The Shore Swarm

The Newsletter for Members and Friends of the Beekeepers Guild of the Eastern Shore
July 2019 bgesva.org

BGES Annual Picnic

Saturday, July 13th

11:30 am

George and Leilani's House

15542 Nebo Lane, Onancock, VA 23417

Directions:

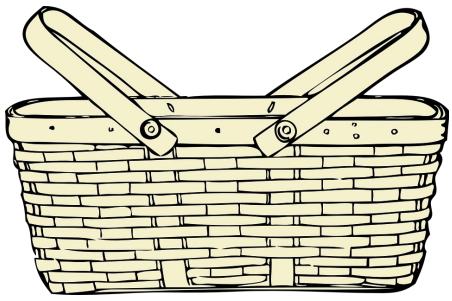
-From northern Accomack County head south on US 13. From southern Accomack County or Northampton County, head north on US 13.
-Turn west onto VA route 179 towards Onancock.
-Turn left onto VA route 718 (Hill Street)
-Continue straight for just over 2 miles, then turn left onto VA route 637 (Mount Nebo Road)
-Continue straight (road zigs and zags) for just over 3 miles then turn left onto Nebo Lane.
-Nebo Lane is a privately maintained clam shell road so please obey the 10 MPH speed limit.
-Continue on Nebo Lane, keeping the horse farm to your left.
George and Leilani's house is at the end of Nebo Lane. Look for the picket fence at the entrance to their property.

Bring a side dish or dessert to share, plus a lawn chair

Families and friends are welcome!

Plants and unneeded equipment sale/exchange.

"Find the Queen" contest



President's Message

Hello Fellow Beekeepers

The weather is finally getting hot and dry. I'm also noticing fewer and fewer natural sources of nectar. My bees have started hitting the humming bird feeders, despite the fact that I have internal feeders on all five hives. I find myself refilling these feeders weekly. For some reason, my lawn filled with Dutch Clover is not appealing to my bees. However, the Bumble Bees are all over it.

With the warmer and drier weather, a source of fresh water becomes ever more important. I have a small bird bath being visited by dozens of Honey Bees all day long. I'm having to refill it daily! This should be a reminder to everyone to make sure there is a source of fresh water nearby for your bees. I know, being surrounded by the Bay and its brackish tributaries, it is easy to forget that the bees need water and saltwater is not a satisfactory substitute. Once the bees find your fresh water source, they will report back to HQ and will then expect to find it full and in the same place so make sure you top it off daily. In my bird bath, I have placed some small white marble stones so the bees can rescue themselves from drowning. They aren't very good swimmers and clearly haven't mastered the backstroke!

Our BGES picnic is coming up on Saturday, 13 July. Leilani and I will be hosting it at our house. I hope to see most if not all of you there!

George

Beekeeping in July

As the best nectar sources begin to give out, the so-called "nectar dearth" begins. The bees look farther afield for good nectar, and become much more protective of the stores they have. You may (or may not) notice a change in the personality of your hive. Your bees may become more easily upset and more defensive, and you may notice more of the hitting behavior if you approach their hive; you may even get some undeserved stings. Some people notice that the quiet hum of a hive has been replaced by a louder more assertive buzz. You may notice robbing behavior if you have more than one hive. Boardman feeders with sugar water at the hive entrance are associated with robbing.

This is not the end of the year for bees, though. They'll continue to gather from clover and from other sources as their bloom times occur. And there will be a second "nectar flow" in the fall, for bees to put away some winter honey.

If your hive has cast a swarm, or if you've added a box of frames to your hive as a honey super, you've got a lot of new vacant territory in your hive. There may not be bees enough to defend that big empty space from the usual suspects – hive beetles and wax moths. These creatures are frequently found in hives, but a hive crowded with bees can usually keep the invaders corralled or otherwise controlled. One rule of thumb is to make sure that 80% (4/5) of the frames in your hive are covered with bees, and don't add new boxes until the bees have filled the space they already have.

If you are adding a super for honey collection, don't make the new box the top box…instead, put the new box above the brood chambers but underneath a super that is already covered with bees.

And as George writes, above, don't forget to provide a water source for your bees. If you set a good seat nearby you can enjoy seeing lots of honey bees who are intent on bringing back water to manage the temperature in the hive on the hottest of days. And since they're not defending their honey or their hive, they're quite safe to be close to.

Telling the Bees

The ancient custom of telling one's honey bee colony about the important events of the life of a family – the sad and the happy – is thought to ensure that bees feel included and valued and will stay around.

Many of us had had happy events to tell our bees about this year. Our BGES hive, however, has lost some important members, and so we are informing you of their deaths.

Early in the year Ettore Zuccarino passed away.

We learned that an important friend to our early guild, Bob Messenger, died this year.

