

THE BUZZ!

January 2006

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

2006 beekeeping season draws near!

We are still in what most folks consider the dead of winter, though we've had some unseasonably warm weather lately (but rest assured the cold weather is not over!) Still, I think spring is not far away. If we see a normal Kentucky winter and early spring, we'll see a lot of early blooming of maples and other trees by mid-February and with it the beginning of the early buildup of the bees in our hives. Also, the first of our winter/spring beekeeper schools will soon be held, and it seems like these February schools are always accompanied by spring-like weather. (See the next article.) In fact, I had an e-mail from a Bowling Green beekeeper in mid-January that he was seeing pollen carried into his hives on a warm and sunny afternoon. Of course, we have to keep in mind that those folks in extreme southern Kentucky are almost in another climate!

So, while we have spring to look forward to as we sit around the fire, we need to be taking some definite steps to be ready for spring beekeeping. If you need to purchase beekeeping equipment, especially woodenware (hive bodies, tops and bottom boards, and frames), you need to be getting your orders in soon. As the winter drags on, the orders pile up at the beekeeping supply companies, and the lag time between order and shipment increases. The same goes for package bee and queen orders. (See the "Buying package bees, mail versus pickup" article elsewhere in this issue.) The package bee and queen suppliers will start to ship in April – remember that they have a maximum number that they can produce and ship each week – and they commit each week's expected production to buyers as their orders are received. So if you want packages or queens in April, especially early April, you need to get your order in.

Winter beekeeping schools to commence soon!

The 2006 winter/spring series of Kentucky (and surrounding states) beekeeping schools is about to get underway. I've been talking about these schools for the last couple of issues of THE BUZZ! and will not go into great detail about them in this issue. For more information on any school, check the back issues of my newsletter (available at my Web site) or use the contact information below.

The first school of the year will be the 2nd Annual Central Kentucky & Tennessee Beekeeping School. It will be held Saturday, February 4, at the Western Kentucky University Ag Expo Center on Nashville Road in Bowling Green, Kentucky. This school will offer a wide range of classes for both beginning and more advanced beekeepers. For more information, please contact Martin Hickey at (270) 843-8743 (day) or (270) 846-1702 (evening) or by e-mail at Queenannsrevenge2002@Yahoo.Com. Additional information is posted on the Allen County Beekeepers Association's website at www.allenkybees.com.

On February 18, the Bluegrass Beekeeping School will be held in Lexington, at the Griffin Gate Marriott Hotel. A series of beginner beekeeping classes taught by Dr. Tom Webster, Kentucky State University's Apiculture Extension Specialist, will be a highlight of the program, and there will be 16 classes for more advanced beekeepers. Special guest speakers Chuck and Karen Lorence, from Aurora, Illinois, will speak on creating a beekeeping business with honey and other value-added beekeeping products both in the opening session and in two of the breakout sessions. A vendor's show, with beekeeping supply vendors, including the Walter T. Kelley Company and Dadant and Sons, will also be part of the program at this year's school. For more information go to the Kentucky State Apiarist's Web site at: http://www.kyagr.com/state_vet/bees/index.htm or contact me (contact information at the bottom of this newsletter).

On March 4, a new beekeeping school, the Kentucky Audubon Beekeeping School, will take place near Henderson, at Stone Hill Honey, 6005 Hatchett Mill Road, Spottsville, KY the home and headquarters of Paul and Betsy Stone's beekeeping operation. For more information contact Paul or Betsy Stone, by phone at (270) 826-2767, or by e-mail at bpstoneky@bellsouth.net.

