# *THE BUZZ!* *June 2005*

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

**Nice honey flow in most of Kentucky, but it looks like it is over!**

Though mid-June we were having another good nectar flow in most of Kentucky, and were well on the way to an excellent honey harvest. However, I began predicting a couple of weeks ago that unless we received a couple of rainy days soon, this nice white clover bloom would dry up and blow away. Unfortunately, it looks like I was correct. We typically see the clover nectar flow continue into early or mid-July. Last year with a record rainfall, clover continued to bloom well into August. This year it looks like it will be over in June.

**Heartland Apicultural Society (HAS) annual conference**

The fourth annual Heartland Apicultural Society Annual Conference will be held from July 7-9 in Edwardsville, Illinois, on the Southern Illinois University campus. The program for this year's conference looks like a very good one, and if you're looking for some good beekeeping education this is the place to bee. Many of the leading apiculture experts from around the country will be there teaching classes and passing on their "bee knowledge". All attendees should bring veils and protective clothing for hands-on sessions in the bee yard. While the registration period for the HAS conference is past, it is still possible to late register at the conference. For more information on registration, lodging, speakers, and other details go to: **http://www.heartlandbees.com/.**

**Eastern Apicultural Society (EAS) annual conference**

This year the Eastern Apicultural Society's annual beekeeping short course and conference will be held in Kent, Ohio, on the campus of Kent State University. This is the nearest the event has been to Kentucky since it was held in Maryville, Tennessee, in 1999.

EAS opens with the short course early Monday morning, August 1, and will run until 5 p.m. Wednesday, August 3. This beekeeping short course will be structured to appeal to both beginning and experienced beekeepers. The Short Course is a little different this year, as part of the time the entire group will be together, and then you will be free to break into different sessions of your choice. On Wednesday, the Short Course and Main Conference will be one and the same - Short Course attendees are welcome to stay all day so that they can take advantage of the 50th Anniversary blowout right after lunch.

The main EAS conference will start at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday, August 3 (overlapping with the final day of the Short Course), and continue through Friday afternoon, culminating with the Annual Banquet Friday evening. The conference consists of talks and workshops on a multitude of topics. The traditional Welcome Social will be on Wednesday evening. Thursday evening will be highlighted by a Barbecue and the annual auction.

All attendees should bring veils and protective clothing for hands-on sessions. For more information on registration, lodging, speakers, and other details go to:
**http://www.easternapiculture.org/**

**Getting our hives ready for next year's honey crop!**

As the spring/early summer honey flow ends, beekeepers in Kentucky will be harvesting their honey crop and starting to prepare for next spring's honey flow. Yes, we start preparing for the '06 honey crop as soon as the '05 crop is off our hives. One of the fundamental requirements for producing a good honey crop are strong (strong means LOTS of bees), healthy hives in the spring. To have strong healthy hives in the spring, they need to be healthy in the fall, and we begin that process in mid-summer. A hive that has any kind of problem now (and problems can be hidden under that stack of full honey supers) needs to have these problems taken care of as soon as the honey is off the hive. A hive that is in fair condition now, with a problem, can become

an extremely poor hive by September. And if you're like most beekeepers, or most experienced beekeepers with more than a few hives, you likely have not given your hives a thorough inspection since those first couple of honey supers became heavy.

A mid-summer inspection of our hives has the same major objectives as an early spring inspection. Is there a laying queen in the hive, are there sufficient food stores in the hive, and are there any signs of diseases or pests?

It is not unusual to have a queenless hive this time of year, mostly because of swarming. When a hive swarms, the bees that remain must be successful in getting a new mated queen established, and this does not always happen. Though a newly swarmed hive may contain numerous queen cells with healthy queens, a hive normally has only one opportunity to gain a new queen. This is because the first virgin queen to emerge will seek out and open the cells of all of her sister queens and kill them before they have a chance to emerge. If multiple queens do emerge, after they make each other's acquaintance, normally only one queen survives. So a hive's survival depends on this lone queen getting out of the hive, successfully mating, then returning and commencing egg laying. If the virgin queen is eaten by a bird or a hornet, or gets lost while making her mating flights, a queenless hive is the result. So the first thing to look for is eggs and young larvae. If either is seen, then you can assume that a queen has been present recently – in the last day or two if you see eggs, and in the last week if you see young uncapped larvae. You do not need to see the queen herself to ascertain her presence – only eggs or larvae.

