

The Shore Swarm



The Newsletter of the Beekeepers Guild of the Eastern Shore

Volume 5, No. 9

www.bgesva.org

October, 2014

From the President:

I write this on the second day of fall. Can winter be far away? It's time to begin preparations for wintering our bees. Mine are hauling in great loads of yellow-orange pollen (goldenrod). I'll be checking on their honey supply soon. Here are some tips on helping our bees get through the winter:

- If your hives are exposed to the wind, perhaps some barriers will help. Straw bales or tarps fastened to stakes a foot or two away from the windy sides of the hives usually work.
- You need to carefully monitor your hives during October and position the frames of brood, honey and pollen for healthy winter hive survival.
- Reduce the top openings, keep bottom screens on for ventilation and mite drop
- Move brood and bees to equalize hive sizes if you have more than one hive or combine a weak hive with a strong hive using the newspaper method
- Move honey and pollen to sides and top of boxes if the bees have not done it
- Transfer the brood to center of bottom box in a two or three box hive
- Under 55 degrees bees cluster on brood and empty comb but never on stored honey
- If or when you feed, two sugars to one water is the ratio from now until the end of liquid feeding
- Do powdered sugar every 4 to 7 days for mite treatment, if needed now
- Small hive beetles and wax moths may invade weak hives and nucs
- FAT Winter Bees live three to six months to get the hive through the coldest months
- The bees need 1 or 2 boxes of capped honey (35 to 60 lbs) to get through the winter; if less, then plan on feeding them. I like to use an empty hive box on top with the feeder INSIDE.

See elsewhere in The Swarm about our upcoming program plans. Remember, we'll meet at the Chamber in Melfa on Saturday, October 4th and the Barrier Island Center in Machipongo on Tuesday, November 4th, then take December off as our bees rest.

John Chubb, BGES President

Upcoming Meeting

Saturday, October 6th

10:00 am – 12:00

Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce, Melfa

Special Guest speaker (and member)

Felicite' Berrouette (a highly skilled, generous, and prolific beekeeper in Greenbush)

Beekeeping Belize-Style on the Eastern Shore

Picnic at Mary Walker's



The weather was perfect and the setting lovely at Mary and Herman Walker's home *Winona* for the annual BGES picnic on September 6th. It was wonderful to see so many old and new beekeepers in one place.

One of the highlights of the picnic - in addition to the splendid food - was honoring our past president, Paul Kist, for his hard work over the past five years getting our group established and growing. It is hard to imagine the effort required and the number of trips Paul has made across the CBBT to be present with us, to help us with our bees, and to promote beekeeping with the public over such a long period of time. Paul has helped grow some local beekeeper expertise over the years – enough that he can now turn over the day-to-day leadership to others and take a much deserved break. *This not the end, though, Paul! We still need you!*

The above picture is of current president John Chubb presenting Paul with a gift that attempts to show how Paul's work has put bees all over the Eastern Shore, from Capeville to Chincoteague and even into Maryland. This framed poster, complete with hive studded map, club pictures, and the names of our members through the years, was produced by Mary and Evan Clements.

Beekeepers at the picnic were invited to visit Mary's bees, play corn-hole, and participate in some tests of beekeeper skill. All the contestants in the contest for the best tasting honey received a share of the votes, but the over-all winner was Chris Merritt. Congratulations, Chris!

Another contest, the test of smoking prowess, was somewhat poorly conceived, and chiefly revealed the lack of prowess among the contest designers! For some of us, keeping a

smoker lit at all is a challenge, so the contest was designed with the meager aim of seeing who could keep a smoker lit for 2 minutes! For the contestants, though, 2 minutes was a ridiculously low bar; the smokers were still going strong long after we moved on to other things! Ultimately, all the participants were winners since the picnic had to end sometime, even while the smokers were still going strong! The prize winner was selected randomly from among all the highly skilled contestants.



If you feel you need some help with keeping your smoker going, here's a list of proven experts to provide advice: WT Wilkins, Walker and David Fluhart, David Hartley, Mark Cline, and Chris Merritt. All the materials that were supplied: (pine needles and pine cones, paper, straw, cotton "trash") produced good smoke. One of the participants supplied an additional secret ingredient (beeswax) with spectacular results.

