THE BUZZ! *February 2005*

An electronic newsletter from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's State Apiarist's Office

Bees are starting to BUZZ!

Well, our bees are starting to BUZZ! They are busy bringing in pollen, and queens are busy laying eggs. Beekeepers are busily starting to check on their hives, clean up old equipment, and send out orders to the bee supply companies. The bee supply companies are busy receiving orders, filling orders and getting ready for the first package bee shipments. The Kentucky State Apiarist is busy fielding questions from beekeepers, planning his schedule to visit beekeepers, and trying to put out an edition of this newsletter prior to the 2005 Kentucky Beekeeping School.

One of the things beekeepers do when they start to thaw out in the late winter and early spring is to go to beekeepers' meetings. So in this issue of THE BUZZ!, you will find a schedule of and information about upcoming meetings. Also seasonal information and news, some of which I hope you will find useful or interesting.

Kentucky Beekeeping school – LAST CALL - to be held Feb. 26 in Versailles

This newsletter is being e-mailed out just a couple of days prior to the 2005 Kentucky Beekeeping School, which will be held on Saturday, Feb. 26, at Woodford County High School in Versailles, just west of Lexington. Everything is ready to go, or will be on Saturday!

A detailed program, description of classes, and directions to Woodford County High School are available at the Kentucky State Apiarist's Web site: http://www.kyagr.com/cons_ps/bees/index.htm. Come and join us. We're looking forward to a big crowd of beekeepers and some good beekeeper education, and a good time is guaranteed for all!

Bees, Birdseed, and Horse Troughs?

Bees, birdseed, and horse troughs? What do they have in common? Well, this time of year, they often have something in common, and I get calls about them. Calls like: "Why are honeybees swarming my birdfeeder?" I typically get a few of these calls each early spring – I'm up to two so far this year. So why do bees often go after bird feed, horse feed, and similar products this time of year? And what should you do when you get a call from your neighbor that the poor little birds are being driven away from their bird feeder by your bees?

Well, first the why. As we see the first warm days of early spring (at least I call this early spring – others disagree), bees are out foraging for pollen, and there is not a lot of it out there yet. Birdseed and other animal feeds are like pollen substitutes for them. I have a report of a feed mill near Elizabethtown whose employees do not appreciate bees this time of year.

Now, what do you tell your neighbor when he calls you up about the birds and bees who are not getting along?

First, assure them it won't last long. Once enough genuine pollen sources start becoming available (early blooming trees like maples), the bees will seek out real pollen and should leave the feeders alone. Unlike the phenomenon of bees congregating at hummingbird feeders, this will not be a long-term problem.

Second, even in the short term, it is only a problem on warm days. As I'm writing this, it is mostly in the low 40s throughout Kentucky. I suspect bird feeders are not under attack here today.

Third, do not suggest moving the feeder. It will not help. I guarantee the bees will find the new feeder location before the birds do.

However, if we do string together several warm days, and bees continue to tag-team a feeder, taking the feeder down for a day might help. The bees may go find a real pollen source (perhaps some maple trees in bloom) like all good bees should. Or perhaps they'll go to a different neighbor's horse trough – if you're lucky, neighbors who don't know you have bees. Then the day after the feeders go back up, the bees will continue to collect pollen (or the pollen alternate) at this new location. Bees learn where the best places to forage are located, communicate this to each other, and keep going back to the good source. So by taking away one source for a day, they'll be forced to find a different one, perhaps a better one, and may continue to return to it.

Another possible solution to the bees and bird feeder problem could come on its own. After a period of several days of cool weather when the bees are cooped up in the hive, they might "forget" where your neighbors' feeders are. Bees have a short memory span for food sources – like my teenage son has a short memory span for where he left his homework assignment. So hopefully, when the bees get out again and go looking for pollen, this time they'll find somebody else's horse trough.

