next month.

Beekeeping Q&A

Norm opened our Q&A by noting that this has been a difficult year. Norm has never heard of so many new colonies, first year boxes, swarming multiple times.

How can we get boxes open and work frames without smashing bees? Pat Swinth noted that some people are going to a 9 frame hive, easier to manipulate than 10 frames, which gets pretty tight. There are rail frames now spaced for 9, Norm noted. These are stable, and the bees use less propolis. It's also easier to work honey supers with a 9 frame.

Dealing with yellow jackets: Another anomaly has been the high number of yellow jackets trying to rob hives. The yellow jackets can work in lower temperatures than the honey bees can. Yellow jackets will steal honey, kill bees, etc. The workers have by now stopped feeding the drones, and have kicked them out; unfortunately, the drones then become prey for –and thus attract–the yellow jackets. One thing that helps is to insert hive reducers as soon as you notice yellow jackets or see the drones being ejected. If you see the yellow jackets actually entering and exiting hives, it may be too late: your best bet may be to combine this weak colony with a stronger colony.

Question from Gary Kalich: the lid blew off one of his hive tops and yellow jackets got in – he squashed many jackets, but his hive was weakened. He replaced some frames, but couldn't find a queen. Now, a few weeks later, the yellow jackets simply moved into his next box. Has anyone had experience in killing yellow jackets and then moving the hive? Has anyone tried that to see if the jackets can be shed that way? Norm said you can't kill enough once it gets to that point to help. Chris Cole suggested getting jacket traps and putting them around starting in the spring. Norm noted that the jackets are carnivores and want to eat the larvae. They'll take sugar – as with hummingbird feeders – but they prefer larvae. Norm used to hang strips of meat over a bowl of soapy water – they'd gorge themselves till they were so heavy they fell into the water and drowned.

Is it possible to over-winter bees successfully in a single box hive? Yes, it can be done if they have enough food stored. If you have an empty or virtually empty second box, take it off – it dissipates the heat, makes it harder for the bees to keep warm. Don't reverse the boxes– it is too late for that now – the bees don't have time for building up new food stocks in an upper box.

Ted had reversed boxes in one colony: the hive the swarm came from was undeveloped, relatively. Very little comb had been drawn. Ted recombined his swarm back into his original hive in a second box. After checking and taking off the top box and paper, he replaced the empty frames with frames with brood and food into the original box. Now both boxes have tons of bees. He “herded” the bees down into the box. He has yet to put feeders on.

Feeding bees: Norm says that if you haven't started, you should start with thick syrup, 2 parts sugar to one part water. You don't want to encourage them to produce wax, which the more diluted syrup tends to promote. Instead, they need to store as much food as they can. Over the coming week, it should be 40 to 60 degrees with some sun, and they should be collecting some pollen: we're coming into the last couple of weeks that they can forage. You should check to see if they have any space to store more food. Nudge the box and gauge the weight – they should be very hard to budge if they have enough food. Don't add boxes: the queen is not replacing dying bees with new eggs at this time of year, so space will be created in the hives as the foragers die. Queens won't be laying again till late winter.

Best buy on sugar: 25 pound bag for \$17 and change at Yard Birds for C&H Cane Sugar. Shop and Kart also has relatively inexpensive sugar; Cash & Carry has 50 pound bags that are relatively affordable. Wal-Mart might order more sugar if we had enough people willing to order.

How disruptive is it to open up the box and feed bees at this time of year? The consensus was that the disruption should not be significant, but the feeding may be crucial to your bees' survival. Bees should go through a division board feeder in 3 to 5 days [a gallon--and yes, this is an investment]. They're hungry: this year there was not enough food supply for bees, and few got harvestable honey. IF we have a long, wet spring, there will be serious bee losses.

Should we wrap hives for warmth? Should we wrap hives with black felt tar paper? Norm has not done this but says this won't harm them unless you cover the opening. Norm keeps his hives covered from the rain and likes to keep the opening side open to the air. Gary noted that all his hives with screened bottom boards lived, whereas each with a wooden bottom board retained moisture, and each of those hives died. The ventilation process is critical. The 9 frame boxes also help with ventilation. Norm believes that in our climate, ventilation is key because it is so hard for bees to keep moisture at bay. Styrofoam boxes he's used seem to over-winter well. The moisture absorbed into wood board evaporates upward. Does ambient damp air from outside filter in through a screened bottom board? -it at least won't rain up from the bottom. The air circulation will primarily be at the bottom. Plastic EZ frames with drawn foundation – these can be trouble. They can warp in the sun on a warm day. Norm has been tossing his out. Dave noted that they make a mean fire. . . .