Thanks to all who helped with food, tables, chairs, and other helps. And many thanks to Herman and Mary Walker for providing such a beautiful setting for the picnic this year.

A Star among Us!



Most of us know member WT Nottingham as an innovative farmer and beekeeper, but did you know WT recently appeared in the movie *Watermen*? This film, directed by James Spione and produced by members of the staff of the Barrier Island Center, has had several showings around the shore and will be shown on WHRO (public television) in the near future. In the film, WT discusses some of the factors impacting watermen, and explains why he chose to make his living from the land rather than from the sea. He also demonstrates some old fashioned techniques of setting sweet potato slips by hand – a rare sight. It's a beautiful movie....Don't miss it!



If you have processed some of your beeswax to make candles or other wax products, you've doubtless encountered a by-product, for which there is a proper name:

Slumgum

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

Slumgum in [beekeeping](#) is the residue of the [beeswax](#) rendering process.

When the beeswax from [brood comb](#) is rendered to produce clean wax, it leaves behind the [pupal lining](#), [wax moth](#) cocoons, excrement from larvae, and other residual debris included in the original material.

Less slumgum can be expected from rendering of cappings or [honey comb](#). Slumgum is slightly heavier than wax and sticks to the bottom of the wax cake. It is brown to black in color, and burns readily. Melted slumgum can be poured over pine cones to make fire starters.

Lumps of slumgum are very attractive to bees, especially when heated by the sun. They can be used to attract [bee swarms](#), and some people therefore prefer applying melted slumgum on the sides of [supers](#).

Slumgum is also used as a fertilizer in some agricultural crops like ornamentals; it has been shown that slumgum contains several nutrients that are required for the growth of these crops. Depending on how well the rendering was performed, slumgum may still contain significant amount of wax that is possible to extract in larger factories using more complex equipment.

Is there anything bees produce that is not useful in one way or other? Some of us have found that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to render useable beeswax from frames of brood comb - still, there are other uses to which this dark, slumgum-heavy wax can be put. When you are processing beeswax by melting it, one method of removing the slumgum is to filter the hot melted wax through a paper towel. You'd be surprised at the residue that remains behind.

Invitations to Public Events

BGES has been invited to set up displays at numerous fall events this year. So far we have had displays at a New Roots Youth Garden event in Cape Charles, the Farm Days event at Ker Place in Onancock, and recently, at the Native Plants event in Wachapreague on September 12th. Below are listed some upcoming events at which your participation would be very welcome!

Upcoming events

Saturday, September 27th – A free Biodynamic Workshop “Horn of Plenty”

from 9:30 – 3:30 at 23345 DeCormis Street, Accomac

Composting Workshop, Potluck Lunch

Contact: 757-709-8761 or 240-285-3528, or www.facebook.com/events/676079335811767

(Stewart Lundy, fellow beekeeper, issues this invitation)

Saturday, October 4th – Monthly BGES meeting, 10:00 am, Melfa

Chamber of Commerce. Felicite Berrouette, speaker.

Saturday, October 11th - Cape Charles Festival

9am – 5 pm

We've been asked to participate (as we did last year). Great Festival! Honey sales welcome....Workers needed!

Sunday, October 19th – Ducks Unlimited Greenwing Youth Event

Brownsville Farm, The Nature Conservancy, Nassawadox. 12 – 4pm

We've been asked to participate, as we did last year. Workers needed!

(Fellow beekeeper Alex Wilke is coordinating this event.)

Thursday, November 20th – Pollinator Conservation Short Course, 9am – 4pm, ESCC

Letting Native Plants Help Pollinators

David Boyd coordinated the Native Plants event, focusing on what the public can do to help pollinators. Some of our members submitted suggestions, and other advice came from written material from state agencies. Here are the suggestions; pollinators will thank you!

Bees do not hibernate in the winter! Lawn weeds can be beneficial to honey bees on warm, winter days. In late winter and early spring when it's still kind of cold, take the time to look at your lawn. Tiny little flowers that can annoy some will keep a honey bee from starving. Let them grow!

Plant trees and bushes that flower in the winter. Red maple trees contain the most important nectar flow of the year; they peak in January. Sugar maple is next, then we start seeing dandelions, holly trees, red buds, tulip poplar, black locust and American holly!

From Donna Fauber

Plant several patches or rows of summer blooming plants in your vegetable garden, just for the bees.

