

Just Starting Out?

GET TO A MEETING!

The Best Way There Is To Learn About Bees And Beekeeping!

With the recent flood of media attention focusing on honey bees and the problems they face, people from all ages, backgrounds and locations are becoming interested in beekeeping. This is fantastic and I hope the momentum continues. Just think, every person becoming a new beekeeper is one less person who knows nothing about bees and one more person hopefully informing others about the importance of bees and other pollinators.

This past year I have had more requests for the Georgia Bee Letter than ever before. Daily phone calls and e-mails requesting information about how to become a beekeeper keep coming in at a steady pace. Bee supply companies have been bombarded with new customers and have literally run out of items and are scrambling to fill orders. Steve Forrest (Brushy Mountain), Fred Rossman (Rossman Apiaries) and Jerry Latner (Dadant) have all informed me that business is the best they have ever seen. They are extremely excited so many new people are becoming fascinated with beekeeping and they too hope the trend continues. However, I can hear it in their voices; they're exhausted. They have been working from sunup to sundown, seven days a week and see no end in sight. No one could have anticipated the swarm of new people wanting to start up colonies. And hence, no one could have anticipated the amount of equipment needed to do just that.

Since there are so many new beekeepers in our ranks I would like to offer some advice; join a beekeeping association, attend regular meetings, acquire a mentor, subscribe to a beekeeping journal, get hands on experience by working with an experienced beekeeper, do your homework, find out as much information as you can and keep informed. Not too much to ask.

Attending local, state or national meetings may be one of the best things you can do as a beekeeper, especially if you are a beginner. Only reading a book (even though there are some exceptional books out there) isn't going to cut it. Trust me. I hate the cliché but here it is; "Bees don't read books." Even experienced beekeepers are perplexed from time to time because their bees aren't doing what they should be. "Doggone it! They never did that before." Well that's Mother Nature and she has a way of changing "our" rules from time to time.

Plopping a colony in your backyard and walking away is a thing of the past. Much has changed even in the past few years. Beekeeping in the 21st century is challenging. You need all the tools at hand in order to keep your bees healthy and alive. Remember these are your pets and they need your attention, especially now. Books and articles will help with the fundamentals, the big picture or the outline so to say. They will also help to familiarize yourself with beekeeping terminology: supers, uncapping tanks, EFB, hive bodies, queenline jars, excluders, hair rollers, shallows, *Varroa* mites, Duragilt, mediums, AFB, queen cells, inner cover, tracheal mites, crimp wire, Sacbrood, uncapping scratcher, queen cups, deeps, hive tool, small hive beetles, brood, telescoping cover, entrance feeder, nucs, foundation, grafting tool, grafting cups, extractors (radial verses tangential), settling tanks, and honey gates. However, it is the experience working a colony that will help you fill in the details. It will bring the picture to life. Unfortunately, it may take years to fully understand the world inside a colony but it sure will be fun getting there.

So why attend meetings? Bottom line, to learn from other beekeepers more experienced than you, to find

a mentor, to keep up on the newest information and to hang with people interested in something you like, bees. Experienced beekeepers can be better than any book. They have the hands on knowledge, so listen, watch and learn. Plus they can tell you about the mistakes they've made in the past in order for you to avoid them in the future.

A book explains how to do a particular task but it can't prepare you for the actual event of doing it. However, working with a mentor in the field will help you build the confidence you need to work a colony. Opening a hive full of bees can be intimidating the first time so it is important to work with someone who knows what they are doing. They can also show you the finesse required when working a colony. How to pull frames, look for the queen, examine brood, mash hive beetles with your hive tool, pull supers, and so on. Whenever, wherever, ask questions because believe me you will have thousands of them. Meetings are also a great source of information





about the latest problems plaguing our industry, and the best ways to solve them. They may not pertain to you personally but it is information you should be aware of.

Another reason to attend meetings is networking. Meeting and then knowing beekeepers in your area can be a life saver at times. You may need something that the queen, package or equipment suppliers can't get to you in time. You also share the same environmental conditions along with the same pollen and nectar flows. It gives you someone to bounce ideas off of, someone to borrow a super from or a frame of brood. It also helps to know that other beekeepers may be experiencing the same problems you are. Hence, you are not alone. "Your colony is queenless too? So is mine!"

But probably the best thing? You're hanging out with a bunch of people who understand what the heck you are talking about. Ever try to explain a simple beekeeping chore to someone who is not a beekeeper: "Yesterday, I went through a potentially queenless colony and took a frame out of the brood chamber to see

if there were any eggs. It had been several weeks since I saw an open queen cell so I assumed a virgin had emerged. And sure enough there was milk-brood from wall to wall. She's of Italian decent but she sure has some Russian blood in her." Deer in the headlights: Blink. Blink.

