

The Voice of Professional and Backyard Beekeeping

Cowlitz Beekeepers Association Newsletter



Dedicated to Preserving the Honey Bee through Community Action, Awareness and Education
October 2023

Next Meeting

Where: In person at the Sons of Norway Bldg. 224 Catlin St. Kelso WA or
Anywhere worldwide on your computer via Zoom

Attendees can join a Zoom meeting without signing into the app. Join us at our next meeting. Click the link I will send out a few days before the next meeting. If you are not a member but would like to attend a meeting request the code at

cowlitzbeekeepers@gmail.com

When: October 19, 2023

Speaker: David Igbagbolere

Topic: Testing the efficacy, toxicity, and residue of a stabilized Oxalic Acid Formulation for Varroa control

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 awareness and education program.

David Igbagbolere has a BS degree in Crop Production and Protection in plant pathology, with further research in in plant viruses and insect vectors. David is currently interested in "honey bee health and management with a focus on sustainable Varroa mite control as a tool to contribute to global food security."

It's election time.

October is a time to choose club officers and board members. If you are interested in helping the Cowlitz Beekeepers Association move ahead into the future, please feel free to nominate yourself or a fellow club member for any position. All positions are available for interested club members. We will hold elections at the October meeting.

Club Logo

We have two entries for a club logo. We will vote on these entries at the October meeting. If you have an idea for a logo, feel free to bring it to the meeting or share on Zoom.

Association Officers and Board:

Ken Curtis, President (360) 261-2795 or
cowlitzbeekeepers@gmail.com

Al Wilmoth, V. President (815) 391-4089

Zenobia Scott, Secretary (360) 425-2314

Zebscott56@gmail.com

Barbara Skreen, Treasurer

David Scott, Trustee (360) 425-2314

Elizabeth Peters, Trustee (360) 241-6954

Anna Pitkin, Trustee

Vicky Turek, Trustee (303) 808-3764

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

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Gather all your beekeeping friends and join us on the west side of the cascade mountains this fall to share our love of honeybees and learn from an impressive speaker lineup during the 2023 WASBA Beekeeping Conference at the Olympia Hotel at Capitol Lake!

FREE BOOTH for Clubs!

Pacific Northwest Beekeeping – October

By Ken Curtis

October in the Pacific Northwest brings the onset of fall. Leaves are changing color and falling from trees and forage for bees has pretty much ended. The time for hive inspections is ending. Bees are spending more time in the hives meaning less work for beekeepers. Preparing your hive(s) for winter in September should have included:

- Condensing hive gear so frames are densely covered with bees.
- Bees prefer to use dark comb so preference should have been given to dark combs.

- Frames in brood boxes should have been arranged so that honey frames are on the outside with pollen between them and brood frames.
- Pollen stores should have been checked. Pollen substitute should have been provided if needed.
- Entrance reducers should have been added to restrict access to mice, wasps, and yellow jackets.
- Hives should have been equalized. Healthy weak colonies should have been combined. Sure, you lose a hive in the fall, but it gives your bees a better chance of winter survival.

The entrance design of a hive does not discourage yellow jackets or robber bees. Adding a robber screen is an effective way to discourage yellow jackets and robber bees. As a result of combing hives, you may have empty brood comb. It's a good idea to discard any that is old or deformed. If you are storing any drawn comb, take precautions to prevent wax moth infestation (avoid any naphthalene containing products). If the comb you removed has plastic foundations the old wax can be removed, melted, and brushed back on the foundation allowing them to be reused during nectar flow in the spring.

Consider providing an upper entrance as the bees will move up to the upper brood box during the winter ignoring the lower box.

Every beekeeper knows that sometimes life comes before beekeeping, so all of the tasks should have been done in September may have been overlooked.

Some things to check to see if your bees are ready for winter include:

Food:

- If honey stores are light supplement with 2:1 sugar syrup. Feeding syrup in the fall should be ceased once daytime temperatures drop below 60 degrees. Feed with dry sugar or fondant after daytime temperatures drop below 60 degrees.
- Reduce the hive size to two deeps with brood on the bottom with honey on top if you haven't already done so. Remove the queen excluder if it is still on the hive.
- Place an entrance reducer on the hive with the opening on top instead of against the bottom board. This allows bees to pass through unobstructed by the bodies of dead bees.

Manage Moisture: Good ventilation is key to successful overwintering of your bees.

- Ensure that your colony has both an upper and a lower entrance on the same side of the hive.
- Tip the entrance of your hive slightly forward to help prevent rainwater from entering the hive, as well as to direct moisture from condensation inside of the hive toward the front of the hive rather than dripping on the bees.
- If you are using quilt boxes now is a good time to place them on the hive.

Warmth:

- Consider closing off screened bottom boards using sticky board material to avoid bursts of cold air from entering the hive.
- Create a windbreak if hives are in an unusually windy location. Straw bales and fencing material, and pallets make good wind breaks.