This could include chives, leeks, sages, oregano, and various herbs that will eventually flower. Honeybees in particular appear to gravitate to large plantings rather than to a few flowers here and there.

From Mary Walker

Let some of your roadsides, borders, ditches, and hedgerows go un-mowed, and allow wildflowers to flower.

For pollinators, our tidy, green, often monoculture lawns are a desert. Many bees and other insects love the clover, dandelions, purple nettle, henbit, and other familiar wildflowers that make our yards so pretty in Spring. Try to resist the neighborhood peer pressure to eliminate the wildflowers!

Try to learn to tolerate a few weeds and pests, rather than resorting to pesticides too quickly. Many pests that alarm us actually are self-limiting and do little real damage.

Even when pesticides don't kill beneficial pollinators immediately, they can have serious long-term, sometimes subtle effects on populations (including us!)

Planting your garden with **MASSSES** of flowering plants (clumps that amount to a few cubic yards of flowers of the same kind) is helpful to bees.

Bees love to find thousands of the same kind of flower in one place; it cuts down on the amount of flying and searching they must do to find that precious nectar. And that makes their work so much easier!

LET YOUR VEGETABLES AND HERBS BOLT INTO BLOOM AT THE END OF THE SEASON. POLLINATORS ENJOY THE UNEXPECTED FLOWERS WHICH SUPPLY NUTRITIONAL VARIETY FOR THEM.

CONSIDER LEAVING YOUR CABBAGE, BROCCOLI, GREENS, OREGANO, BASIL, AND OTHER PLANTS IN THE GARDEN FOR A FEW EXTRA WEEKS OF FLOWERING.

When you plant native plants, you support the native wildlife that is well adapted to those plants and may depend upon them.

Leave patches of vegetation and soil undisturbed when possible, as these provides homes for many kinds of pollinators.

Many live in the soil around the roots of the very plants they pollinate, so turn over the soil only when you need to.

Native plants are largely adapted to withstand local pests.

If you MUST use pesticides,

- spot treat only affected plant
- read the label carefully
- treat when the plant is NOT flowering.

Pollinators will thank you!

From A to Bee: My *technically* First Full Year of Beekeeping

Chris Merritt

OK. So where to begin? Sounds clichéd I know, but think about it. Where did it actually begin? A friend? An article? An interest in gardening? Russell on WESR? It all just clicked one day in my truck when I heard an ad for a beginner beekeeping class put on by the BGES. My first thought was "Well, I guess a 70's disco band should know all about the Birds and the *Bees*."

I talked to a buddy of mine who, like me, is trying to learn all he can about self reliance, and we decided to take the class and see what it was all about. The class was wonderful, I will never forget how pumped I was after the first session. I was ready to order my stuff right away, and drive to wherever needs be to get some bees. Well, the second week came and we learned about pests. Talk about getting the wind sucked out of your sails. It would be hard not to admit that it all seemed overwhelming, but we were going for it. I ordered my boxes and frames, had them all setup in the ideal spot that I had debated in my mind for weeks. Now I just needed some Bees.

I ordered 2 packages of bees through the club. My buddy didn't. I'll never forget him saying "If I am supposed to have them, they will come." I guess he watched Field of Dreams one too many times. But

you know what, they *did* come! He was cutting his grass and not five feet from where he had placed his hive was a swarm. I got the call and rushed over to help him get them in his hive. A little jealousy was brewing, I have to admit. So there we were, 2 newbies trying to get a swarm into a box. It was a blast, the buzz was a feeling I will never forget. As we stood back to admire our work, lo and behold another swarm was a few trees down. To this point in our lives we had never seen a wild swarm, and here we were, two in one day. I called dibs on the second swarm and we wrangled them into my box. I was now on my way to becoming a Beekeeper.

Time went on, the learning curve was constant. That first summer I went from 1 to 3 hives. To be honest no matter how many books you read, no matter how many you tube videos you watch (except Donna's of course), nothing compares to being in the hive yourself. I learned early if you accept the fact the bees have you and not the other way around, you can learn so much on every hive visit.

