

Skagit Valley Beekeepers



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May 2015

Article Header

The next meeting will be **May 14th, 2015 at 7:00 PM** at the Skagit Farmers Supply CENEX Administration building, located at 1833 Park Avenue, Burlington WA.

See Diane Dong at our next meeting and volunteer to help at the Skagit County Fair. You'll have a great time!

Things To Do This Month

- The swarm season is on. Watch for swarm cells! Go through those hives and check for swarm cells.
- Check for mites now, treat before you put those honey supers on.
- Good to have an extra box on hand just in case you need to hive a swarm or make a split.
- Is there room for the bees to put nectar? Is there room for the queen to lay? Are they back-filling the brood's nest? Make sure there is room!
- Make sure your bees have enough honey and pollen - watch for a dearth, a dearth usually happens in June before the blackberry flow but things are early this year - if they don't have enough food, be prepared to feed.

Our Spring Dearth

The first year I had bees, I fed so much that my hive swarmed right before the blackberry flow.

I learned my lesson.

The second year, I didn't feed and noticed one day in May that my hive was kicking out drones. In May!

On the advice of another beekeeper, I opened up the hive

and yes, there was no honey, no nectar. Nothing for them at all. I immediately started feeding and they took it all in.

Another lesson learned.

Check for stores and feed if needed but don't feed too much that they back fill the brood's nest.

Some signs of a dearth are:

- Bees removing drones and brood early in the season
- Lack of honey and or nectar in the hive.
- Bees robbing other hives, especially weak hives.
- If the fruit trees are done blooming and the maples blooms are drying up and the buttercups are showing themselves, there's a chance you're in a dearth.

Swarms

Swarming is a method bees use to reproduce, reduce congestion and move on when there is a lack of forage in the area.

When the bees decide to swarm, build queen cells, and often the queen will lay an abundance of drone brood, they exercise the queen more and feed her less to get her ready for flight.

Signs of swarming...

Back filling the brood nest. If there is an abundance of



Back filling the Brood Nest

nectar coming in or if you are feeding the bees heavily with syrup (especially during a flow), the bees may place that nectar or syrup where the queen would normally be laying. If the queen can not lay, then there might be a tendency to swarm.

No place for the queen to lay. Like back-filling the brood nest, if there isn't room for the queen to lay, they may swarm. There should be plenty of space for the queen to lay.

Queen cups with royal jelly (and brood) in them.

Queen cells on the lower portions of frames (but not always, sometime queen cells can be found higher up and once I found a swarm cell on the middle of the inner wall of the bottom brood box.

A lot less open brood and a lot more sealed brood. When the bees are getting ready to swarm, they limit the queen's egg laying. With the queen not laying, at some point you'll see more capped brood than open brood.

Causes of swarming...

Unemployed nurse bees. Overabundance of worker food and royal jelly in the nurse bees and a surplus of wax makers with nothing to do.

Congestion in the hive. This might be noticed by the bees during those cool rainy days when the older bees can not get out to forage. I've read of more swarms happening on a nice warm day after a period of cool days.

Congestion in the brood nest. If the queen and the workers find that there is no room for the queen to lay, this might trigger an impulse to swarm - to find a new place with room for the queen to lay.

Large number of drones

Bees are not consistent in their behavior and the factors that contribute to swarming are:

The age of the queen. The older the queen, the weaker her pheromone and the inability of that pheromone to reach every corner of the hive.

Some types of bee (based on genetics, race, or strain of bee) are more likely to swarm than other types. Each type may swarm for different reasons and at different times. Carniolians are known to overwinter in small clusters, build up quickly in the spring and congest the hive.

Russian bees, even more so.

Crowded hive. Either by the bees themselves or with the eggs/brood.

Weather, nice warm weather after a period of cold or cool or rainy weather.

Ventilation. **Lawrence John Connor** in his book *Increase Essentials* mentions that those hives with proper ventilation

swarm less often.



A relocated queen cell that was originally on the box wall



A 2015 Swarm

Methods to prevent swarming...

Swarms happen and sometimes there's nothing you can do to prevent them - but there are things you can do to reduce the chances that the bees will swarm.

Open up the brood nest. Just expand the brood nest and give the queen a place to lay. See: <http://www.bushfarms.com/beesswarmcontrol.htm> for instructions on how.

Swarm prevention using the Demaree method. Download this nice PDF to learn how http://countryrubes.com/images/Swarm_Prevention_By_Demaree_Method.pdf

If you already see queen cells or queen cups with brood, split the hive and make them think they swarmed. Move the queen and a portion of the bees to a new hive or nuc. Kind of like a cut down split <http://www.bushfarms.com/beessplits.htm#cutdown> or artificial swarm <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/artswarm.html>

Remove the swarm cells ...actually this may not stop the bees from swarming but it does often give you a little more time (a few days) to do something.

There are many other method. A quick Google search should help you out - or talk with other beekeepers and see what they suggest!

Seth's List Of Honey Bee Significant Plants

At the April 2015 meeting, **Seth Smith** listed off various plants in our area which has some significance to bees and beekeeping in one form or another.

- Big leaf maple tree
- Skunk cabbage - good nectar source. Bears eat it too!!
- Dandelion - packed with pollen
- Mustard - yellow.
- Madrona Tree - white blossom
- Dogwood
- Cascara - good nectar source during the dearth period.
- Dead Nettle is a field weed
- Currant - purple in color
- Pussy Willow are a good nectar source
- Vine maple

- Apples
- Salmon Berry
- Sheppard's Purse is a field weed
- Clover and Red Clover bumble bees like
- Thimble Berry usually blooms during the nectar dearth.
- Wild Rose blooms during the dearth
- Nine Bark blooms during the dearth
- Lynden Tree
- Fireweed
- Butter Cup blooms during the dearth and have no value, no nectar for honey bees
- Himalayan Blackberry



First blackberry bloom found in 2014 - May 31st

