

# Skagit Valley Beekeepers



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**January 2015**

## Each Day A Little More

The next meeting will be **January 8th, 2015 at 7:00 PM** at the Skagit Farmers Supply CENEX Administration building, located at 1833 Park Avenue, Burlington WA. Our **Seth Smith** will be talking about "**Funeral Services: Dealing with dead-outs.**" We'll investigate causes of the death of a hive and what to do with the equipment after a hive dies.

It is also time to be thinking about buying spring **nucleus hives**. Seth will be talking about that as well.

### Time to renew your SVBA membership!

Our annual membership is \$12.00. Please see **Scott Rhodes** this next meeting to pay your dues. At the same time, you can also pay for your Bee Culture subscription. The new magazine subscription rates are: 1 year: \$25.00; 2 years: \$48.00; 3 years: \$69.00.

## Taking A Peek 10 To 15 Years Back

*"What day is it?", asked Winnie the Pooh  
"It's today," squeaked Piglet  
"My favorite day," said Pooh"*  
— A.A. Milne

I was lucky enough to get some old American Bee Journal magazines and I completely enjoy looking through them. A lot of knowledge there. A lot of tips and information. I want to absorb all that knowledge but I only have so much time. It is all interesting though.

In the U.S., concerns 15 years ago were pretty much those we have today. Foreign countries dumping cheap "honey" on the U.S. market. How to control Varroa populations and how to get those bees to survive and overwinter. Not much change there, we still seems to be facing those same problems.

I also like to skim through the magazines -- not just for tons of good reading material but for the advertisements

as well. Prices for most everything has of course risen over the last 15 years. Did you know you could get a three frame motorized extractor for \$420.00? I wish I bought one then but I wasn't working bees then. The prices for deeps and supers were about 150% less than they are now.

The real shocker: The price for queens and packages really have changed! The price for a queen was about \$10.00 to \$14.00 each back in the spring of 2000.

Now days, queens are usually \$20 to \$35 each and I see that price rising a bit more if you don't want those southern queens.

Packages? They were about \$40.00 to \$49.00 for three pounds. Checking the prices for the upcoming 2015 spring season, the price for a three pound package is now about \$115.00 to \$120.00. Up from even last year and I found some places in Washington State selling them for even more than that!

A small consolation in our favor was the price that we sold our honey for. In the spring of 2000 a one pound jar of honey sold here on the West Coast for about \$1.99 to \$3.25. In November of 2014 that price was about \$9.00 for a 1 pound jar.

Oh boy. Life is getting spendy. The question is what will it be like the next 10 to 15 years? Are we in a bubble or are the bees in so much trouble that the price of beekeeping will just keep going up?

## Things To Do This Month

- If the weather warms up enough, you might consider popping a lid or two to see how your bees are doing. Queens could be starting to lay. There's a lot of talk about winter treatments against varroa mites. If you treat, do so before the queen starts laying.
- Quickly clean dead bees off the bottom board. We want to make sure the live ones can get out of the

hive when they need to and no bees are blocking the entrance.

- Lift the back of the hives to check their stores. It needs to be hefty or you might want to consider feeding. If you need to feed, use dry sugar, a fondant or other non-liquid feed.
- Check and or clean your woodenware and other equipment, build or order those hive parts that need replacing.
- Consider starting another hive and ordering new queens, packages of bees or nucs.
- Catch up on your bee magazines and read books about bees and beekeeping.

## Honey Bee Biologist Dr. Bruce Eckholm

Those of you who had the opportunity to come to the Washington State Regional 1a Beekeepers Meeting last October were lucky enough to listen to Sue Cobey and Klebert Silvestre. Before their presentations, Sue briefly introduced a new member to our beekeeping community:

honey bee biologist **Dr. Bruce Eckholm**.



*Dr. Bruce Eckholm*

Originally a beekeeper from the Seattle area, Bruce earned his PhD in Entomology at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He spent six years at the USDA Carl Hayden Bee Research Center, where he investigated colony-level genetic influences on the physiology and behavioral ecology of honey bees. Bruce has

authored/co-authored several original research papers in leading scientific journals, as well as a book chapter in *Honey Bee Colony Health: Challenges and Sustainable Solutions*. He now works as an independent research scientist and small-scale farmer on Whidbey Island.

In addition to farming, Bruce collaborates with other honey bee scientists from around the country. With the Tucson bee lab, he is currently developing a web-based tool for almond growers to model their orchards under different weather conditions and colony strength profiles. The tool predicts almond yields and will ultimately help the almond industry gain an understanding of the scale of colony losses. Other research activities at the interface

between colony genetics, foraging, and honey bee nutrition are in development as well.

