Skagit Valley Beekeepers

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June 2015

Blossoms Abuzz

The next meeting will be **June 11th, 2015 at 7:00 PM** at the Skagit Farmers Supply CENEX Administration building, located at 1833 Park Avenue, Burlington WA. Speaker/Topic TBD.

It looks like snow from afar but that's the blackberry bloom. It's happening. So early though. Ready or not, it is that time of year. The blackberries look great all along Highway 20 from Coupeville all the way to Concrete!

Please see Diane Dong at our next meeting and volunteer to help at the Skagit County Fair. Last year was my first year. I didn't know what to expect but it turned out to be a smooth and interesting four hour shift. We stood behind a desk with display items - various beekeeper things and various pictures of bees and brood at various stages. People would stop by and ask about bees and beekeeping and honey. The best part though, was helping people find the queens. There were two observation hives, one with Carniolian (darker) bees and one with Italian bees. One queen was dark, the color of leather, the other bright. Both surprisingly hard to find at times. Peoples eyes would light up when they found the queen. The four hours passed by quickly.

It is worth it, so please volunteer.

Things To Do This Month

- The blackberries are blooming - it's time to think about putting your honey supers on. Maybe we'll talk about this at the meeting!
- Do you need to re-queen? It's easier to find queens for sale this time of year.
- Did you check your mite levels. Use a sticky board (I use the sticky board to give me an idea of the presence of mites in the hive or as an indicator that a mite treatment is working - a sugar roll or other types of tests might better provide the level of infestation) or do a powdered sugar test to determine your mite levels. Visit http://goo.gl/Jy7065 for an example on how to test for mites.

Raising Queens

Seth Smith provided a workshop on queen rearing by grafting larvae. The turn out was great with about 17 people attending. John and Mary Cunningham were most gracious and supplied a wonderful lunch of smoked pork, baked beans, cole slaw and the most terrific cookies. I'm not sure who provided the brownies but they were fantastic.

Inspecting queen cells

It was a great day to get together and learn about raising queens! Good weather! Seth provided a lot of good information at the workshop and I'll try to go through the major points that Seth demonstrated to us (and if I get any of this wrong, the fault it mine).

Preparation

Decide which day you're going to graft and visit thebeeyard.org/queen-rearing-calendar/ and enter the grafting day you decided on. Print that out. It will be handy.

Four days before grafting, place an empty frame of worker cell comb into the hive of the queen that you want

to graft from. This is the frame that your queen will lay eggs within the next day or two.

The Starter
A day before grafting (or at least four hours before grafting), find a hive with lots of bees! You're going to use the bees from this hive to raise your queen cells for a couple days.


Creating the Starter

Go through the hive and find the queen. Set the queen aside in her own box temporarily just to get her out of the way and safe. Grab a couple more frames of bees and place those in the box with the queen.

Then grab a couple frames of mostly pollen. And then grab a frame of mostly nectar or uncapped honey. And place them next to the ***starter hive***. Make sure there are no eggs or open brood on these frames. Have a frame of foundation ready too.

A starter hive is just the name given to a hive/nuc that you will use to start raising queen cells for a couple days. You don't want any eggs or open brood of any kind in the starter. No queen cells, no queen cups. This hive is the hive that you're going coax the bees to ***start*** the queen raising process.

Next, shake ALL the remaining bees from that hive into the starter hive. Holding the frame, give a couple firm shakes inside the starter hive. Grab the next frame and repeat until all the frames have been shaken. Now add the frame nectar in slot 1, a frame of pollen in slot 2, slot 3 is empty (this is where a frame or bar of queen cells will go), a frame of pollen in slot 4 and the frame of foundation in slot 5.

Give all those empty frames to any existing hive.

Place the queen and the two frames you set aside into a new nuc or a new hive.

You now have a starter hive.

Grafting
With the frame that you introduced to the hive of your favourite queen a few days ago, go graft larvae from just hatched eggs into the queen cups. There's different grafting tools available, you'll just have to find the one you like the most.


