

Skagit Valley Beekeepers



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April 2014

Movin' On Out!

The next meeting will be **April 10th, 2014 at 7:00 PM** at the Skagit Farmers Supply CENEX Administration building, located at 1833 Park Avenue, Burlington WA. The speaker will be Seth Smith and he'll be talking about his nucs trip and upcoming events.

Swarms. I'm not knowledgeable enough to teach about swarms and bee behavior. I know swarming is the colony's way of reproducing. A bee (the queen) makes more bees but a bee belongs to a bigger entity which "they" call *superorganisms*. Superorganisms are comprised of, well, organisms. In our case, the bee. But superorganisms also reproduce. That reproduction is called a *swarm*.

I have a lot to learn but it's kinda fascinating, isn't it?

Tom Seeley wrote this book called "*Honey Bee Democracy*". He went out and took the time to figure out what made the bees decide to swarm, what the bees did when they swarmed, and even what kind of home they were looking for.

How do thousands of bees decide to all go to that spot over there? In that small hole. In that tree? At the same time?

Fascinating.

Another interesting aspect of swarms is that they are free bees. Swarms are a great way to increase your hives - if they're not from your hives. Swarms deplete your hive when they are yours. I know.

Well. Maybe check out the book I mentioned. Also go on YouTube. There are lots of experienced beekeepers (and not-so-experienced) catching swarms.

Learn about swarm prevention while you're at it.

Things To Do This Month

- Package bees arriving! Packages need special care! Feed 1:1 syrup to get them fed & drawing out wax. Feed pollen substitutes. Keep it up until they're able to care for themselves.
- Peek at queens every 7 - 10 days - or just check for eggs. If the queen dies or is having problems, you'll need to replace her quickly.
- Consider mite treatments while there is no brood but nothing that will interfere with the queen.
- For established hives, feed if needed/desired but check for signs of overcrowding/swarming. Have boxes ready to add. Are the maples blooming?

The 2014 Potluck / Silent Auction

The Potluck / Silent Auction was moved to the Senior Center in Sedro Wooley this year to accommodate a larger group of people. It worked out extremely well and the larger venue was needed!



The food was fantastic with the wonderful tasting ham and so many things to go with it. Amazing!

The auction was fantastic with everything from a Skep Hive cake to honey and beverages. From Mason bee hives to Honey bee hives. Soaps, pillows, and so much more. **Thanks to everyone who contributed items for the auction and thanks**



to those who bid. It was a success!

A Swarm In The Old Plum Tree

A story by Brad Raspet

During my first year as a beekeeper, a lady called me about a large swarm in the top of her old plum tree off Bennett Road and my wife came along to observe.

When we arrived I discovered that this tall old plum tree must be one of the biggest oldest plum trees in the county. I was barely able to position myself with my cardboard box directly beneath the swarm by standing on very the top rung of an old orchard ladder, and even at that point as I grasped the tree trunk to give it a good shake I realized that this might be a little difficult.

Well, I gave the trunk a good shake and realized that I needed to shake a little longer and harder than I had in the past because of the thickness of the tree trunk... by the time I was done shaking I had managed to get most of the bees into my cardboard box but a rather large number had missed the box and ended up on landing on the right side of my body.

Still standing on the top rung of this old rickety orchard ladder, **I looked down to see about 20 or 30 little miniature darts sticking out of the back of my hand** and arm (no bees, just their stingers left behind).

I slowly climbed down the ladder with my prize, to hear the concerned property owner, her children and my lovely wife all asking if I was OK.

I remember responding that other than feeling like I had just finished off a few cups of coffee that I was fine. Then my wife says to me "you really should be wearing gloves you know", and I do glove up more often now if it looks like it might be a difficult swarm.

Darn wives, they're always right!