It is great to have Bruce in our area and I hope to hear more about his endeavors.

## Using Snelgrove Boards

*by Michael Jaross*

I doubled my hives and replaced all queens using the **Snelgrove Method**. I was able to get a copy of L.E. Snelgrove's book, "Swarming: It's Control & Prevention," from an online bookstore in Australia. Originally published in 1934, this copy was a reprint put out by his family in 1981.

The Snelgrove Method is a way to prevent swarming by separating the queen from most of the brood and bees, putting idle "swarm ready" workers back to work and giving the hive the idea that it's either queenless or short

on bees. We had a really early swarm season up here, so I did have one swarm only because they were ready to go before I got the Snelgrove Board in Place.

A Snelgrove Board is essentially a double-screen board with doors to "valve" bees gradually back down to the bottom box where the queen is isolated. All the brood, (except a tiny bit in bottom box to keep the queen glued in place), and most of the bees are isolated in the top box. As the bees are removed from the queen by two screens, they don't get any queen pheromone which is distributed by contact, not in the air.

Since the bees on the brood feel queenless, they start making cells. Lots of them! When the cells are close to ripe, I make splits with them, retaining one in the top box to eventually replace the old one downstairs. Clear as mud?



*Michael Jaross with a Snelgrove board*

This was an exciting experiment. It worked well. Not 100%, but when was the last time you got 100% with beekeeping? I had a carpenter friend knock out half a dozen custom Snelgrove Boards, but later found that you can buy them cheap from Brushy Mountain where they call them "10-Frame Double Screen Boards." They didn't know Snelgrove from squat. Not quite as deluxe as my custom made units, but WAY more economical.

I don't know the full history of this method, but it seems to have been in common use some decades ago both in



Upper and Lower entrance and colored landing area

Europe and the U.S. It's maybe not suitable for commercial yards, but when you have a little time, keep good records, and don't want swarms, it's effective. You can either make increase or not. Your choice. I gave away extra queens and cells this year as I had a few over what I needed for my own splits. Next year, I will make sure I have the equipment to split into and sell those nucs once the queens are proved.

My goal in 2014 was to switch all my queens over to Carniolan. I've been keeping dark bees from splits I took from a friend a few years ago. But, acquired a few Italians along the way. I like working with Carniolans, they overwinter well and they are especially gentle for my students at WWU to work with.

I've been making queens one or two at a time since I started with bees 10 years ago. Haven't bought queens or bees in that time. The Snelgrove Method is a lot more reliable than what I've been doing and I'm looking forward to a MOSTLY swarm free future with fresh queens as needed and increase when and only when I want it.

## Tips From You!

I was very interested in hearing about those beekeeping lessons you've learned over the last year. Anything that helped you out or anything that was just interesting. One

of my biggest lessons (among many) was that you need to do what you need to do and there's nothing to be gained in waiting to do it later. If the bees need fed. I learned that I needed to do it. Not next week. Not tomorrow. If the bees needed another box, put the box on. Waiting just might mean I'd be shaking bees off a tree.

Last year, I listened to a lot of new beekeepers who lost their hives over the winter. Almost all of them said their bees starved. I decided this year, there was going to be no procrastination. I would do it when it needed done. Don't get me wrong, I want those bees self-sufficient but I think you have to work toward that goal, not just expect it.

**Anita Anderson-Johnson** emailed and said, "*Along with our regular meetings learned quite a bit from a YouTube video entered in by San Diego Beekeepers Association featuring speaker Peter Borst. I really recommend watching it for understand ways to make successful splits. He actually thinks like a bee if you listen to his presentation.*" The video can be found on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxDwz9M87Xw>

I watched it and it was very interesting talk about bees, hives and doing splits.

**Mary Pat Larsen** wrote, "*I relearned something I should have known, but forgot. I took about 10 frames from a hive that seemed to be defunked. I brought these home and extracted them. The honey came out dark in color. I put it in a gallon jug. To my surprise, the honey immediately started to ferment. I brought the jug into an SVBA (Skagit Valley Beekeepers Association). I asked if I should sell it. "No", I was told. However, the other beekeepers said, this honey would make great mead. Now I have drunk mead before and it is good but extremely addictive. I didn't want to go there.*

*Later I found some frames that looked good to harvest, but only some of the honey was capped. I haven't extracted these yet, but it occurred to me that this could have caused the fermentation I had experienced earlier. Back to SVBA. Sure enough, at that meeting, the other beekeepers told me that these too would ferment.*

*So now I Have about 2 gallons of mead grade honey. Good for cooking if nothing else, or is it even good for that?"*

I think it would it would be good for cooking or drinking. Hmm. I wonder what it would taste like if converted to vinegar.

