

Lewis County Beekeepers' Association: *November 2008 Newsletter*

IN THIS EDITION:

- **LCBA News and Upcoming Events:**
 - **Saturday, 12/13/08, 1 p.m.: Hive Building Demonstration**
 - Where: Bob Harris's "Rose of Sharon Farm" (contact information omitted from online edition).
 - Norm Switzler, Bob Harris, and Sharette Giese will demonstrate how to build hives from wood, use pre-made plastic, and more.
 - **Next LCBA Meeting, Wednesday, 1/14/09, 7 p.m.: John Ruhl of Ruhl Bee Supplies** will speak at our January monthly meeting at the Old Chehalis Courthouse: opportunity to buy bee products.
- **Minutes of our 11/12/08 Business Meeting. Topics included:**
 - *Networking with other beekeeping groups*
 - *Events planning*
 - *LCBA bylaws: first reading*
- **Summary of 11/21/08 information on "what it's like to run a bee business": Roy Schaafsma, Dave Smith, and Sharette and Tim Giese**

Minutes of November 12, 2008 Business Meeting:

Bob Harris was in Arkansas, so LCBA Secretary Susanne Weil called the meeting to order. *Minutes* of the 10/08/08 meeting were *approved*.

News Items:

Olympia Beekeeping group: Sarah Roelas, our Treasurer, reported on her visit to the Olympia beekeeping group. She found it fun and informative. They presented information, then had an open book test as a way to educate the members. They also showed a film titled "Organic Beekeeping in Vermont: A Beekeeper's Journey." They bring items to raffle as door prizes.

The Olympia group meets on the 2nd Monday of each month. Their president would like to attend one of our meetings to talk about ways we could collaborate. It was also suggested that we invite their president to speak at one of our monthly meetings. Norm volunteered to visit and talk with their president about this.

Vancouver Beekeeping conference: Sarah reported that one of the Olympia group members had gone to this conference and thought it was great, offering much information on current research about bees. In 2009, the conference will be held

the weekend before Thanksgiving: we could set up carpools for LCBA members to attend.

More tapes for the LCBA Traveling Library: Norm brought in two VHS tapes on basic beekeeping and said that he learned a lot from them (they must be pretty good if Norm felt educated!). These tapes were added to Gary Gorreman's Traveling LCBA Library. It was noted that in our meeting room at the Courthouse, though, we need DVDs to show videos.

Hive building demonstration: We discussed Bob Harris's idea of a hive building workshop at his farm. Some members have established hives already, whereas others are looking to build, whether from scratch or from kits. We decided to have, first, a hive-building demonstration, then hear from John Ruhl about bee supplies at our January meeting, and then follow up with an actual hive building workshop where members could build with help from experienced folks. Ken Jones would be willing to loan his shop.

Cost of start-up supplies? One member asked what start-up supplies for new beekeepers actually cost. It's hard to know from just looking at a catalog: an itemized list would be helpful. Bob Harris has a list of items needed to start for less than \$200 per set-up, including the smoker. Bob will email the list to Susanne, who will distribute it to LCBA members by email.

December 13 demonstration details: Sharette Giese, Norm Switzler, and Bob Harris will demonstrate techniques at Bob's farm on Saturday, December 13, starting at 1 p.m. Included will be building wood hives from scratch, using prefabricated plastic frames, and more. Norm will order a "Bee-Max" hive, which is polyurethane, to demonstrate. The Gieses noted that there is also the option of getting frames with plasti-seal in the middle: this gives the wax comb stability that allows re-use. However, if beekeepers want chunk honey, they need a wire setting with a wax sheet in the middle so that they can heat the wire and cut chunk honey out in combs.

Speaker for January: John Ruhl of Ruhl Bees, Portland, will speak at our next regular monthly meeting, January 14, 2009, 7 p.m. at the Old Courthouse in Chehalis. He will bring catalogs and may be able to offer us discounts on products.

Bylaws: Peter Glover drafted bylaws for LCBA, based on the existing bylaws used by the Pierce County Beekeepers' Association. The bylaws were emailed to LCBA members prior to the meeting and paper copies were distributed for those who needed them. Peter walked members through the draft of the bylaws, and Susanne incorporated suggestions into the revised draft, which will be sent out at the same time as these minutes. On the revised draft, changes appear in **bold**. At our Saturday, 12/13 meeting, we will review these changes for approval prior to the hive building demonstration. All present agreed that this should be a **brief** discussion: **not** focused on bylaws material already accepted by members at the November meeting, but giving

members the opportunity to discuss these changes after having seen them in writing, then vote on adoption of the bylaws. Peter was thanked for his work in drafting the bylaws.