The second thing to look for is sufficient food stores. One might think that it's silly checking a hive for stored honey when one has just pulled off three or four full supers from that hive. And if you use two deep hive bodies for the hive's brood area, you likely will find a number of frames, perhaps even an entire deep box of frames, which are full of honey. But then again….you may not. Sometimes with a very active queen and a hive that is producing frame after frame of brood and young bees, most of the surplus honey is going into the honey supers. Which, when we're trying to produce a lot of honey, is a good thing. But since the bees don't realize that their friendly beekeeper considers that honey in those supers his (or hers), when you pull that honey you may have pulled most of their honey reserves. And they won't tell you that they're low on food; they will just starve. From mid-summer into the fall we probably need about 20 pounds of honey on a hive to maintain them until the start of our fall honey flow (which begins in September in Kentucky). So when checking a hive in mid-summer, we need to see at least three or four deep frames that are full of honey (or their equivalent in shallow frames or partially full frames).

The third thing to look for is any signs of disease or pests. The most common of these are varroa mites and American Foulbrood (a bacterial disease). There are a number of methods for checking for varroa mites. A simple method of checking is opening capped brood. Check drone brood if it is present (due to the longer development time of drones, varroa mites prefer drone brood over worker brood, and drone brood is easier to open). Open at least 10 cells, but up to 30 is better. The reddish colored mites are easily visible on the white pupae. (If you're not sure if what you're seeing is a mite, watch for it to move. Varroa mites move, and pieces of wax or debris do not – or get a small magnifying glass.) If more than two out of 10 cells contain varroa, plan on treating for varroa before fall. If more than three cells contain varroa, I would treat as soon as possible. Another good method involves using screen bottom boards, especially the newer screen bottom boards that come with a removable tray that can be used as a sticky board. Spread a thin layer of a "sticky" material (a mixture of vegetable shortening and petroleum jelly works well) on the tray, and leave it under the screen bottom board for 24 hours. After 24 hours remove the tray or sticky board and count the varroa mites present on the board. In the beginning, you may wish to use a magnifying glass to examine potential varroa mites. If you're seeing more than 20 varroa mites, then you'll want to plan on treating before fall; if you see more than 30 varroa mites, you'll want to treat as soon as possible.

American Foulbrood (AFB) is a bacterial disease that infects developing brood. Adult bees are not susceptible. Though adult bees do not become infected by AFB, the disease is primarily spread by nurse bees while feeding larvae. AFB is very difficult to control and will spread to other hives as well as within a hive. Beekeepers who have never seen the disease before – and fortunately many have not – may have a problem recognizing it. Infected brood will have darkened, misshapen cappings, and often numerous empty cells due to the death of diseased brood. Capped cells will also often contain small holes where adult bees have opened cells containing infected pupae (sometimes removing the pupae). A good way to know that hives are free from AFB is seeing healthy capped brood. If you are seeing only healthy capped brood in a hive, you can be reasonably sure that the hive is not infected with AFB or other brood diseases. A good Web site in which to view photos of both AFB infected cells and healthy brood is the Mid-Atlantic Apiculture Research and Extension Consortium (MAAREC) site at: **http://maarec.cas.psu.edu/pest&disease/pppd.htm**. There are lots of other good beekeeping photos (including some of varroa mites) at this site. Visit their homepage at **http://maarec.cas.psu.edu/index.html**. If you think that your may have a hive with AFB, please contact me. I can help you determine if you do indeed have hives infected with AFB, and help you develop a plan of action for dealing with this difficult beekeeping disease.

**Varroa situation in Kentucky**

Many beekeepers in Kentucky who monitor their hives for varroa report that, for the last couple of years, varroa numbers are very low. Many have reported skipping either the spring or the fall treatment and some go a full year (or longer) between uses of Apistan or CheckMite Plus strips. However, we have had serious instances of Apistan resistance in Kentucky, and I do recommend switching to CheckMite Plus if you have been using Apistan exclusively for varroa control for several years or more. Many beekeepers in Kentucky still get good results with the use of Apistan, and many are now rotating between the products. Likewise, if you have been using CheckMite Plus for two or three years, you should, perhaps, switch back to Apistan.