Buying package bees, mail versus pickup

In the December issue of THE BUZZ!, I discussed the importance of new beekeepers getting started with nucs (small starter hives with a queen and a few thousand bees) or packages of bees instead of established hives. I strongly promote the purchase of nucs because of their advantages: Bees in nucs are not stressed due to being caged and transported several hundred miles; the new queen is already established and laying; and many beekeepers who sell nucs will deliver them, help you install them, and give you a little hands-on instruction at the same time. Unfortunately, the number of beekeepers in Kentucky making and selling nucs is too low to meet the demand. That's why most new beekeepers (and many experienced beekeepers looking to increase their number of hives) purchase package bees. While you can order packages to be shipped through the mail (most packages sold in Kentucky originate in Georgia), this process is stressful to the bees, and they sometimes arrive in less than ideal condition – or worse. For this reason, many beekeepers prefer to purchase package bees from a vendor who hauls or arranges to have someone haul them by truck to Kentucky. This is considered less stressful than shipping by mail.

Several dealers will have trucked packages of bees available for pickup in Kentucky in the spring. Some of these are listed below with contact information and the location of pickup. Keep in mind that you must order all package bees in advance, and they do often sell out. It's not too early to place orders. The first people to provide this service to Kentucky beekeepers were local beekeepers who have started sideline businesses selling beekeeping supplies. All of the folks below plan to be at the vendors show at the Bluegrass Beekeepers School in Lexington on Feb. 18. If you don't get your packages ordered before then, you will have an opportunity to do so at the Bee School.

Ron Spillee, Spillee's Bees, Morning View: Ron has been bringing package bees to Kentucky beekeepers for a number of years. In case you don't know where Morning View is located (I didn't until I went looking for Ron one day), it's in northern Kentucky, south of Cincinnati and west of Crittenden. Ron will have package bees and queens. He also sells beekeeping supplies and will have local queens and queen cells available later in the spring. Contact Ron at (859) 356-7376.

Jim Sammons, Jim's Bees, Georgetown: Jim is a Kentucky beekeeper who partners with Ken Lightle of Buckeye Bee in Utica, Ohio, to provide package bees, queens, beekeeping woodenware, and other supplies in Georgetown. Jim tells me that they will have northern nucs available later in the spring as well. To get prices, place orders, etc., contact Buckeye Bee by phone at (740) 405-4174, by e-mail at beekeeper100@hotmail.com, or go to the Buckeye Bee Web site at <http://www.buckeyebee.com/>.

Walter T. Kelley Company, Clarkson: The Kelley Company will again have package bees and queens available for pickup in Clarkson on Saturdays in April and May as well as by mail delivery. Of course, you can also pick up other beekeeping supplies while you're there (but I'm sure they appreciate it if you place your equipment order ahead of time). You can reach the Kelley Company by phone at: (800) 233-2899 or order a catalog through its Web site at <http://www.kelleybees.com/>.

Dadant & Sons, Robin Mountain, Branch Manager, Frankfort: Robin Mountain will have package bees and queens available for pick-up at his new beekeeping supply business in Frankfort this spring (see article elsewhere in THE BUZZ!). Robin and his wife, Stella, will also have nucs and, being Dadant distributors, will offer a wide variety of beekeeping supplies. For the benefit of our Tennessee beekeeper friends, Robin will also have a pickup location in Knoxville, Tenn., and will be transporting bees to Mayfield (Western Kentucky) for pickup as well. Contact Robin and Stella at (502) 848-0000.

Dadant & Sons opening new branch in Frankfort

Kentucky will soon have a new local beekeeping supplier in the state when Robin and Stella Mountain open their new branch of Dadant & Sons in Frankfort at 955 Chenault Road (take Interstate 64 to U.S. 60 west at Exit 58, then turn right at the first light). Robin and Stella will offer a wide range of beekeeper supplies, package bees, nucs, and queens for sale in Frankfort. Robin also plans to offer beekeeping instruction on Saturday afternoons. They will officially open on Feb. 1. You can reach Robin and Stella at (502) 848-0000. And you can request a Dadant catalog at the Dadant Web site:

<http://www.dadant.com/index.html>

Selling honey at Farmers' Markets & upcoming Farmers' Market Summits

For the last several years we have seen a real growth in local farmers' markets and an increase in the number of local beekeepers who participate. Selling your products at farmers' markets has several benefits for the beekeepers. Primarily, they are just excellent places to sell honey! They are convenient (nearby) and, since they are in your community, you will have the opportunity to make yourself known as a local beekeeper – resulting in increased demand for your honey and increased out-the-door sales. Farmers' markets are also a retail market, where the beekeeper receives the entire sale price of his or her honey. Another benefit is low overhead. While other similar seasonal venues such as festivals can be excellent places to sell honey, there is often a high cost involved for the seller – costs that will often start at \$50-\$75 per event and can go into the hundreds of dollars. Farmers' market costs, on the other hand, are often just membership in the local farmers' market association and can be as low as \$25 a season. And you don't have to have a great amount of honey to sell. Even if you have just a few cases of honey, you can set up and sell them at your local farmers' market.

if you think that selling honey at your local farmers' market may be for you, there are some upcoming workshops that may interest you. During February and March, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture will sponsor four regional farmers' market summits. The two-day summits will bring together market managers on the first day for workshops on conducting effective meetings, managing conflict, effective promotional campaigns, and media relations. The second day will offer general farmers' market information for producers on topics ranging from pricing strategies to market rules and customer service. During both days, workstations will be set up for participants to work on labels for value-added products, selling honey, organic/sustainable production, retail meat sales, and other topics. Representatives from the Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy will be on hand to help with applications for the Farmers' Market Competitive Grant Program.

Schedule for summits: Jenny Wiley State Resort Park – February 17-18; General Butler State Resort Park – February 24-25; Lake Cumberland State Resort Park – March 10-11; and Lake Barkley State Resort Park – March 24-25.

Further information can be obtained by calling Janet Eaton at (502) 564-4983 or janet.eaton@ky.gov, or going to www.kyagr.com and clicking on "Farmers' Markets" on the drop-down menu. The 2006 Kentucky Farmers' Market Manual is also available at this Web site containing rules, regulations, marketing tips, and other information to assist farmers' market growers and market managers. A section entitled "Selling Honey at Farmers' Markets," which includes honey jar labeling information and honey processing regulations (of interest to anyone selling honey), is also available at the Web site.

Is honey production a problem for hobby beekeepers?

Speaking of honey and getting rid of it ... At the recent American Beekeepers Federation convention in Louisville, Kim Flottum, editor of Bee Culture Magazine, was discussing his book "Backyard Beekeeper", and stated that for many hobby beekeepers, one of their big problems is – "HONEY"! Or rather, how to get rid of it! This comment resulted in laughter from the audience, which obviously consisted of industrious beekeepers intent on maximizing their honey production, who could not conceive of how too much honey could be a problem. Their problem is not being able to produce enough of it. But Kim went on to say that if you're a small backyard beekeeper, fascinated by bees, and wishing to keep only a couple of hives, to observe bees at the hive and your garden, perhaps make a small amount of honey for yourself and friends, a good honey crop or two could give you an overabundance of honey! He said that he frequently has such beekeepers tell him, "I've got a half a dozen five-gallon buckets of honey in the basement!, How can I get rid of it!?" I sat there nodding, because I've had some of those beekeepers call me up and ask me the same question. Kim had a couple of suggestions for hobby beekeepers with this problem. One was "throw it away" (this suggestion brought a large groan from the audience!), and then he said "or give it away" (which brought a reduced level of groaning – this groaning was from the sales-minded beekeepers in the crowd!).