2004 Tennessee Beekeeper of the Year is also a Kentucky Beekeeper

In the January issue of The BUZZ! I reported that Kent Williams from Wingo, Ky., had been honored as Kentucky Beekeeper of the Year by the Kentucky State Beekeepers Association. Shortly after that announcement, I learned that another Kentucky beekeeper had been named the 2004 Tennessee Beekeeper of the Year. Larry Chadwell, a native of Jackson County, Kentucky, was honored by the Tennessee Beekeeping Association. Larry still maintains colonies in Kentucky even though he is now a resident of Tennessee. Larry is also an active member of the Whitley County Beekeepers Association in Corbin, Ky., and is often seen at beekeeping meetings in Kentucky as well as in Tennessee. Congratulations Larry!

Kentucky State Beekeepers Association (KSBA) Spring Meeting

On March 19, just a few weeks after the Kentucky Beekeeping School, there will be another opportunity to learn about beekeeping by attending the KSBA Spring Conference. This event will be held at the Kentucky State University Agricultural Station just south of Frankfort (off U.S. 127). Speakers will include: Dr. Tom Webster and Robin Mountain from Kentucky State University; Phil Craft, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's State Apiarist; and special guest speaker Maryann Frazier from Pennsylvania State University.

Maryann Frazier has worked as an apiary inspector in Maryland and as a beekeeping specialist in Africa and Central America. She holds a Master of Agriculture degree in entomology, specializing in apiculture. She is now a senior extension specialist at Penn State and is well-known for her presentations on bee diseases and hive management. Maryann spent 2003 in England. This experience will be the subject of a talk that she will share with us entitled: "A Year in England with the Queen and Her Subjects." So come and learn about British bees and beekeepers, their floral sources and honey crops. She'll also share with us how British beekeepers are dealing with diseases and mites. Take this opportunity to ask questions and talk with Mary Ann Frazier and your regular cast of Kentucky beekeeping experts.

For directions and a map to the KSU agriculture station contact Phil Craft or go to:
http://www.kysu.edu/land_grant/coop_extension_program/agriculture_natural_resources/beemap1.pdf

Culling old brood comb

One suggestion that I always make to beekeepers in the spring is to inspect their brood comb, both comb in active hives and comb that is being recycled from dead outs (hives in which the bees have died). Old brood comb can be a sump for disease. In addition, older brood comb, deformed comb, or comb with holes is not as effectively used for raising brood as fresher comb. Older brood comb may even be more likely for varroa to reproduce in than fresher comb. See this abstract: http://www.edpsciences.org/articles/apido/abs/2004/04/M4012/M4012.html Old brood

comb likely also soaks up pesticides that we use to control varroa and may affect drone and/or new queen viability, so culling old comb is definitely a good idea. When examining old comb in your hive this spring, plan to replace comb that is misshapen, contains lots of holes, or is extremely black, with frames of new foundation. Once the bees start bringing lots of nectar and drawing out new wax in the spring, they will draw out the new foundation very quickly. A good tip is to mark each frame with the year that new foundation is placed in it, then attempt to do a regular rotation of brood comb every four or five years at the maximum.

Preserving Woodenware

If you are putting together new woodenware, make sure you preserve the exteriors of all wood surfaces properly. I'm old-fashioned in this respect. I like woodenware painted, and painted white, though I must admit that my friend Gerald Burchett's hives look very nice in a distinctive shade of light green. Whatever color you use when painting woodenware, stick to a light color that will help reflect sunlight and help keep the hive cool. Use good painting practices. Make sure the wood is clean prior to painting and use a good-quality primer and finish coat paint. I use a primer followed by two finish coats. Then every few years, woodenware that shows signs of wear will be cleaned, very lightly sanded, and will receive a fresh coat of finish.

