

The Voice of  
Professional  
Beekeeping

# Cowlitz Beekeepers Association Newsletter

Dedicated to Preserving the Honey Bee through Community Action, Awareness and Education

March 2022

Issue 3

## **Next Meeting:**

**Where:** Anywhere worldwide on your computer via Zoom

**When:** March 17, 2022 7:00 PM

## ***Chat with Ian Stepler***

If you live in Longview or the surrounding area and already keep bees, intend to do so or are simply interested in this fascinating hobby, Cowlitz Beekeepers Association is the association for you. Even if you don't keep bees, joining us will help support our cause, our community action and

## **Association Officers and Board:**

**John Holmes, President (360) 355-7795 or**  
[cowlitzbeekeepers@gmail.com](mailto:cowlitzbeekeepers@gmail.com)

**Ken Curtis, V. President (360) 261-2795**

**Zenobia Scott, Secretary (360) 425-2314**  
[Zebscott56@gmail.com](mailto:Zebscott56@gmail.com)

**Barbara Skreen, Treasurer**

**Ray Davis, Trustee (503) 556-9784**

**Elizabeth Peters, Trustee (360) 241-6954**

**Dave Scott, Trustee (360) 425-2314**

**Kathy Scott, Trustee (360) 601-0393**

Although it was decided that our March meeting will be zoom only, starting in April the goal will be to have meetings occur in-person with zoom being incorporated. It has been a long two years, it will be good getting back together.

**Ian Stepler** lives in Miami, Manitoba located about 30 miles north of North Dakota. He is President of Stepler Farms, which is known for their cattle genetics. They farm over 3000 acres and produce 245,000- 300,000 pounds of honey per year. Ian is the apiarist of the farm, running around 1500 colonies and averaging 200 pounds of honey per colony (range of 125 to 350). He got his start in beekeeping over 20 years ago by taking a beekeeping class at the University of Manitoba. He then bought 4 hives and the rest is history. From the past help and knowledge that he received from fellow beekeepers, he believes in sharing knowledge in support of beekeepers and their bees. Visit his You tube channel and website.



## Handmade Proud:

Looking to buy new woodenware at reasonable prices?

- Bottom Boards - Top Covers - Inner Covers - Hive Boxes and more...

Contact **Gerry Herren**

Ph. (360) 355-0051

Swarmchaser40@gmail.com

## BEEKEEPERS CALENDAR OF SEASONAL ACTIVITIES

### March

*Suggested Activities for Beekeepers in the Coastal range from Washington, Oregon and California...*

Brood rearing will begin in earnest and be quite noticeable by month's end. - The bees will begin flying this month and although there is usually adequate spring pollen sources, nectar is in short supply. Honey bees can consume up to 3 pounds of food per day, so feed as needed. Keep the hive entrances clear. Brush away any dead bees to ensure adequate ventilation and egress.



On a calm and warm (at least 55 degrees) day when the bees are actively flying, open the hive to check the status of the colony. - Check that the hive is queen right - are there eggs in the brood chamber? Do you need to combine weak colonies? - Keep in mind, with cooler temperatures and limited or no nectar, the bees might be more aggressive. Keep your visit short.



If sugar feeding has begun, continue. Otherwise check hive weight/honey stores often and feed if necessary. Remember cold windy March weather can keep bees from getting out and starvation can hit quickly. Spring Sugar Syrup is a 1:1 ratio.

## 2022 Membership Dues

<https://cowlitzbeekeeping.wixsite.com/website/registration>

click this link, fill out the form, submit. Then send your check to the listed address. Thank you for supporting Cowlitz Beekeepers Association

## Three-Legged Stool Honey Bee Workshop Presented by BG Bees LLC, Hood River, Oregon

June 24-25, 2022

Focusing on diseases, pests, and nutrition the workshop will have presentations, discussions, an 'in hive' inspections. One can attend in person or 'virtual'.

<https://bg-bees.com/three-legged-stool/>

## 2022 Nuc Purchase Program

This year we will again be buying nucs from Foothills Honey Company in Colton, Oregon. These are 5 frame nucs. The cost is \$135 per nuc. You must be a current member of CBA or CCOBA to purchase.

There is more information about the nucs and ordering information at:

<https://cowlitzbeekeeping.wixsite.com/website/nuc-sale>

Fill out the form and send a check to the address shown at the bottom of the form. Nucs can be ordered now while payment may be made any time before March 15, 2022.



