



# The PSBA BUZZ

February 2007

Volume 8, Issue 2

EVENTS at the  
Arboretum Center  
Graham Visitor Center  
2200 Arboretum Drive E.,  
Seattle, WA 98112  
(Meetings are the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday  
of each month except July and  
December.)

Feb. 27, '07  
MEETING 6:30-9 pm  
Beginners Instruction  
6:30-7:15 pm  
Main Presentation:  
Ideas, Gadgets, and  
Other Small Devices  
for Better  
Beekeeping?"

March 27, 2007  
Business of Beekeeping

April 24, 2007  
Turkey BeEcotour

## Hive Calendar

On the first 55 F+ afternoon, go through hives briefly: clean hive bottom boards and clean out dead hives. Feed hives that will not otherwise make it to summer. Feed all hives in order to medicate with fumagillin (Fumidal B). If medicating in the spring with Apistan or Coumaphous, install at the middle of March to allow enough time after removal for the required 'medication free' period before installing honey supers for the blackberry flow.

Tracheal mites are probably the worst problem for bees this time of year. The winter bees live a long time and therefore have multiple generations of mites living in their trachea. Treating for tracheal mites at this time of year could save a hive. It is too cool for crystalline menthol to be effective but menthol-soaked towels are shredded by the bees and dispersed throughout the hive. See the recipe in "Treatment of the Month" at the end of the newsletter.

Reverse the brood chamber if the brood is entirely in the upper box. This has the effect of giving the queen open frames above the brood chamber, giving her the sense of plenty of room, thus diminishing the swarm instinct. While you're at it, this would be a good time to rotate out old comb. If replacing with foundation, hives should be fed with sugar water with 1:1 ratio, sugar:water.

You will note that bees have started bringing in pollen. Pollen sources in February may include Crocus, Heather, Skunk Cabbage or Pussy Willow.

*-Based on Roy Thurber's Bee Chats, Tips and Gadgets*

## Club Notes

I was sitting in my backyard the other day reading and a bee landed on my arm. Because it was almost 60 degrees, I wore a short-sleeved shirt and while I waited for the bee to finish resting and fly off, I thought now would be a good time to take a look at my hives. I figured that, on a sunny warm day, they would either be out or dead. I was right. One of my hives, a very strong one that produced a lot of honey last year, had a few bees coming and going. Another hive, which was a late season swarm that never filled up the two foundation boxes, was abandoned and probably dead.

These days, beekeepers have a lot to deal with. The focus on different diseases seems to come and go. They are prevalent one year and rare the next. The standard of treatment was strong pesticides for years. Now we have new treatments that are less toxic to the beekeeper, the bees and the environment. The most up to date, current information is often discussed at our meetings:

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timing of treatments, correct dosage and handling of medications are all important. Our club is one of the best ways to stay in front of the latest technology, find out what has been tried and what is working, and what fellow beekeepers are experiencing in our area. Just today I read an article in the Seattle P.I. about a new illness which is killing bees [http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/national/1501ap\\_dying\\_bees.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/national/1501ap_dying_bees.html). We learn what to do and what not to do. I often tell prospective members that the club is a great place to hear about mistakes instead of having to experience them.

Each year, our winters and summers can be very different. One year it will be cold and dry during the winter, another may be warm and wet. Some springs, it seems to rain for months. Others are bone dry. Each condition dramatically affects our bees. What treatments to use for them? When to use them? What to think about for next month? What new supplies are working? These questions are answered during our meetings which start with the 'Beginner's Discussion' at 6:30 pm. Although the basics are discussed, there is useful information even for seasoned beekeepers. The second part of our meetings is a program discussing a specific aspect of beekeeping.

Beekeeping may seem like a complicated process, but once you get into it and have built your own hives, it is well worth it. When the bees are flying, something as simple as a bee landing on your arm can bring a pleasant appreciation of nature and your place in it.

*Richard Sirota, PSBA president*

# Winter Waiting

By Jason Nelson

Late in December, as the snow came falling, it came home to me that I was a beekeeper. For a brief moment the wind ceased its moan and I knocked against the hive wall. An eternity passed before I heard it – the sound of a thousand wings inside roused from their winter rest. I retreated to the safety of the house. The warm buzzing inside of me was all the confirmation that I needed. Now I face a question more daunting than finding the queen in an angry hive: How does a beekeeper get through the winter?

The bees can only gather and wait as they have for millions of years, but for them patience bears no risk. Their instinct is fixed and reliable. No bee has ever come to the first day of spring and struggled to remember what to do. Not so the beekeeper. At least, not so *me*. I have to work from one week to the next just to remember what "normal" looks like. Through the summer I build momentum that peaks with the last inspections of fall. *This* is how the colony looks. *This* is what is right. The bees keep no clock in the hive but they know the days. With the turn and tilt of seasons they convert their zeal for growth to a fixation on survival. Beekeepers are not so well tuned.