Remember not to paint the inner surfaces of woodenware. These are left unfinished so that they can absorb moisture and assist the bees in regulating the humidity inside the hive. This is one of the great advantages of wood versus plastic hive equipment. Though I have nothing against plastic bottom boards or outer covers, I prefer wooden brood boxes, supers, and inner covers. Some beekeepers prefer to treat their wooden ware with a chemical preservative. The following is from an article from the November 2004 issue of "The Antennae" published by the editor of the Tennessee Hobbyist Beekeeper's Association. The article is entitled "Preserving Woodenware."

In the past, a variety of chemicals have been used by beekeepers as wood preservatives, but the use of most (creosote, chromated copper arsenate, etc.) have been banned because of their hazardous nature to humans. These chemicals are also hazardous to bees and can find their way into wax and honey. The best options for chemical preservation of woodenware are copper napththenate and copper-8-quinolinolate. Both can be obtained as a concentrate or solution ready to use, and both are relatively nontoxic to bees. Make sure you know the strength of the copper, since for example, only 10 percent of a solution of copper napththenate is available as copper.

Copper Napththenate Methods:

Soak and wrap: The wood is soaked in 1.25 percent copper solution for one hour, then tightly wrapped in plastic for three days and then aired for 10 to 20 days, depending upon temperature. The copper napththenate is diluted to 1.25 percent using mineral spirits or paint thinner. Copper napththenate and related compounds can be hazardous, causing eye, skin, and lung irritation, and they are possible carcinogens and affect the nervous system as well.

Soak method: This is the most commonly used technique. Timber is soaked in a 1 percent copper solution for 12 to 24 hours, drained, and aired for 5 to 60 days, depending upon temperature. Note: It is essential to air the treated timber so that paint will adhere. Oil- or water-based paints may be used.

Copper-8-quinolinolate: This preservative is less effective than copper napththenate but is also less hazardous. Can be obtained as a water- or solvent-soluble concentrate or ready to use. A solvent-type solution of 0.045 percent copper is commonly used.

Kentucky 2005 Upcoming Beekeeping Events – mark your calendars!

- February 26, 2005 (Saturday), the second annual Kentucky Beekeeping School will be held at Woodford County High School in Versailles, Ky. For more information go to the KDA State Apiarist's Web site at: http://www.kyagr.com/cons_ps/bees/index.htm. Also see article elsewhere in this issue of THE BUZZ!

- March 19, 2005 (Saturday), Kentucky State Beekeepers Association Spring Conference at the KSU Farm, Mills Lane, Frankfort. Guest speaker Maryann Frazier, Senior Extension Associate, Department of Entomology, Penn State University.

2005 Beekeeping events in the region

- February 26, 2005 (Saturday), Indiana Bee School III will be held by the Indiana Beekeepers Association in Indianapolis. For more information go to: http://www.goshen.edu/bio/Bee/Newsletter.html
- March 12, 2005 (Saturday), Southwest Ohio Beekeeping School will be held in Loveland, Ohio (Northern Cincinnati suburb). For more information go to: http://warren.osu.edu/ag/bschool.htm

To have THE BUZZ! sent directly to you!

If someone has forwarded you this issue of THE BUZZ! and you would like to have THE BUZZ! sent directly to you via e-mail, send me an e-mail at phil.craft@ky.gov and ask to be added to my list. I organize my e-mail list by name, so make sure you sign your e-mail with first and last name. Also, if you are a Kentucky beekeeper, I'd appreciate knowing a little about you and your beekeeping activities – address, how many hives, years of beekeeping experience, and if you belong to a local beekeeping group or to the Kentucky State Beekeeping Association. I would also like your mailing address. This information helps me better serve the beekeepers of Kentucky by knowing where beekeepers are located and allows me to let you in on regional beekeeping activities, or to drop you a note if I discover your e-mail address stops working. This e-mail newsletter is not restricted to Kentucky residents. Many subscribers are from our surrounding states, especially Tennessee and Indiana. If you're from out of state, I need only your full name and home state; any other information is optional.

Keep those smokers lit and your bee veils on!

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