



THE HONEYBEE TIMES

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President's Message

Well, looks like we made it through another January in NorthEast Ohio. The days are getting longer and Spring can't be too far off, can it? Seed catalogs have been coming in the mail on a regular basis, the Great Big Home & Garden Show is coming up and GCBA had a booth and was a Speaker at the NARI Home Improvement Show at the I-X Center.

Even if the groundhog sees his shadow, there will still be 6 more weeks of Winter before Spring arrives.

Just because it's cold and there's a little bit of snow on the ground doesn't mean there isn't anything to do with beekeeping:

Watch a movie: Queen of the Sun, Ulee's Gold, More than Honey, The 'B' Movie, etc...

<http://strathconabeekeepers.blogspot.ca/p/bee-videos.html>; for a listing of bee related things...

Catch up on new (or old) editions of your favorite publication. You may come across an article that may apply to your current situation with your bees.

Read a book – fiction or non-fiction: Tales from the Hive, The Beeman, etc... Many of the books are available for Free at your local library.

or try this link

<http://strathconabeekeepers.blogspot.ca/p/the-beekeepers-library.html>

Look into doing some Queen Rearing; especially if you have a very strong hive. Ohio raised Queens are very desirable.

Take a look at your woodenware and start some maintenance with re-stapling your frames, taking off burr comb, maybe think about replacing your plastic base with wax base, etc...

Only have one hive (so far)? Look into expanding your apiary by adding a second hive (make sure your local ordinances will allow this).

Try something new: candle making, soap making, lip balm, hand cream/lotions.

Beekeeping classes are starting on February 3rd and running each Wednesday through February 24th at 7:00pm at the Cleveland Metroparks Rocky River Nature Center. Topics covered range from Beginning your hive to Bee Anatomy to Bee Diseases and our March 9th Meeting will cover Swarm Management.

Congratulations to Patti Richards who had the winning ticket on the complete hive raffle (generously donated by Queen Right Colonies) that was drawn at the January Meeting. Patti is currently a 'no bee' and is taking classes this year and she is extremely excited about winning the raffle.

We awarded two Scholarships this year: Andrew Koranda and Malcolm Campbell. It will be nice to have them attend the classes and events this year. Hopefully their hives will produce a good amount of honey for them.

The Vice President slot is still open to anyone who may be interested (it looks great on a job resume).

EarthFest is coming up on April 17th at the Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds in Berea. GCBA will once again have a booth there. Hopefully we will have a package of bees installed close to the time of this event.

Our GCBA Conference will be on May 21st at the Fairgrounds. We are pleased to have Ross Conrad as our Keynote Speaker. More details on this to follow.

I am looking forward to seeing all of you at the February classes and getting a chance to meet the next group of Urban Farmers: BeeKeepers. Remember to check out our FaceBook page for an interesting blend of postings.

Larry Theurer

Upcoming Events

March 9, 2016 GCBA MEETING

Rocky River Nature Center

7-9PM

Denzil St. Clair – how to prevent your hive from swarming and what to look for



2016 Beekeeping Classes

Learn all you need to know about becoming a beekeeper in this series of four classes on Wednesdays in February. Registering for classes also includes a family membership for one year. **The cost for the Beginning Beekeeping program is \$50.**

Class Dates –

February 3, 10, 17, 24

Feb. 3 – Getting Started in Beekeeping

Feb. 10 – Beekeeping Management

Feb. 17 – Improving Your Skills

Feb. 24 – Bee Diseases and Pests

Location – Rocky River Nature Center 24000 Valley Pkwy, North Olmsted, 44070

Time – 7pm till 9pm

Cost – \$50.00

Educational material – “Beekeeping for Dummies” – may be purchased during the classes for an additional cost.



Tri-County Beekeepers Association Inc. 38th Annual Spring Beekeeping Workshop

March 4-5, 2016 - Wooster, Ohio

"Beekeeping in 3D - Detection, Disease, Doctoring"



Absconding Bees or Death by Varroa

FOUND ON <http://www.honeybeesuite.com/did-they-abscond-or-die-from-varroa/>

This past fall, I received many reports and questions about absconding bees, perhaps fifty in all. Every year I get these and I must admit that I've always taken the beekeepers' word for it when they said their bees absconded.

But this year I realized the sheer number of reports was off-kilter somehow. Yes, honey bees abscond on occasion, but it is rare, and it is usually the result of untenable conditions in the hive.

Absconding due to thymol

Only twice have I seen absconding myself. The first time was in the middle of a treatment with thymol (Apilife var) for *Varroa* mites. I found the cluster, along with their marked queen, in a nearby cedar tree where I was able to capture them. With a bit of research, I discovered other beekeepers who had similar experiences with thymol, especially when daytime temperatures spiked above the recommended treatment threshold.

Absconding due to scavengers

The second time one of my colonies absconded, I received a call from the landowner where I kept an outyard. She said yellowjackets were going in and out of one of my hives. By the time I got there, the bees were pouring out of the hive and clustering below the hive stand, queen and all. I was able to drop the cluster in an empty hive where it stayed. When I opened the original hive, I found it teeming with yellowjackets, bee bits, and ripped and dripping combs.

Other beekeepers have reported absconding after severe infestations with wax moths and small hive beetles. But in all three of these cases, the proximate cause was a scavenger, which means the colony was

weak to start with. A healthy, vibrant colony is generally able to control attacks of yellowjackets, beetles, and wax moths. A weakened or hungry colony, however, may decide it is losing the battle and opt to leave. At least, this is how it appears.