The first cold week I miss inspection day and feel disappointment. Two weeks later I am itching for a bee fix. By the end of the month I'm suffering from full withdrawal. I paint every box I own twice, glue, package, filter and fiddle. On weekdays I flip through the catalog and consider the pages of possibilities. On Saturdays I tap the window with my hive tool and press my fingers to the glass, cursing the rain. Bees cluster together for warmth. Beekeepers huddle in meetings, reliving the glory of past harvests. I wonder at times if in the heart of the cluster the old bees boast, "and then I hauled in five *grams* of pollen. Yes,

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[www.pugetsoundbees.org](http://www.pugetsoundbees.org)

[www.psbees.org](http://www.psbees.org)

[www.beegeek.com](http://www.beegeek.com)

from one flower." I doubt it. Since they don't sleep they can't find solace in dreams of warm days and fresh blooms. Instinct tells them to hold on, to wait for a spring that will come, that must come.

It's been months now since I last saw them free flying, months since I opened the hive for a dose of wonder. Each day I look at the soggy grass. I know what I'm looking for can't be there yet - The yellow blooms that bear the first pollen, the herald of days when warmer weather wakes the hive. When we return to our patterns, our instincts. When the bees resume their growing, gathering, and raising and I my study of them. Last night the weather man said storms and cold, wind and snow stretched through the weeks to come. I gave the catalog one last glance, one final flip, then turned off the light and burrowed down in my bed. I can't say that bees dream of spring to get through the winter—only that beekeepers do.

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## February Meeting

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2007

Beginners Instruction: 6:30-7:15 pm

Van Sherod's beginner lesson precedes the main presentation.

Main Presentation: 7:30-9 pm

**Ideas, Gadgets, and Other Small Devices for Better Beekeeping?"**

**By Bob Clark, honorary lifetime trustee**

This is an informal talk showing some beekeeping equipment invented, modified, adapted, ripped-off, and tried over four decades of laid-back urban, farm, and migratory beekeeping. All these devices employed some basic principle of beekeeping and bee behavior and some worked better than others but they were all fun to try. Use your own ingenuity to improve on your existing equipment, tools, and systems and maybe you too can reinvent some basic beekeeping approach.

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## Bees In the News

Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD)

The beekeeping community is abuzz with news of a "new" disease called colony collapse disorder. <http://agininfo.psu.edu/news/07Jan/HoneyBees.htm> A working group has been put together to study the 2006 outbreak of Colony Collapse Disorder. The Mid-Atlantic Apiculture Research and Extension Consortium has issued a preliminary report of the group to describe in detail what is known at this time. <http://maarec.cas.psu.edu/pressReleases/FallDwindleUpdate0107.pdf>

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## Announcements

Swarm List

The 2007 swarm list will be finalized this month. Inclusion on the list is free. You can have your name at the top of the list in bold for a cost of \$10. Come to the February meeting to get your name on the list.

Mentor Program

Are you a new beekeeper that needs a little guidance? We will pair new beekeepers with a mentor to help them learn. We will also make available a list of additional mentors and talking points. Cost is \$20 for association members.

### Hobby Beekeeping Class

John deGroot will be teaching a 10 hour classroom course in becoming a hobby beekeeper through Discovery University, 3 blocks west of Northgate Mall. The calls will be two sessions of noon until 5 pm on Saturday March 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> and will cost about \$48. Register online at

<http://www.discoveru.org/classes/detail.cfm?CID=2505>

### Apitherapy Course, April 26 – 29, 2007, Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina

The American Apitherapy Society (AAS) has named the Raleigh/Durham area of North Carolina as the location of its **Charles Mraz Apitherapy Course & International Conference (CMAACC)**. Now in its 12th year, the annual apitherapy training focuses on the therapeutic use of products of the beehive, including honey, pollen, propolis, royal jelly and bee venom therapy.

<http://www.apitherapy.org/news.html>

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## Treatment of the Month

### Menthol-Soaked Towels

#### 1): Measure and mix components:

Place two standard packs of menthol crystals (3.4 ozs. or 100 grams) in an 8 oz. (118.3 cc) measuring cup, then add canola oil to fill. Microwave for 4 mins. at 50% power. Check to see that all crystals dissolved--if not, microwave for an additional minute at 50% power. Must be used while warm otherwise crystals will reform.

#### 2): Add to paper towels:

Remove 30 paper towels from one roll; fold in half and stack. Put stack of paper towels into a large zip-lock bag and add 1 cup of warm menthol-canola.

Zip the bag shut then squeeze the towels in the bag until all towels are evenly saturated. If one end of towels are somewhat dry, turn the bag sideways putting dry end down--in about 10 minutes, all will be evenly saturated.

Thus, one cup of menthol-canola mix will treat 30 paper towels--using 2 towels per colony, this will treat 15 colonies.

Towels can be stored at room temperature indefinitely if the bag is zipped closed.

#### 3): Add to colonies:

Do not add to colonies while a honey flow is on. Place one paper towel over the top bars of each brood chamber. Best time to treat is September. (Tracheal mites are usually not a problem from May to September, so no menthol needs to be used until the time that mites begin to build up in late August or September). Colonies can be treated anytime during the winter when temperatures rise above about 45 F. We recommend this treatment whenever tracheal mites are found; additional treatments can be made in December, January and February. The bees will chew up the paper towels and discard them at the entrance in 3-4 days (or longer in winter). This mix caused no harm to our bees but definitely reduced or eliminated the tracheal mites.

**Don Jackson's Shop Towel technique:** A very similar technique was published in the February issue of the American Bee Journal by Don Jackson (Jackson, Don. 1997. Tracheal mites, menthol, and shop towels. Amer. Bee J. 137(2):138-139).

He used a 50-  
of shop towels

Editor's note:  
crystals. It  
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