Practicing the art of grafting

Grafting is simply the moving of the larvae from the cell on the comb to a queen cup. The idea is to use your tool and from the side of the cell, slip the end of your tool down and under the larva. Lift the larva out and place her in the queen cup without flipping her over or damaging her in anyway. It is an experience but only practice makes perfect.

Once you've finished grafting. You want to place the frame or bar of queen cups into the center position of your starter hive. We'll leave those queen cups in the starter for a couple days (check that queen calendar you printed out)

The Finisher
Next, we will talk about the finisher. After a couple days the queen cups with the lavae you grafter will be moved into a finisher. The finisher is any normal healthy hive where we let bees feed and completely draw out and cap the queen cells. In the Finisher, the queen is excluded down into the lower box. The rest of the bees roam freely just as any typical hive.

You can make the finisher the same day you make your starter hive - or you can make the finisher a short time before you are supposed to move your queen cups into the finisher.

To make the finisher, select a hive and then find the queen. Place the queen in the lower box. Add an excluder to the lower box, and then add your second box.

If you can't find the queen, you can simply remove all the frames from the top box and then shake each frame inside the top box and then smoke the bees down into the lower box. Remove the top box, add an excluder and then replace the top box, and then replace all the frames in the same order in which you removed them. You'll notice the bees coming back up into the second box - but the queen will not be able to. *You want to make sure you see those bees coming back up into the second box and covering comb before moving your queen cups to the finisher.*

When moving your queen cells into the finisher, place them in the center position of the top box.

Removal
Keep your queen cells in the finisher until the day your queen calendar calls for you to remove them. We want to make sure we remove the capped queen cells *before* they hatch and place them into queenless hives or nucs. Any extra queen cells you don't need can be sold or given to other beekeepers.

Varroa Control By Drone Removal

by Michael Jaross

Sacrificial drone comb on it's way to the freezer.

A bare plastic drone frame was put in a strong hive on May 9. The bees drew all the comb from scratch, got the queen to lay up an entire frame of drones at one go, and today, May 27, the frame is 99.9% capped and presumably full of breeding Varroa Mites.

I've already put the frame in my freezer and will leave it there for a day. Afterward, the frame will be allowed to come up to room temperature, then re-introduced into the hive it came out of. The bees will clean out all the drone carcasses and dead mites in a day or two. If I leave the frame in there, they will do the whole thing over again.

I usually only do one drone cycle unless the hive is unusually strong. This hive is probably in that category, so I might go through a second cycle. This also slows down the brood building process for worker bees, **so if your hive is booming ahead to fast on the population curve, the sacrificial drone process will slow it down**.

Now that the drone frame is completely drawn, the bees won't have to put so much energy into the process in future cycles. Or, I can move this drawn out drone frame to another smaller hive and those bees will have an easier time of it.

This method of mite control uses hive resources; beeswax and the nectar and pollen needed to make it, the queen's valuable time and her eggs. Since they are all drones, none of the queen's semen stores are used here. As I understand it, queens usually run out of drone semen before they run out of eggs, so this adds a little justification to the process.

Sacrificial Drone Method for getting rid of mites is just one more tool in the Varroa War Chest. It requires strong, resource rich hives, but it means just a little less invasive treatment with other methods. Keeping mite control methods varied makes it less likely the mites will develop resistance to any one method.

Jaross holding a frame of drone comb.

Picture by Taylor Moffett, WWU Outback Beekeeper

The same day I removed the capped drone frame, today, I did a Powdered Sugar Roll mite count and got ZERO mites. I interpret this to mean that my mid-December Oxalic Acid Vapor treatments were very successful and that almost all the current mite load is currently in the drone cells being frozen.

A word of caution: **be sure your remove a sacrificial drone comb BEFORE any of the cells begin to emerge. Failing to do so will flood your hive with mites.** Timing is everything!