***Speakers: Summary of 11/21/08 information on “what it’s like to run a bee business”:
Roy Schaafsma, Dave Smith, and Sharette and Tim Giese***

The business of honey: Roy Schaafsma started his bee business in 1964 in Castle Rock. He built to 300 hives, and now maintains about 150. Asked where he places his hives, Roy noted that he puts them all over: Rainier, Longview, and other places nearer home. He used to bring his bees to people’s farms for pollination, but gave that up and now maintains his own hives and honey. Out of his house, he sells 4 gallon jugs, mostly, but also some smaller jars. Roy noted that small containers are important for sales in markets. Asked about how he feeds his bees, Roy said that he focuses on pollen from blackberries, but that it’s good to sell a variety. The Gieses noted that it’s possible to have a lavender yard, a blackberry yard, and so on to promote this variety.

Nosema: a threat to bees: Roy said that his bee business was yielding a “pretty good sideline income,” averaging 60 pounds per hive, till this year, when he lost over half his bees, probably because of the new Nosema problem: a bee diarrhea that hangs on. No one knows how to treat it. He attended the Vancouver conference where presenters had suggestions, but no cure. Bees with Nosema eat, but can’t digest, so they starve to death.

Any way to lower chances of Nosema? Members asked whether anything can be done to lessen the chances of a Nosema outbreak. Dave Smith noted that it helps to sprinkle the frames with a mixture of fine-grain baking sugar, Terramicin, and Fumadil-B: he tried this and now his hives are doing well. He gives about one gallon per week: the bees will empty it because they are making honey from it.

Mites: The problem of mites came up: Roy, Dave, and the Gieses suggested that beekeepers should watch for deformities when the bees come out in the spring. *Roy had a method for catching mites, but the secretary missed it, unfortunately!*

When disease kills your hive, what should you do? One member asked what to do if a hive dies off as a result of disease. Dave and Roy answered that treating frames with Terramicin was one approach, but that burning the frames and starting with new ones may be the best approach. However, if bees are dead face-into the frames, that is a starve-out. Other than disease, though, Roy noted that some things you must do to help bees thrive, but other than that, bees are “pretty forgiving.”

Heating hives in winter? One member asked whether they should heat their hives. Dave and Roy answered that that isn’t necessary: bees make their own heat and, in summer, their own cooling. In winter, bees cluster. When the nectar stops coming in, the queen stops laying eggs, the workers and drones stop flying, and then the hive doesn’t need to be at 92 degrees: the hive can drop in temperature, and the bees cluster around the queen to survive the winter.

Winter bee feeding? How about winter feeding? Honey is bees' food source: you can get money by selling the honey, but you must be sure to invest enough in feeding your bees. During the clustering phase, the hive moves across the frames and eats the honey. You can tell from the weight of the hive if you need to feed them. When feeding is necessary, fill the tray with water and sugar: when it's warm enough for the hive to break the cluster, they'll come out and eat the water-sugar mix, so it's good to keep supers on the side with that supply. Dave noted that if you catch a swarm, you must feed it through the winter. He feeds them sugar water laced with Fumadil, but no vitamins, through the winter. Roy is trying some vitamins for the first time and will report next year on how this worked.

Size of hive openings in winter? How much of an opening should one have for hives in the winter? Dave and Roy said that this should be small: you don't want mice entering. Dave puts a divider between the supers. They use a slatted rack on the bottom board with openings for things to drop down and out. This can also help bees stay warm. Whereas worker bees live only six weeks before working themselves to death, they will live longer in a cluster, dormant (not hibernating).

Checking bees in summer? In summer, how often should beekeepers check their bees? Roy said that he checks every 10 days, though others check less often: there are different philosophies and no consensus.

The Gieses' Fresno hives: Tim and Sharette Giese (woogiebee.com) have 100 hives in Fresno, California and a parent company with Tim's father. Tim feeds his bees in the south and only has to do one feeding. The Gieses reported that farms love the chance to work with beekeepers: it's a win-win for everyone. However, in the south, Tim noted, beekeepers worry about bee-robbing by other hives: he experienced this and lost half of his "nukes": established hives were killed and cannibalized by other hives.

Stress and disease in bees: To minimize chances of disease entering hives, the Gieses try not to stress the bees too much: they limit the number of pollinations they do. They center on honey, primarily citrus and wild berry honeys. They think that this may be why they have less incidence of mites and disease. They have not experienced colony collapse disorder: it's possible that the big companies court colony collapse by stressing their bees too much, working them too hard.

Essential oils? Sarah asked whether anyone had tried essential oils as part of bee food. The Gieses are going to try that: oregano and clove are anti-microbial, anti-fungal, and it's possible that using essential oils could mean going completely chemical-free. Norm noted that he plants spearmint around his boxes, and that bees love it. The Gieses noted that if there is a bad smell, you know you have a "foul brood," and that it's best to burn the boxes if you suspect foul brood.

Lost queens: One member had heard of bears breaking into a hive and wondered how, in a situation like that, a beekeeper can find the queen again. He had poured 40 to

50 pounds of sugar (before the rainy weather), but couldn't find the queen. It was noted that a hive can last two to three months without a queen if there's enough brood there. It takes 21 days for a brood to hatch. If you need to get a queen, though, you need to act early in spring: many places sell out fast!

Respectfully submitted,
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