So what is going on here? Our isolation is part of this picture; we have little movement of bees into Kentucky with the exception of packaged bees. Plus, most Kentucky beekeepers have had fairly good honey crops the last three years, and good honey flows mean strong hives, and strong hives contribute to bees' being healthy. I would by no means wish to imply that our varroa problems are a thing of the past in Kentucky. Last year, while visiting beekeepers and helping them check for varroa, I saw low varroa numbers for the most part. But occasionally I would run into hives that were heavily infested. Pest problems can run in cycles, and we may just be at a low point in a cycle, or perhaps there is a weather factor involved that we do not understand. So I urge beekeepers to continue, or start if they are not, to practice good varroa control strategies. Good varroa strategies include the use of screen bottom boards, use of resistant queens and, most important, monitoring for varroa on a regular basis. The registration of alternative varroa control agents is continuing, and alternating different products is important. And, since we may not get the 99 percent kill with these new products that we get with Apistan and CheckMite Plus, monitoring is even more important. With consistent use of either Apistan or CheckMite Plus, development of resistance is always likely so, again, monitoring is needed to make sure that these products are effective.

**Beekeeping liability insurance**

A question I sometimes get from beekeepers is "Where can I obtain liability insurance coverage for my beekeeping operation?" There have been a couple of articles in the national beekeeping magazines in the last year about this issue. There are really two issues involved: liability insurance that will protect beekeepers if someone gets stung around their hives or honey house and sues, and product liability insurance. Most beekeepers with only a few hives do not consider carrying liability insurance (especially product liability insurance) due to its cost. Also, honey is generally perceived as such a safe and wholesome food product that many beekeepers do not feel at risk. However, in a time when people are quick to file lawsuits whenever they feel that they've been harmed, more beekeepers are interested in obtaining liability insurance for their beekeeping operations.

In the last year or so, it seems to have gotten more difficult for beekeepers to obtain such coverage. However, I recently discovered an agent in Shelbyville who can write a policy to protect beekeepers. If you are interested in such coverage contact Lani Basberg with American National Property & Casualty, 12 Main Street, Shelbyville, KY 40065, 1-866-456-2572 (toll free), or e-mail: basberg@bellsouth.net. Ms. Basberg will also be a guest speaker at the July 13 meeting of the Blue Grass Beekeepers Association meeting in Lexington.

**State Apiarist Web page address change**

Recent changes at the Kentucky Department of Agriculture Web site have resulted in a new address for my Web page. The KDA web site is unchanged – still http://www.kyagr.com – so if you've been accessing the State Apiarist's web site using the dropdown menu at kyagr.com, you have not been experiencing any problems. But, if you have added the State Apiarist's Web site to your favorites list and attempted to access the site directly, you've been unsuccessful for the last couple of weeks. The new direct address is: http://www.kyagr.com/state_vet/bees/index.htm. I've been making updates to my Web site on a fairly regular basis lately, including information on upcoming beekeeping events in Kentucky and surrounding states. So check the Web page occasionally for these updates.

**Interested in removing some bees from a structure?**

A consequence of the reduced varroa mite pressure on honeybees in Kentucky the last couple of years is an increase in reports of feral honeybee colonies in trees and structures. Where I once received three or four calls per year about such colonies, I now average perhaps one a week during the summer months. Recently, I personally assisted a Lexington arborist in removing one such colony from a tree that had to be taken down. There is a beekeeper in the Louisville area who has removed several colonies from similarly downed trees in Louisville during the last year or so. And the list goes on and on.

As a service, the State Apiarist's Web site has added a list of requests from property owners who have feral honeybee colonies that they would like to have removed. If you are an experienced beekeeper who is interested in removing such colonies, you may wish to check my Web site ( http://www.kyagr.com/state_vet/bees/index.htm) occasionally to see if there are colonies in need of removal in your area.

A word of warning: If you've never removed a colony from a structure or tree before, be aware that this is hot (especially this time of year), dirty work, and potentially dangerous work if the colony is located above ground level. However, we do run across colonies that are quite easy and safe to remove. If you are interested in tackling such a removal and lack experience at doing so, you should assist a more experienced beekeeper before tackling a removal on your own.

There is currently a colony of honeybees in a warehouse in the Frankfort area that needs removing. See the above site for more information if you are interested.

**Honey to extract? Use one of the KSU honey processing units**

Do you have honey to extract? Would you really like to move this job out of your house this year, or is your wife insisting that you do? Has your beekeeping operation outgrown your extraction equipment?