The first summer we found 4 swarms, removed 2 colonies from old trees and 1 from an old house. It was an adventurous summer to say the least. I met all sorts of people through my travels and have enjoyed each and every one along the way. My father now keeps bees and took the class last year. It's been fun to teach him something after all the years of him teaching me. We differ on some of our strategies a little, but that's what's neat about beekeeping. There really is no one way to do it. I love what Paul Kist says: "The bees forgot to read the manual."

Coming into spring this year it was a blur. I was able to capture or help capture 11 swarms. I was helping to maintain 12 hives including my own. I was able to help get 3 people started with beekeeping and rebuild 2 others. Some didn't work out, but we all learned together. It's been amazing to see my family and people's faces watching the bees. I have enjoyed the BGES meetings and utilizing the vast knowledge this club has to offer. If you have a question, just ask. Between all of us in the club we can figure it out.

Once people start hearing you have bees, you become pretty used to hearing the question, "You got any honey?" But after that initial question it amazes me how intrigued people are. You're either nuts or doing the coolest thing on the planet in their eyes. I was fortunate enough to assist John Long in representing the club at Kerr place a few weeks back and it was nice to hear all the good things people had to say about the BGES. All the club members are doing great things for our communities and the environment. I encourage everyone to help if and when you can at these functions. Plus, when you see the kids eyes light up with an observation hive, you will be hooked.

What I have learned and would like to pass on to new beekeepers is that ***you're going*** to make mistakes, ***you're going*** to get stung, and there will be times ***you're going*** to be overwhelmed. But you are ***going to love watching those bees!***

The Un-named Column

September 2014

This month I have a story. This year I decided to treat some of my hives with Apilife-Var (Varroa killer) rather than my normal Oxalic acid. I made that decision in order to switch things around and help

prevent resistance in the mites. That should be the mantra of everyone, no matter what you use on your hives to help keep down the pests: don't always use the same chemical (hard or soft). Switch the chemicals - use combinations of things; that way it slows or stops development of resistance and your treatments will all be more effective. Some even advocate not using drone trapping continuously but why might be another story. I will say that if I could do it I wouldn't use any treatments at all and let nature take its course but doing so gets expensive so I try to treat minimally.

Anyway my story is that I treated 6 hives (one \$40.00 package treats 6 hives and gives you a useless amount left over). As best I could tell, all of them were strong and all had moderate to heavy mite drops before treatment. I put the wafers on as directed and one week later went back for the second of three treatments. I found one of my hives in a complete mess, it smelled (really stunk!), 95% of the bees were DOA and larva had even died while hatching – of course hive beetles were everywhere! I called the supplier who says they never heard of a hive being killed by this stuff but they will check. So I was giving up on this hive but Angela's sharp eyes found the Queen still kicking but looking rather sad. So we cleaned things up and changed boxes and frames. I went back and give her some more workers from a strong hive. I also changed all the woodenware and 80% of the frames just to see if this hive can be salvaged. I will let you know how it turns out but since Angela found the Queen I am glad I didn't toss her the live black racer snake we found (we thought it was dead). So all of this brings me to part of the column I have been planning, that is, a short book review.

One of the main reference books in my library is called Natural Beekeeping: Organic Approaches to Modern Apiculture, written by Ross Conrad. This was first printed in 2007 and there is now a second edition (\$22.58 at Amazon). This book is filled with lots of useful information and over the years has provided both enjoyable reading and ideas that I can implement to reduce my own use of nasty materials. The book is also complete, with topics ranging from "Why Organic Beekeeping (#1) to dealing safely with pests and diseases (5 Chapters) to harvesting honey (Chapter 11). I really have only a couple of negatives about this text. First it is written in the first person so at times it seems like an autobiography and maybe a bit of bragging. Second all of the pictures (at least in the first edition) are black and white making it a bit hard to distinguish some parts of the images. Finally, Mr. Conrad very much advocates not using protective gear (at any time) and he attributes development of allergies to "use of certain medicines in life" – which is not true. Those points aside I would recommend having a book like this on your reference shelf as it can provide ways around reaching for chemicals it even gave me an idea while writing this column. Perhaps this type of beekeeping is something to which we can aspire but not always emulate.

Hope your bees are healthy and you have by now cleaned and sewn up their little winter coats.

-Russell

(Russell makes a very strong case for avoiding the use of chemical treatments in our hives!)

Hope everyone can make it to the October meeting, where Felicite will share beekeeping ways that he has brought from Belize, or developed himself, with us.