Feeding bees in very cold weather: If it drops down to 30 degrees, should you still feed? NO – below 50 degrees, don't open your boxes.

A fascinating improvised feeder design: Bruce Casaw brought a feeder to show: he took a box about the size of a super box and inserted plastic trays, then made an ingenious mesh cage, about one-half inch wide, with cork floaters, and attached this to the inside of the box. When he pours syrup into the box, the cage floats on the syrup but does not fill. The bees can climb up through a 3/4 inch divot and enter the mesh cage and feed without drowning. (Norm suggested using non-toxic aquarium glue to anchor trays inside.) The sweet thing about this design is that you don't have to open up the hive to feed the bees. This is Bruce's experiment. His crevice in the back for bees to access is small enough that they don't have enough room to build comb in. They may build between top frame of box and the feeder, though. He's disseminated 150 pounds of sugar this way since July. He now plans to adapt this design to be insertable into a hive box. Maybe this could be a wood shop project during next year's hive building workshop.

Question: who could host a hive building workshop? Provided he gets his wiring done in his shop, Ted could potentially host it: he acquired many of Sherwoods' woodworking tools. With volunteers to help organize, it's a possibility.

LCBA Group order for 2012 package bees? We are likely to have quite a few losses and will be competing with commercial beekeepers, who will be a higher priority to the sellers. If we want to lock in an order, we need to do so before Christmas, ideally in November. Would it be possible to get bees through Tim Geise? Sarah will call them and ask if they could do it. Ruhl is buying in quantities that are competitive, and they will give us a discount. We would need to get a head count. Bees probably would not be delivered till mid-late April. Susanne will check with Bob re: whether he has talked to Ruhl yet. Norm's truck can get 6 to 8 dozen package bees packed in. The last couple of years, the Sherwoods ordered over 200 packages.

What bees are best for us to buy? Jon asked where Ruhl gets their bees and is wondering about bringing in greater genetic diversity. Norm noted that some order the Buckfast bees through a Texas distributor. On the other hand, there's an argument for focusing on bees that have thrived locally as best adapted to our climate. Norm is working with some people in the club who have time and interest to try queen breeding.

Can we join forces with another bee club to do an order, possibly Olympia or Cowlitz County? Cowlitz is small, and Bob just did a class down there, mainly for the agricultural community: if there are beekeepers down there, they may want to come in on an order with us.

Which is better – a nuke or a new package box? A four frame nuke box is all set and ready to go, whereas a new package will have to establish itself. On the other hand, nukes generally aren't available till later in the season.

Introducing a new queen – a true story: Norm described how he introduced a queen to a queenless hive and how the foragers led her in. Escorted into box! Norm never had seen anything like that. The box she came in had so few bees, with so little feed, that the queen was so weak she could barely walk – and then the workers helped her!

Alternative pollinators: if you have Mason Bees, this is the month to move them from outside into a cool dry place (below 55 degrees Fahrenheit). You can leave them out, but the conditions can make inroads on them, as can predators.

Marking queens: Gary Stelzner noted that if he has the queen marked, this is a huge help. For a dollar extra, the sellers will mark them. Usually it's a brilliant yellow or blue or pink – the color of the year. Gary had to buy several queens this year and found it well worth it. Can we mark queens ourselves? Norm said it can potentially be done, but you'd want to know whether the substance would be toxic to them or not – e.g. nail polish could be toxic. Jon noted that a very fast drying latex paint is advertised in the catalogs. Norm said you may have to use a very fine tapered brush and be delicate. Gary noted that bees will try to take off any artificial coloring you put on the queen, so it's a good idea to invest that dollar and let the pros do it.

Report from our October 8th Open Board Meeting – Norm & Susanne summarized key points, below. If you'd like the minutes from the Board meeting, please email Susanne (Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com) or call 360 880 8130.