One of the stumbling blocks beekeepers often face in trying to increase the size of their operations is the time and effort required to extract their honey crop. It is one thing to extract from the supers of four or five hives using a small hand extractor and de-capping the frames with a knife. As the number of their hives increases, many beekeepers reach a point at which they can't grow without more efficient methods of processing their honey, but without growing they can't generate enough income to afford better equipment. Beekeepers are often discouraged from increasing the number of their hives by this catch-22. One of the goals of a project at Kentucky State University is to assist beekeepers by providing extraction equipment on a regional basis.

The equipment provided is designed to allow beekeepers to extract large numbers of honey supers in a quick, efficient manner. Robin Mountain, KSU's Apiculture Associate, is working with local beekeeping associations and County Extension offices to secure central locations for housing the equipment and to manage its use by local beekeepers. (Beekeepers need not be members of the local association to use the equipment.) The extraction units that are provided consist of an automatic de-capper, a de-capping tank that also serves as a sump for extracted honey, a 12-frame electric extractor, a honey bottling/storage tank, and an electric honey pump that pumps the honey into the bottling /storage tank. The honey is filtered as it is pumped into the bottling/storage tank. All this equipment is mounted on a wheeled sled, which is extremely mobile and easily cleaned.

This part of the KSU project is now up and running. Thus far the project has placed honey extraction units in Whitesburg (Shad Baker, 606-633-0369), Whitley City (Greg Whitis, 606-376-2524), Campton (Ted Johnson, 606-668-3712), Paris (Jim Doyle, 859-987-3084), Burlington (Susie Kahmann, 859-781-8977), Campbellsville (Elsie Miller, 270-465-2831), Scottsville (Gordon Vernon, 270-622-8313), Prestonsburg (Ray Tackett, (606-886-2668), and Mayfield (Kent Williams, 270-382-2348). Please note the name, and phone number of the contact person for each unit.

Do not let driving distance to a unit deter you from using it. If you factor in the amount of time you save while extracting your honey, a drive is worth the trip.

If you're interested in using a unit at one of these locations, contact the contact person for the unit nearest you or Robin Mountain by e-mail at rmountain@gwmail.kysu.edu or by phone at (502) 597-6351.

**Kentucky 2005 Upcoming Beekeeping Events – mark your calendars**

- August 20 (Saturday), 1 p.m. Beginner Class on Honey, Wax, and Wintering, at the KSU Farm, Mills Lane, Frankfort. Beginners will be instructed on honey and wax processing and preparing hives for winter. This is part 3 in Dr. Tom Webster's annual beginning beekeeping classes. Bring veils and protective clothing for hands-on beekeeping session in hives. No pre-registration required. Free. For more information, contact Tom Webster at (502) 597-6351, e-mail: twebster@gwmail.kysu.edu, for directions to KSU Farm go to: http://www.kysu.edu/land_grant/coop_extension_program/agriculture_natural_resources/beemap1.pdf

**2005 Beekeeping events in the region**

- July 7 – 9 (Thursday – Saturday), Heartland Apicultural Society 4th Annual Conference, at Edwardsville, Ill., Southern Illinois University campus. Apiculture experts and experienced beekeepers from across North America will conduct approximately 50 presentations on all aspects of beginning and advanced beekeeping. All attendees should bring veils and protective clothing for hands-on sessions. For more information on registration, lodging, speakers, and other details go to: http://www.heartlandbees.com/. Economical dormitory lodging and meals are available.

- August 1-5 (Monday through Friday), Eastern Apicultural Society Short Course & Conference, at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio. Many of the apiculture experts from the eastern U.S. and Canada will conduct a short course (Aug. 1-3) followed by conference presentations (Aug 3-5). All attendees should bring veils and protective clothing for hands-on sessions. For more information on registration, lodging, speakers, and other details go to: **http://www.easternapiculture.org/**

**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!**

**Phil Craft, State Apiarist**
**Kentucky Department of Agriculture**

**E-mail Phil.Craft@ky.gov**
**Web page:** http://www.kyagr.com/state_vet/bees/index.htm

100 Fair Oaks, Suite 252
Frankfort, KY 40601
Phone: (502) 564-3956
Cell: (502) 330-0797
FAX: (502) 564-7852