## Change in Leadership

With increasing time and effort needed to care for my father, I have found it does not allow me to fulfil my duties as President. I have therefore decided to step down and in accordance with our by-laws Ken Curtis will become CBA's new President. Ken has a great passion for beekeeping and will serve CBA well. The position of Vice President is open, members interested can contact Ken.

John Holmes

## Preventing pry damage to hive boxes

Mikal Boucher

While listening to a podcast on my way to work a product called Pry Point was mentioned to reduce damage to bee boxes. This made me think about modifying my boxes so they would last longer. What I came up with was installing 3-inch lengths of 1/2-inch x 1/16-inch aluminum flat bar that was picked up at a local home department store for a few bucks. Aluminum was chosen since it is easier to cut and drill and doesn't rust.

I decided to do all corners so that no matter the box's orientation, when I stacked them the pry plates would line up. The bottom box might only need the top done but again, by doing all corners along with the top and bottom, I can place boxes in any position. Using Gorilla glue and a couple screws, they seem to be in place really well and not going anywhere. The Gorilla glue does expand a little so I need screws to just prevent the aluminum bar from lifting. I used 1/2-inch stainless steel tapered screws #4 so things sat flush and would not rust out. I've put together 6 deeps, the boxes are ready for painting now and will swap out old hive boxes once the weather warms enough,

Another option that could be tested, would be to mount the flat bar to the side of the box. Visually the bar would not be hidden but could serve the same purpose. The surface area of metal in which to pry would be much less and a thicker bar may be needed. This method eliminates the need to chisel an inset for the bar and round headed screws could be used not requiring tapering screw holes. Caulk behind the plate so no moisture can get between wood and plate.



## What improves overwintering success

Dewey Caron

When you look into a bee hive what do you see? Mainly we see parallel frame holders, lots of them. When we lift a frame, we see the beeswax combs. In the combs we expect to see capped brood and stored bee bread and some honey – depending upon which frame we lift. Finally, we should be looking at a mantle of bees maintaining a proper hive temperature – 70s if no brood, 90s if brood is present. Beeswax comb cells are ACTION CENTRAL of a bee hive.

Last month Kelly Kulhanek discussed her thesis research while she was at Maryland, before starting her post-doc at WSU. Using a meta-analysis performed by Natalie Steinhauer, another PhD at Maryland, Kelly described her investigation of best management practices compared to survey respondents normal management practices of the five most common predictors of colony wintering success. Her research data was collected at three sites in Maryland and four additional sites including Oregon State University, Corvallis.

Recall, the 5 managements that made a difference from the BIP survey data were: handling of deadouts, how colony was started, comb culling management, treatment for varroa and finally formic acid mite treatment. The BIP data Natalie and Kelly analyzed were losses, not losses per beekeeper. I have demonstrated that the BIP data is a measure of the losses of commercial beekeepers. Colony losses of three commercial beekeepers reporting on 20,000 colonies swamps the 163 backyard beekeepers (with up to 39 colonies, average of 4 colonies each) which only adds another 783 colonies – a mere 3.7 % of the commercial colonies. BIP losses (Kelly's analysis) are commercial losses; the PNW losses (my losses) are backyard beekeeper losses.

Cowlitz beekeeper data included 25 Cowlitz beekeepers last year with 178 fall colonies [www.pnwhoneybeesurvey.com](http://www.pnwhoneybeesurvey.com) . One of the questions I ask is survival of colonies by origination. As Kelly demonstrated for the BIP data, the best survival was for colonies established from splits (loss level 33.7%) compared to purchasing and hiving packages (44.6% loss level). For the 25 Cowlitz respondents last year, 30% of overwintered colonies did not survive the winter while 36% of splits did not survive. Numbers are not statically significant. However, colonies established from package had a higher loss of 67% (although numbers were very different, this is a significant difference).

One deviation is the BIP data on nucs vs the Cowlitz PNW data. Analysis of BIP data found nuc loss (33.9%) closer to split survivals while the Cowlitz beekeepers had heavier nuc loss level (69%) compared to split loss level. Varroa monitoring/treatment and formic acid use were mirrors for both the pnwhoneybeesurvey and the BeeInformed survey.

The PNW survey will be back for our 13<sup>th</sup> year this spring. The site will open mid-March and continue to take your participation until the end of April 2022. I look forward to continued Cowlitz participation again this year. Thanks

## APIARY REGISTRATION

All beekeepers, backyard or for a business, need to register their hives each year. All money collected helps fund research projects with the Washington State University and other entities.

Registration is due by April 1 each year. Your current registration expires December 31.