Not absconding, but something else

The vast majority of the reports I heard this fall appeared not to be the result of mite treatments or scavengers. Instead, the stories, nearly identical in all cases, claimed the following:

- The colony that “absconded” was the largest in the apiary, or one of the largest.
- The incident occurred in September, October, or November.
 - The colony seemed normal during a recent inspection, usually between one and four weeks prior, and then suddenly disappeared.
- The beekeeper did not see the bees leave or find them later.
- Honey was left in the hive or it had clearly been robbed (as evidenced by ripped cells).
- A small amount of brood remained in the hive.
- A small number of listless bees lingered on the combs, but the rest were gone.
- The queen was missing.

At first, I wondered if an influx of Africanized genes into the larger population was causing an increase in absconding, but I could find no evidence for that theory in recent literature. So I spent considerable time re-reading the reports (at least those I could find) and concluded that nothing about them suggested absconding. Instead, the observations listed are classic signs of collapse due to *Varroa* mites.

A plethora of non-treatments

Where I could, I went back and asked those beekeepers how they treated for mites and when. The answers were a hodgepodge, but some examples are listed below:

- I didn't see any mites so I didn't treat
- I dusted with powdered sugar in the spring and fall
- I used Honey-B-Healthy
- I used wintergreen patties
- I bought a local queen
- I have a screened bottom board

While there is nothing wrong with doing these things, none of them—even in combination—will handle a mite problem. Many different philosophies have evolved for raising bees in the world of *Varroa*, but learning to recognize an infestation seems like a logical first step.

Often, when I suggest a colony disappeared due to *Varroa* mites instead of absconding, I am roundly trounced. “No, they were fine last week.” “It’s not possible because it was my strongest colony.” “The colony was new this year, so it couldn’t have mites.” I find it intimidating to say anything.

What we know about *Varroa* collapse

Based on observations going back many years, beekeepers collectively know a lot about collapse due to *Varroa*. Some key points:

- The number of mites in a colony increases as the bee population increases. But when the bee population begins to decrease in the fall, you are faced with more mites per bee. Likewise, when drone production stops, the mites move into the worker brood. This is the reason colony death from mites skyrockets in September, October, and November.
- Large colonies support huge numbers of mites. When these colonies contract in preparation for winter, the number of mites in the hive is astronomical. Large colonies—even those that appear healthy—are often the first to fail due to the sheer number of mites.
- Not only do the large ones fail, but they fail fast. Some say that a large colony can collapse within a week. This “here today, gone tomorrow” aspect is what leads beekeepers to think their hive absconded.
- Oddly enough, sometimes smaller colonies do better against mites. Their smallness may have been caused by swarming, queen supersedure, or splitting, all of which produces a brood break sometime in the season, which means less brood was raised and fewer mites were produced.
- Colonies that have collapsed from mites often leave behind honey, sometimes large amounts. This is especially obvious when the colonies collapse during cold months when predators are less likely to clean out the combs.
- Colonies that collapsed from mites often leave behind some brood. This occurs because life in the hive was preceding normally until a large influx of mites took them down. Because it happens so fast, it can easily occur within the 21-day brood cycle. The result is a patch of brood in an otherwise empty hive.
- The queen may be missing for a number of reasons. She may have been infected with viruses and died, or she may have starved, or she may have died of exposure because her work force is gone. Her body may have been removed from the hive or she could have fallen into the hive debris. A dead and shriveled queen is hard to spot in a pile of bee bodies.

Where the bees go has always puzzled me, but there have been many observations:

- In the beginning, the live bees drag out as many bodies as possible. This is more obvious in poor weather when they leave them just outside the door. During warmer or drier days, they will fly them further away so the dead go unnoticed.
- Sick bees will often fly out and die for the good of the colony. Many people have observed this behavior. On cursory inspection, the dying bees look fine, but they are not.
- When the hive is sufficiently weakened, predators and scavengers may move in. This can give the appearance that they are the cause of the problem when, in fact, they are the result of it.

- Sometimes bees have been seen to “abscond” but not in a coordinated way. Instead, individuals may flee from the colony and take up residence in a nearby hive. This drifting spreads mites to other colonies.

I don't know why beekeepers are unwilling to believe or admit their bees died of mites. If I suggest any other cause of death, they are likely to accept it—or at least consider it. But mention mites, and the answer is usually a resounding “No way!” A stigma associated with mites suggests that you are somehow lacking in ability as a beekeeper if you lose a battle with *Varroa* mites.

Another common misconception is that mites are easily visible by the beekeeper. In fact, mites make a point of hiding from view. They spend a lot of time beneath capped brood cells and are rarely seen on adult bees. Even if phoretic mites are present on the adults, they can remain partially concealed between segments.

Whatever the reason for dismissing the mite problem, it's sad because by denying the evidence we preclude an opportunity to learn and improve. Like most conundrums, the more you know, the more successful you will be.

What to look for

I would prefer you didn't take my word for it, but do a postmortem on the hive that you suspected of absconding. The first clues to death by *Varroa* are listed above, that is, a suddenly empty hive that still contains honey and a patch of brood. But if you want more evidence, here are some other things to look for:

- Look for guanine deposits inside the brood cells. These are white, crystalline patches that adhere to the top of the cell. Randy Oliver at [Scientific Beekeeping](#) has a nice description.
- If there is capped brood, open the cells, pull out the pupae and look for varroa mites.
- Sift through the debris on the bottom board and search for dead mites.

While honey bees will abscond on occasion, it is rare, especially in races of the European honey bee such as *Apis mellifera ligustica* and *A.m.carnica*. Before chalking up your lost colony to something that rarely happens, do a thorough postmortem on your empty hive and keep an open mind.



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