

Lancaster County Honey Producers NEWSLETTER

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also

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Newsletter:

Jim Pinkerton

Winter 2011

Here it is February; the Ground Hog has made his prediction that spring is “just around the corner” (much closer the “6 more weeks of winter”....I think??). It has been over two months since we have had real temperatures high enough for the bees to fly; they have got to have all six legs crossed by now.

In *Allen Latham's Bee Book*, Published in 1949, he writes, “*In the winter of 1903 -1904, the temperature from November 19 till March 22 did not get above the freezing point enough to allow snowballs to be made from snow in the shade, and on March 22 the bees got their first real winter flight. In spite of this hard winter I did not lose a colony, though one almost died*”. Let's hope this cold does not last that long. I have heard it is better, for the bees, not to be breaking cluster with the up and down temperatures that we sometimes have. We will find out in the next month or so, just how our bees have fared this winter.

Membership in the Lancaster County Honey Producers is \$10.00 per family per calendar year. Dues should be sent, by April, to
Lori Stahl, Treasurer

Meetings for
2011

Jan 29

Introduction to Bees and
Beekeeping Workshop

Wow, what a day!!

We had 65 attend...57 were
new members...52 have no
bees yet, many are looking to
start beekeeping this spring.

March 8

Lancaster County Honey
Producer's Banquet
At the Gathering Place

See Page 5

April 19, 6:30pm

At the Gathering Place
Building Nucs for spring and
summer splits.
Installing a nuc

May 17, 7:00pm

Backyard habitats
Location TBA

August 16

Picnic at Strickler's Farm
Official invitations later.

August 20

**National Honey Bee
Awareness Day**

Sept 20, 7:00pm

Strickler's Farm
Using those hive products

Oct. 18, 7:00pm

“*Honey Roundup*” and
meeting at
Dutch Gold Honey

Realistic Expectations

By Michael Bush

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"Blessed is the man who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed" --Alexander Pope

I think it's important in every aspect of beekeeping to have realistic expectations. Not to say that those may not be exceeded at times, but also at times they will not be met as both failure and success are dependent on many related variables.

As examples, let's consider some of the variable outcomes.

Honey Crop

Typically people tell beginner beekeepers not to expect a honey crop the first year. This is an attempt to set realistic expectations. However a good package with a good queen in a good year (appropriate amounts of well timed rainfall and flying weather) may far exceed this or may not even get well established. But generally it's a realistic expectation for the beekeeper that they should get established enough to get through the winter and maybe make a little honey.

Plastic Foundation

People buy plastic foundation (and other plastic beekeeping equipment such as Honey Super Cell fully drawn comb) and sometimes are very disappointed. The bees typically will hesitate to draw the plastic (or use the Honey Super Cell) and this sets them back a bit. Sometimes the bees will draw a comb between two plastic foundations in order to avoid using it. Sometimes they will build "fins" out from the face of the foundation. None of these are unusual, but they also often draw it pretty well. How well they do depends on a combination of genetics and nectar flow. Many people seeing the hesitation decide never to use plastic again. But actually once the bees use it, comb on plastic foundation or even fully drawn plastic comb is used just like any other comb. The delay at first seems like a big setback, and for a package, perhaps it is, but once you get past it there is no problem getting it used after that.

Wax Foundation

People use wax foundation and often it gets hot and buckles, or the bees chew it all up or the bees don't want to draw it and they draw fins or combs between. They do this less with than with plastic, but still sometimes they do. The buckled foundation often gets comb build on it and the comb is a mess. Many people after an experience like this say they will never use wax foundation again. But really that's just how the circumstances went. If you put it in on a good flow the bees would not have chewed it and it would have been drawn before it buckled. My point is that people often have unrealistic expectations and when those are not realized, they are disappointed in the method when it was other circumstances that led to the problems.

Foundationless

Some people use foundationless frames. Many have perfect luck with it but some will have bees that just don't get the concept and build some crossways comb. Since this happens just as often in plastic foundation, and wax foundation that has collapsed or fallen out etc. it would not seem that significant, but if the only experience you

have is with the foundationless, you may assume that other methods don't have these problems. But they do. Again, genetics and timing of the flow have a lot to do with success or failure.

Losses

New beekeepers often assume that every hive should live forever and every hive should make it through the winter. Some winters, they do. But most winters kill off at least a few of the hives. Obviously the more hives you have the more this can happen. I went years without losing a hive, but I only had a few and I always combined any that were borderline on strength and those were the days before Tracheal mites, Varroa mites, Nosema cerana, small hive beetles, and a host of viruses we now have. Now I have around a hundred hives and try to over winter a lot of nucs, of marginal strength and there are those many new diseases and pests to stress them out. No winter losses is an unrealistic expectation. But high winter losses are a sign that you must be doing something wrong or the weather did something quirky.

I always try to figure out the cause of winter losses. Often it is starvation from getting stuck on brood. Sometimes with nucs or small clusters it's a hard cold snap (-10 to -30 F) and the cluster just wasn't big enough to keep warm. I always look for dead Varroa. Finding thousands of dead Varroa in the dead bees is usually a good indication that the Varroa were the primary cause of their death. A lack of such evidence is probably good evidence that it was something else.

Again, the point is that sometimes wintering exceeds or falls below even realistic expectations. But it's helpful to start with realistic expectations and work from there. Realistic expectations from healthy hives as far as losses are probably in the 10% range with some years worse and some years better.