Well, I have some further suggestions if you are a beekeeper in this situation, producing more honey than you can consume yourself and give to friends, and you do not wish to expend a lot of energy selling honey. One solution is: If you are in possession of some five-gallon buckets of honey that you wish to dispose of, you can call me. I know beekeepers, whose markets have outgrown their production, who call me all the time, asking where they can buy some honey. The last time a beekeeper called me to ask what to do with his excess honey, I gave him a phone number. Minutes later, he was on the phone with a beekeeper who not only wanted to purchase it from him but was also willing to make a two hour drive the very next day to pick it up. Another suggestion for the hobby beekeeper with too much honey is to make an agreement with a beekeeper friend (one who makes a business of selling honey) to not only buy your honey but remove it from the hives, extract it, pay you a per-pound price for the honey, and give you some honey back for your own use. I often hear beekeepers say that they enjoy working with the bees but consider harvesting and extracting honey pure drudgery (I feel that way myself). I know a couple of beekeepers who have such an arrangement with an older beekeeper who still enjoys maintaining quite a few hives but has found the lifting of honey supers to be a bit too much for him. They both feel that they benefit from this arrangement. The beekeepers who harvest the honey have additional local honey to market, and the other beekeeper is relieved from the harvesting of honey but still has some income from his hives to continue to finance his operation. Another option is, as Kim said, to give it away. You can donate bottled honey to local fundraisers, charity breakfasts, or to the agricultural breakfasts at the Kentucky State Fair to which beekeepers donate honey every summer (if you wish to donate honey to the State Fair breakfasts, contact me). Also contact me if you have bulk honey that you wish to donate – even honey of lesser quality. There is a primate rescue center (<http://www.primare-scue.org/index.html>) near my home that really appreciates donations of honey. Did you know that chimpanzees love honey?

Rupp Arena analogy for winter clustering of honeybees

I often use the analogy of a room crowded with people, producing heat from the collective warmth of their bodies and humidity from their respiration, to explain the need for proper ventilation for a hive of bees in the winter. Opening a couple of windows in this hypothetical room, producing an air flow which cools the room and removes excess moisture, is analogous to raising the cover slightly to improve ventilation in the hive. The Lexington Herald-Leader recently published an article about the heating of Rupp Arena (home of the University of Kentucky's men's basketball team) and the surrounding Civic Center Complex. The article stated that due to increases in natural gas prices, the cost of heating the Lexington Civic Center has doubled over last year's. But on certain nights of the winter, heating Rupp Arena is not a problem at all; in fact they are able to turn the gas heating system off! These are the evenings when 23,000 University of Kentucky basket fans cluster in Rupp Arena to watch the Wildcats play. On most of these winter evenings, unless the outside temperatures fall into the teens, they not only turn off the heat, but actually pump outside air in to ventilate the place. I wonder if in Louisville, at the home of the University of Louisville Cardinals, their faithful fans beat their wings to help ventilate Freedom Hall?

February Beekeeping Events – mark your calendars

IN KENTUCKY

- February 4, 2006 – the second annual Central Kentucky and Tennessee Beekeeping School will be held at the Western Kentucky Ag Center in Bowling Green. This will be a one-day beekeeping school. See article elsewhere in this issue, or for the most current information contact **Martin Hickey, (270) 843-8743 (day) or (270) 846-1702 (evening) or by e-mail at Queenannsrevenge2002@Yahoo.Com**, or go to www.allenkybees.com.
- Feb. 18, 2006 – the Bluegrass Beekeeping School (previously called the Kentucky Beekeeping School), in Lexington, Ky., at the Griffin Gate Marriott Hotel. See article elsewhere in this issue, or for the most current information you may check the Kentucky State Apiarist's Web site at http://www.kyagr.com/state_vet/bees/index.htm, or contact Phil Craft (contact information at the bottom of this newsletter).

IN SURROUNDING STATES

- February 25, 2006 – the Indiana Bee School (IV) will be held at Southport Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis. Dr. Keith Delaplane, professor of entomology at the University of Georgia at Athens, will be the keynote speaker. On-site registration starts at 8 a.m. EST with program starting promptly at 9 a.m. and concluding at 3:30 p.m. Registration fee will be \$20 per individual or \$30 per family (lunch included). To guarantee lunch, reservations must be made by February 15. For more information go to: <http://www.goshen.edu/bio/Bee/Memberform.html> or contact Steve Doty by phone at (317) 485-5593 or by e-mail at jsdoty@indy.net.

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