### **RCW 15.60.250 Liability for acts or omissions.**

A person who owns or operates an apiary, is a registered apiarist under RCW 15.60.021, and conforms to all applicable city, town, or county ordinances regarding beekeeping, is not liable for any civil damages for acts or omissions in connection with the keeping and maintaining of bees, bee equipment, queen breeding equipment, apiaries, and appliances, unless such acts or omissions constitute gross negligence or willful misconduct.

<https://cms.agr.wa.gov/WSDAKentico/Documents/Forms/current-6116-Beekeeper-BrokerRegistration.pdf>

## Monthly Meeting via Zoom Notes

February 17, 2022

Meeting came to order at 7:00 p.m. 29 in attendance, including the guest speaker.

Guest speaker: Kelly Kulhanek, from WSU. Kelly gave a presentation on Best Management Practices for Small Apiaries. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact Kelly at [kelly.kulhanek@wsu.edu](mailto:kelly.kulhanek@wsu.edu). She will be happy to assist you. Had a short question and answer time after her presentation.

### General Business:

- Hopefully we will have a Hybrid meeting in March. Will contact Doug from Sons of Norway to make sure that is possible.
- Membership and Nuc sales are trickling in. So far we have 35 memberships in and 10 nuc sales from Columbia County and 10 nuc sales from Cowlitz members.
- Nuc sale purchase cut off date is March 15, 2022. All payments need to be received by that date. Will not accept any payments after the cut off date.
- Had a short question and answer time after the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Minutes taken by, Zenobia Scott, Secretary



## Out in the Bee Yard

Bill Holmes



February had to have thrust confusion into the plans of bees. They were bringing in pollen regularly much of the month, then it got cold, very cold. Twenty-six degrees here in Cathlamet at the tail end of the month is not something I have seen. Then, it warms but rain dumps torrents into March. I rarely open hives in February and this year I left them alone again. However, I do watch the entrance action and check hive weight.

March is major apiculture time and sets the stage for your entire summer. Your queen has been laying eggs and nurse bees have been tending brood since January. That activity gradually ramps and by March there are strong numbers of mouths to feed. Hives can easily reduce last summer's stores to nothing in March or April especially if there are cool rainy periods keeping the field force home bound. So, check the hive weight weekly, and open the boxes and see for yourself how much honey is available and be ready to feed syrup. Many hives are lost in spring to starvation.

Now is the time to finalize your goals for 2022 and make sure you have the equipment you will need ready to go. A swarm hanging low on a limb and nowhere to put it can be frustrating. If you want to make splits to control swarming, or to increase your apiary then research now on the methods and decide which method you will try.

Around mid-March on a 60-degree day open the boxes and inspect frames. You are looking for a strong queen who is laying a nice tight pattern across multiple frames. If she is not then you should replace her. Though it's likely too early to find one, you have time for research and ordering. If all your bees are in the upper box and the lower is empty of stores and brood, you should consider reversing the boxes. Sometimes my bees will work down into an empty box and sometimes they don't. Never reverse the boxes if it will split and separate the brood. Reversing can help reduce hive crowding and brood nest congestion (lack of egg laying space). I typically don't reverse bodies until late March or early April when night time temperatures are above 40 and daytime temperature is regularly above 50.

Finding a weak hive and then a strong hive presents an opportunity to even the populations. Weak hives are not always due to a poor queen. They could have suffered higher winter mortality for any number of reasons. So now when they could be building their population, they struggle with inadequate nurse bees. On the other hand, the strong hive may quickly fill 2 boxes with brood and stores and begin swarm preparations. So, by moving some frames to the weaker hive you improve both hives. Just make sure you don't move your queen.

Spring inspections are a great time to replace old comb. There should be empty drawn comb especially in that bottom box. Be on the lookout for dark comb and replace it with either fresher drawn comb from a deadout, or frames of blank foundation. You can also get rid of comb that is predominantly drone cells.

Check for varroa mites. I will likely do a 48-hour mite drop through the screened bottom board in mid-March. Then follow-up with either an alcohol wash (I use Dawn soap in water instead) or go straight to treatment. Treatments available are Apivar (though it is an 8-week treatment and you can't leave the strips in when honey supers are on the hive) or Formic Pro which needs temperatures above 50 degrees but can be used with supers on. I dipped Swedish sponges in a mixture of Oxalic acid and glycerin last spring and placed them between brood boxes but had mixed results. I am planning to try that again this year at higher dosages. Spring is fun busy time in the apiary and you should just enjoy it. Bill