And beekeeper John R. Arnold of Cheriton died in May.

Our Guild is seeking suggestions for appropriate ways of remembering our beekeeping friends.

Beekeeping System Part #1

The set up.

Russell Vreeland

A couple of weeks ago Ann asked me to provide an article for this newsletter. The fateful thing is that just as she made that request I was elbow deep in the largest per hive spring honey harvest I have ever experienced. But that is getting ahead of my report so let's reset. This will be a two-chapter report because there is too much to tell you in one. This month I'll concentrate on the set up and next month on my actions and the results.

I have always been a "traditional beekeeper" 2 deep hive bodies, with 10 frames each, a nice open landing area so the girls can move in and out with ease, multiple medium supers to get as much honey as possible dreaming of a year stacking 10 on each hive, visit the girls every week (and no matter how hot no less than every 2 weeks), make spring splits because I know how to do it, control swarms. You all know that stuff, it is how we were taught. But then after two devastating years of losses (over 31

dead hives in two years) I had to sit down and take a hard look. I did some reading, especially the person I consider the best bee scientist currently active – Dr. Tom Seeley of Cornell University. After reading about his studies comparing two apiaries – one traditional and one that he calls "Darwinian Beekeeping" which appealed to me I decided to try it. This is my report on my first year. By the way if anyone is interested I can provide the article. I admit I feel like a brand new beekeeper telling the experienced folk "this is how I do it." In a way that is correct. Still we can all learn new stuff.

So what is this like? First, this beekeeping system is not at all like the way we were taught or what is written in the books. In fact, the only similarity is I still use a Langstroth hive with 10 frames to start. That is where it ends. First, no hive gets more than one deep hive body, it is on the bottom and that is it. Then it gets one medium hive body which can be 9 or 10 frames. These two boxes are never rotated by the way. Every spring you do need to remove some old comb so it doesn't get foul but otherwise you just leave them alone. The reason for this configuration is that one deep + one medium is almost exactly the size (based on volume) of a well-functioning wild hive. Also Tom learned that in nature bees like to put more brood in the longer larger combs and saved the smaller stuff for Honey since it is so heavy. So that is it, now if you want honey you add one (that is all) super above a Queen Excluder. No more. Ever. The next thing is the landing and entry board. You block off the entire opening save for a section that is one to one and half inches in width. If you have a screened bottom they will get enough air and yes that opening will be crowded on most days but leave it alone. You also keep the top sealed no holes there either. This configuration means that the guard bees are crowded tight and only need to defend a small area that is crowded with bees. Think of it this way, a single Army company defending a 10 mile front is too spread out to be really effective, but the same company defending a half mile or less would be really hard to break through.

So that is the configuration, but that is not all of the system. In Darwinian Beekeeping you don't make splits – ever. If they decide to swarm you let them but you can (if you wish) catch the swarms. Ideally, you try to get them into a bait hive so you don't actually catch them. That hasn't worked very well yet for me. Now you might ask why take the chance when you can split a good hive? Well, the reason is simple. Within a well-functioning hive a bee goes through a variety of different stages and jobs as she ages. She can switch back and forth a bit depending on the needs of the colony but pretty much she stays the course from cleaning, to nursing, to wax production, guarding and foraging. When we make a split we go into the hives and simply pull five frames with eggs, Queen cells etc. Then we put them into a new hive and say "have at it." But when the bees decide to swarm, that swarm is made of bees of all ages and jobs. As they prepare to swarm some load up on honey and food stores, the wax makers get all primed to build new comb and they recruit enough foragers to find food and most importantly a new home. The bees know how old each member is and they stock the swarm with the ratios that will give it the best chance of survival. When we make a split we take frames with eggs, young brood, capped brood all of the very bees the hive needs to repopulate after the swarm leaves. On the flip side our split may well end up with mostly young bees because we take the frames during the day when the foragers are out. So in the new hive the young bees need to become foragers depriving the larval bees of their nurses and cleaners. But now the hive we leave behind has a higher ratio of old foragers who can't make new comb and are poorer nurses, at the very moment the hive most needs

those things. Plus, they are now scratching their antennae wondering what happened to those babies they had in all of that missing comb. In effect, a swarm is a well-coordinated highly evolved mechanism to reproduce, leaving the home colony with a strong ability to repopulate while attempting to send out a subgroup with a decent chance at survival. A beekeeper made split, even with the best of intentions and care, is a ham handed knife blade cutting through the colony without regard to where the cut starts or ends. Darwinian beekeeping.

So that is how it sets up and next month I'll tell you how I now have to work my hives and the results of this past year.

Oh one final thing – if you adopt this system expect to have a lot of extra equipment. I do if anyone wants some.

No BGES Meeting in August

Next regular meeting: September 3rd at the BIC

6:30 pm