Robber Bees

By Ken Curtis

In a honeybees' world family and survival is of utmost importance. Worker bees struggle all summer to collect the resources needed to survive the winter, but sometimes there isn't enough available nectar so foragers begin to look elsewhere for resources. This is especially true during a dearth or a drought. It can make a beekeeper feel helpless.

Robbing may come as a big surprise to a new beekeeper, but it is something that every beekeeper will encounter at some time. Robbing occurs when workers enter a hive that is not their own and steal honey or sugar syrup. Wild colonies in the area or colonies within an apiary could be the robbers. Weak colonies may not be able to protect their hive and can become overrun by robbers. Many beekeepers have had small mating nucs completely destroyed by robbers. By practicing beehive management beekeepers can identify and minimize robbing in their apiary.

The defending colony will defend itself to the death. After most of the guard bees are dead robbers enter the hive and the onslaught continues. The queen might even be killed by the robbers meaning the colony is doomed. Even if the queen survives the colony may be too weak and/or not have enough workers or brood to recover.

Tips to Prevent Robbing in Your Apiary

- Don't be messy in your apiary. Don't spill sugar syrup when refilling feeders and clean up all wax and burr comb.
- Use Entrance reducers and keep the opening small (especially for weak hives).
- Feed colonies during a nectar dearth.
- Equalize colonies strength by moving frames of brood from a strong colony to a weaker colony. Spray the frame with a light mist of sugar water to prevent fighting. Be careful not to move the queen.
- During times of dearth keep inspections brief. Inspections can lead to robbing.

Normal Activity at the Hive Entrance

Don't mistake busy traffic at the hive entrance as a sign of robbing. On the morning or afternoon after a rainy day you may see hundreds of bees flying around or in front of a hive. Given the choice bees will not poop in the hive so if the congestion is only for a short period of time it is probably just a cleansing flight.

It could also be young adult bees making their orientation flights. Orientation flights are often mistaken for robbing but there is no fighting at the entrance. Orientation flights usually settle down after a few minutes. As bees grow older, they will fly further away from the hive. Robbing goes on for hours or days.

The threat of robber bees is worse during when natural nectar decreases (nectar dearth). A dearth can be the result of an early spring freeze, a drought, or the end of the bloom season for flowering plants.

An apiary with many beehives close together causes robbing. Weak colonies are especially vulnerable to being killed by a strong colony of 40-60,000 bees in a crowded apiary. A small colony can be overwhelmed in a few short hours. In nature beehives are not close together. The aroma of a nearby hive leads invaders right to the front door of a neighboring hive.

Seasonal factors also play a role in robbing behavior. Everything might be well and good during the spring and early summer when natural resources are abundant, but that all changes when large hungry colonies have less forage available.

Identifying Robber Bees

Foragers get excited once a few intruders enter a hive and return home with food and join in the raid. Before long dozens of battles are going on at the hive entrance. Typically, older bees are the attackers, but younger bees will join in at the height of the frenzy. The attackers can infect a colony as well. The influx of bees spread diseases and pests such as Varroa Mites.

Robbers can also be identified by trying to enter hives through unusual entrances. They can be seen trying to enter through cracks between boxes and the outer cover.

Robbing will continue until the colony is killed and all resources are depleted. Once robbing is noticed it must be addressed immediately. Beekeepers are not always successful, but intervening may make it not worth the effort for robbers to attack the hive.

Stopping Robber Bees

Narrow the hive entrance. Entrance reducers work well and are easy to make or cheap to purchase. A smaller entrance is easier to protect. Close any extra holes or spaces between boxes and block upper entrances until things settle down. You only want one small entrance (1-2 inches by 3/8 inch). Robber screens also work well and can also help against yellow jacket attacks.

Relocate Weak hives. Move weak colonies to another bee yard if one is available. Keeping smaller colonies away from a bee yard with stronger colonies is a good practice. Most beekeepers do not have this option so being vigilant to keep small entrances on small hives and splits. Preventing robbing is much easier than stopping a robbing situation.

Disguise the hive entrance. Hanging a wet towel over the front entrance is a popular beekeeper method of discouraging robbing. Resilient bees figure out how to get around the towel, but most of the attackers will just buzz around the front of the hive.

Stop robbers' bees with water. A sprinkler positioned to rain down over a victim hive might also be successful in stopping robbing. This could result in robber bees returning to their hive, but they will return.

In the fight for survival this is normal behavior in the insect world. Honeybees will steal from each other. Although it promotes survival of the hives with the strongest genetics, no beekeeper wants their hives to fail. Hive management and good housekeeping practices go a long way in preventing robbing. Be vigilant.

References

Anderson, C. (2023, June 20). *Robber Bees - How to deal with Them*. Retrieved from Carolina Honeybees: <https://carolinahoneybees.com/honey-bee-robbing-behavior/>