When I first began my job at the bee lab, Dr. Delaplane insisted that I speak at local and state meetings. I agreed, thinking there were maybe two in the state. Come to find out (and to my amazement) there were 15 county groups in the state of Georgia plus one state organization. If you go to the Georgia Beekeepers Association website (www.gabeekeeping.com) there is information about each club, meeting time and place – along with contact information.

Not only are local, state and national meetings important but beekeeping institutes, classes and workshops as well. In May we concluded our 17th annual Young Harris beekeeping institute. It was one of the largest institutes to date with over 150 people in attendance. National speakers like Jerry Hayes (Chief of Apiary Inspections with the Florida Department of Agriculture), Ross Conrad (Author of *Natural Beekeeping: Organic Approaches for Modern Beekeeping*) and Kim Flottum (editor of *Bee Culture* magazine and author of *The Backyard Beekeeper: An Absolute Beginner's Guide to Keeping Bees in Your Yard and Garden*) helped bring in the crowds. Regional speakers included Cindy Bee, Bill Owens, Jim Quick, Shane Gebaeur, Bob Binnie, Will Montgomery, Lonnie Funderburg, Dr. Paul Arnold, Robert Brewer, Dr. Keith Delaplane, and myself.

Jerry's topics ranged from CCD

to Africanized bees to advances in disease and pest control. Ross enlightened us about the natural approaches for disease and pest control. Kim presented information on how to get started, who's who in beekeeping, and using nucs. The other speakers rounded out the program to make it one of our best yet. Now if you are new to beekeeping, you may not know all these names yet, but give it time and you will recognize most of them – especially if you live in the south.

Another thing that makes beekeeping meetings special is you can ask the speakers questions. I have met very few people in this business that can not be approached. Most are eager to answer your questions.

The UGA Beekeeping Institute like others across the states is a two day event. Participants are engaged in morning lectures and hands on workshops in the afternoons. The goal of our institute is to provide basic information for the beginner and more current topics or concerns for the experienced beekeeper. The institute also has a master beekeeping program and Welsh honey judging certificate program. If you have either of these in your state, I would recommend you participate if for nothing more than for your own personal satisfaction.

Our institute also offers a master beekeeper program which starts off with the certified level, and then moves to journeyman, master and finally master craftsman. By the time you get to master craftsman you are required to not only pass an oral exam, but to participate in a university research project, complete 15 units of public service, present a program at a state meeting and the bee institute, demonstrate practical

Here is a list of beekeeping associations in the southeast and some upcoming meetings.

State	Web address	Upcoming meetings
Georgia	gabeekeepers.com	Sept. 26 th & 27 th
Alabama	alabamabeekeepers.com	Oct 10 th & 11 th
SC	cstatebeekeepers.org	July 17 th -19 th
NC	ncbeekeepers.org	July 10 th - 12 th
Tennessee	tnbeekeepers.org	Oct 17 th &18 th
Florida	floridabeekeepers.org	
Heartland Apicultural Society (HAS)	heartlandbees.com	July 10 th – 12 th West Virginia
Eastern Apicultural Society (EAS)	easternapiculture.org	August 4 th – 8 th Kentucky

experience in seven specialties and either publish an article or be interviewed on radio or TV concerning honey bees. It is quite the accomplishment. Actually they all are.

So far our institute has graduated over 100 certified, 16 journeymen, 12 masters and one master craftsman. Bill Owens still solely holds the title of Master Craftsman for the state of Georgia. Several states also have bee schools that offer a master beekeeping program along with classes and workshops for beginners and experienced alike. Check out your state association website for information about upcoming classes and meetings.

Over the years I have attended meetings all over the U.S. and I have to say there hasn't been a bad group yet. Not even the association that forgot to pick me up at the airport. The people you meet are from all walks of life, down to earth, friendly and eager to help new beekeepers. Get involved sooner than later. You'll be glad you did.

It's July in Georgia which means only one thing, its hot! The sourwood flow should be reaching its peak so I hope your colonies are already in place. Since I am writing this article

in May, I can't comment about how good or bad the sourwood flow is at this point. However, future projections are for an outstanding sourwood flow.

So far in Georgia our Spring flow has been exceptional in most places from North to South, East to West. But I have heard from a few beekeepers that they barely made a super of honey. Location, location, location! Here at the lab we made a good bit of honey. If only we could have kept our honey producers from hitting the trees we would have made a bumper crop. It was an unusual year for excessive swarms. Not only did 90% of my colonies swarm but they did so by

the end of March first week of April. I am hearing other reports of swarming being higher than usual.

Now if you have missed the sourwood flow, there is still nectar to be had down south. Cotton should be blooming soon and the good thing about cotton is that it's usually irrigated. So drought or no drought it will be supplying the nectar and pollen for your colonies.

Hope your bees didn't hit the trees like mine.

See Ya! **BC**

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