Losing Bees To A Swarm

A story by Robert Niles

I had inspected the hive just about a week earlier - but maybe not as thorough as I should have. I checked the third box - and the second - and then lifted the second so that I could see under it, checking for swarm cells, just as I was taught. Everything looked fine, I did a bit of math in my head. The 3rd box was only 50% drawn but the total hive percentage would be over 80%, so I decided to add a 4th box.

A few days later, I go out about 4:30pm and there's a swarm leaving the area, heading south high into the trees. An amazing site to be sure. I thought they were just passing through. What are the odds though? Flying right over my hives on the way to their new home. I peeked into the hives and they both looked nice and happy with lots of bees.

The next day I opened up the hive that had a bit less activity. Looking back, the activity had been less and maybe less for a few days before I saw that swarm. But with the weather the way it was, some days the bees were busier than other days.

After opening the hive, I searched and searched. No queen. Lots of bees, maybe less than before, There has to be less than before! Lots of 4-9 day old brood, lots of capped brood. No eggs though.

Again, I didn't see any swarm cells or queen cells for that matter.

Until I got to the bottom box.

There's a queen cell ON the east WALL of the box. Then there's two more queen cells, one on each 1/2 drawn foundation-less frame that I had previously added when I



A "bunny" swarm on blueberries near Rockport, Wa

photo by Seth Smith

removed two frames in order to bait the bees into the second box.

Yes, the hive had swarmed. That swarm I saw was from my hive. **Not some swarm passing through - they were mine! My heart sunk.** The day I saw the swarm I did some driving around, hoping to find them. To no avail.

Back in the hive, I noticed back-filling. Back-filling everywhere! Looking back, I should have known better but I didn't see it coming. I opened up the brood nest, placing foundation from the 3rd box down into the 2nd and 1st.

A few days later the hive that swarmed, swarmed again. This time I didn't see them leave the hive but did see them land and cluster 30 feet up in a tree. Way too high. There was no way I was going to get them way up there.

A couple days later, the second swarm had left. I had opened up the hive again and there was one of the other queen cells with the top off, hanging on the cell as if it had a hinge. No other queen cells, the third one was gone. No eggs anywhere else.

Apparently there was another queen. I could only hope they weren't wanting to swarm again. As she is my last chance to go queenright or I have to find and buy a queen.

Nine days later, I was watching the hive at 2:30 in the afternoon. And I saw this bee land of the front of the hive. A drone? It wasn't a drone, it looks all wrong to be a drone. It's not a worker! Too big!! A queen? A QUEEN! It has to be! She's moving around quickly, other bees on the face of the hive are moving towards her and then she's up in the air and zip! She lands right on the entrance and walks right in. Wow! Was she just orientating or was she returning from a mating?

Or was it my imagination?

A few days later, I checked the hive. Eggs!! One egg in each cell, right in the middle of the cell in a tight laying pattern.

Joy! A queen is laying!

Catching A Swarm With Dad

A story by Dr. Vanoy Smith

I hived a lot of swarms with my dad in central Texas, where I spent the formative years. Dad used to get a bushel basket or any sturdy box and attach a long pole or a couple of 2X4s (heavy when two 10 footers are nailed together). He and I would jiggle the box really hard under the swarm, and with lots of bees, **those which didn't get into the box, we were showered with the remainder.**

One huge swarm completely filled the basket and weighed over 30 lbs. Now imagine a 30 lb weight to bring down slowly at the end of nearly 20 ft of 2X4s. No, we did not drop it, I ran along the ground holding up the 2X4s and Dad doing his best at the other end, so that monster swarm was set down at a precalculated distance right in front of a 3

full depth hive with only foundation.

That hive built all the combs out perfectly, not a drone cell seen, and needed a couple more supers to hold their honey.

And, yes, I caught a swarm last summer using a sturdy cardboard box and 2X2s, and the swarm only weighed about 4 lbs. Anybody who wants to borrow the box is welcome.



Seth Smith with son hiving a swarm

photo by Seth Smith



Pat Ray reaching a swarm through a thicket of blackberries

photo by Seth Smith