Splits

One of the common questions I hear from new beekeepers is "how many splits can I make?" Of course the answer to this is probably the most variable of any except, perhaps, "how much honey will my hive make?" The difference between a good year and a bad year in beekeeping varies far more than 10 fold. I've had years where I got 200 pounds of honey from every hive and years where I harvested nothing and fed 60 pounds of sugar (between spring and fall) to every hive. Splits are similar. Some hives can't be split at all. Some can be split five times in a year. Most can only take one split and still make a decent crop of honey and be well stocked for winter.

How many hives in one place?

Another common question about beekeeping is "how many hives can I put in one place?" With awesome forage (like in the middle of 8000 acres of sweet clover), and good weather, it may be close to impossible to put too many in one place. With poor forage and drought, it may be that only a few hives is too many. A typical number that is thrown about is 20. This is a nice round number that is applicable as a generality, but to be realistic it will depend on many things and many of those things vary from year to year.

The point of all of this is that results in beekeeping vary dramatically based on what is happening around the bees as well as things like the time of year, the way they are cared for and so on. It's very difficult to predict what the outcomes will actually be, so there is no point in having too high or low of expectations. Take things as they come and adjust. Be prepared for either exceptional success or failure and adjust as you go.

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Some Organization Business Up For Discussion

There was some discussion about our group's name not really reflecting our purpose to be ***Beekeepers*** rather than ***Honey Producers***. Looking at our club's history we were originally 'The Lancaster County Beekeepers Society'. Almost all groups in the state are 'Associations'. But recently a Philadelphia group was started that is a *Beekeepers Guild* and one in Pittsburg, just called *Burg Bees*. We can call our group whatever we choose. Not that we have to be different, but, than again why not go back to our original name from that first meeting, 135 years ago, on March 13, 1876..... **The Lancaster County Beekeepers Society.**

For the most part the name change would be a simple matter. But we do need to open it up to the club for discussion, make a motion on whatever we decide and then vote on it. Any thoughts, opinions, feelings need to be addressed. All is open for discussion and revision. Our group will continue as we have been either way.

Matt Libhart has created this logo as an example of what we could do. So, we can talk about it, kick it around at the Banquet, have an official discussion at the first regular meeting on April 19 and then vote on it. If anyone cannot make the meeting and wants to e-mail or mail their thoughts to me, I would be happy to present them at that time.

Thanks for your input....Jim

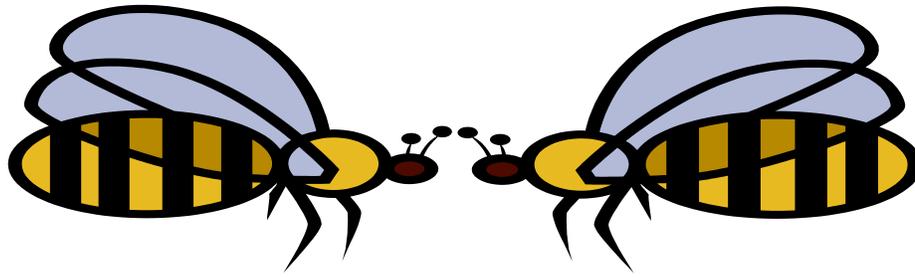


This is some fondant that is in a feeder box on top of a Nuc in my yard. The fondant had covered the hole in the fall. They have eaten a hole in the top and are now feeding on the edges. The cover of the feeder box can be taken off without disturbing the bees below. For most of the winter the bees were clustered away from the hole and could not be seen. It was great to see some bees around the hole and flying this past Sunday.

There was almost an audible aaaaaaaaah coming from the yard as they were able to fly for the first time since November.



I lifted lids in 2 yards Monday just to listen for activity. Out of 12 hives, I found 5 dead, 3 that I had doubt about in the fall, but also 2 that I thought should have made it. I did not open any that had activity, will wait for some warmer weather for that.....soon, I hope.



7th Annual Honey Banquet

Our annual HONEY BANQUET will be held on March 8, 6:30pm at The Gathering Place located at 6 Pine Street in Mount Joy. Come out and enjoy a delicious buffet dinner and camaraderie with fellow beekeepers. The cost is \$15 per adult, while children (ages 12 and under) eat for free with paying adults.

We are planning just an enjoyable evening of good food and conversation, with a silent auction thrown in for fun. Bring something for the auction, if you wish, but most important, come and enjoy the evening with friends and families of beekeepers.

**The menu will include: Tossed Salad, Ham loaf, Boneless Skinless Chicken, Steamed Red Potatoes, Fresh Broccoli, and Baked Corn.
*Build Your Own, Ice Cream Sundae Buffet, for Dessert.***

RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED by March 6.

Reserve your dinner at The Gathering Place on March 8, 2011.

NAME _____

PHONE NUMBER _____

NUMBER of adults _____ NUMBER of children (ages 12 and under eat for free!) _____

AMOUNT of PAYMENT Enclosed = \$15.00 x number of adults (ages 13 and over) _____

Send this form (or a paper with your count) and payment by **March 6** to:
Jim Pinkerton, 6 Pine Street, Mount Joy, PA 17552
(Make checks payable to 'Lancaster County Honey Producers')

See you on March 8th at 6:30 pm!