Upcoming Classes? We were scheduled to offer a new beginner's class through Lewis County Extension, but it didn't have enough enrollees to run. Bob and Norm plan to offer the class early in 2012. Meanwhile, Tim Weible at the Honey Hut / Centralia Deli is running a WSBA sponsored class. Those interested can call Tim at 360 736 1015: his 5 evening class starts October 25 and costs \$10 (for the WSBA book), and those who complete all 5 classes will receive an apprentice certificate from WSBA. The class takes place at Centralia Deli, and class participants get a 10% meal discount on class nights.

Upcoming speakers, topics? --what to plant for nectar? Where can you buy? Seasonal cycles? Ideally, how can we produce food for bees year round?

Another topic: Kimo asked about a "Bug Off" proprietor who did a pest control talk at GFE a few years ago. He deals with honey bees and tries to defer destruction of bees by working with people who do what our Bee Team does.

Christmas potluck – Members were enthusiastic about having a 3rd annual holiday potluck, so Susanne will reserve the Newaukum Grange for our December 14 meeting.

New volunteers – mentors, Bee Team? The people who are most often called for mentorship tend to be the ones who are busy doing swarm extractions for the Bee Team. Would anyone be willing to help out as a mentor to take calls and visit those who would like some help.

Hands-on, on-site workshops in spring 2012? Gary Stelzner suggested that we could have actual hands on workshops at members' bee yards to show beginners how to inspect a hive, find the queen, manage the hive. Norm could host this. This was met with great enthusiasm. We could do several of these workshops. We may have lost some members because they lost their bees and gave up: this might help.

Discounts on magazines: Bob Harris has the information – Susanne & Norm will ask him. Roy said that there is a 20% discount if you are an association member. Bee Culture is more geared to the hobbyist; American Bee Journal is more scientifically oriented.

Membership directory: Jon put this into the new membership form. If people want, they can opt out and not have their contact information listed; otherwise, we can create a directory with members' names and contact information.

Nametags: Bob is working on getting more nametags.

LCBA Representation at County Fairs: In 2011, we missed our chance to be involved in the Southwest Washington Fair. Could we have our own booth, with the observation hive, and educational displays? Floral? Conservation? The latter is good because outdoors-oriented people come through

there. The Grange building gets too hot for bees. The conservation space is cooler. We'd have to make a committee and get enough volunteers (probably 2 to 4 people per day) to cover all 6 days. We could run a sign up list ahead of time and get commitments. If we can't get the coverage, then there would be no point having a booth. Brandy will make a sign up sheet so we can explore this. Another issue is paying for parking and admission. We might be able to use club funds to pay for parking permits and tickets. Other groups (e.g. Master Cannors) gave their volunteers parking passes and tickets in exchange for volunteers putting in 4 to 6 hours of their time. We could have a possible fundraiser of raffling off a colony of bees at the fair plus a mentor's phone number, and maybe add a free membership. The hive, bees, wooden wear, etc., would be donated for the fundraiser.

Outreach: Norm suggested that we make business cards with Bee Team names and numbers. Refrigerator magnets would be a good approach, too.

LCBA / WSBA News and Announcements:

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.
- If you need help with Mason Bees, check with Kimo Thielges (kimosabe@compprime.com), or Ted Saari (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.

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 In 2012? 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 – it's a great experience!

Need Beekeeping Supplies? Visit Honey Hut at Centralia Deli Steakhouse & BBQ, 708 Harrison Avenue in Centralia. Call Tim Weible, 736-1015, for more information about supplies and prices. Tim has pretty much everything you may need by way of supplies in stock: suits in small to XX, gloves, boxes assembled or unassembled, supers, wax and plastic foundation, frames, tops, bottoms, smokers, tools, and books. The Honey Hut also sells local honey, and even mead!

Christmas Shopping? LCBA Member Rob Jenkins makes cool yard art out of found iron!
Contact Rob at ironimagery@tds.net; 360 978 4200

Growing Places Farm needs beekeeping supplies: If you have gear, especially bee suits and visors, that you can spare, please call Lynn Ford, 360 807 4304, or email lford@gpfep.org.

Respectfully reported—bee happy!

Susanne Weil, LCBA Secretary: Susanne.beekeeper@gmail.com; 360 880 8130