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# THE BEE LINE

*The Newsletter of the Oregon State Beekeepers Association*

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Volume 28, Number 2

March 2003

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## Beekeeping in the South (of Oregon, that is!)

By Mary Moss

To continue the series on beekeeping practices in various regions of Oregon, we picked up the telephone and headed south. It wasn't long before we caught up with Morris Curtis, a long-time OSBA member and beekeeper who practices his craft down in the Medford-Eagle Point region of Oregon.

Morris' father kept bees, and Morris learned early on how to catch swarms. Beekeeping was a real family interest all around, says Morris, aided and abetted by their friend, Delmar Smith, a well-known beekeeper in the area. (Smith also owned the Crater Rock Museum at Central Point.)

"I learned a lot from Delmar," Morris says appreciatively. "One of the most valuable things he taught me was how to efficiently assess a hive's health without even popping the lid. After working with Delmar, I knew exactly what signs to look for. I'd just walk by and know what was what from the indications outside the hive. This was essential," Morris emphasizes, "because I had 700-800 colonies to look after while I worked full time at a mill."

Things went well. "It was easy," says Morris, "That is, it wasn't bad until the mites came on the scene. Then, I couldn't just 'eyeball' the hives anymore. By that time, though, there was no more mill work. The beekeeping then became very challenging; I had to learn how to handle the mite control and abatement procedures. I've found that

doing 'damage control' is what works; trying to completely omit the mites is an impossible task."

Morris says he has a pretty good handle on it, now. "I've been working with oils for years; you can control the mite problem with oil, if it's done efficiently through a fogging device. It's a whole new concept brought forward by beekeepers from Italy, and it works well in Oregon. However, it has to be done consistently, with no lapses," he cautions. (Morris says that a recent issue of the *American Bee Journal* carried an article about fogging with oil.)

Morris is clearly enthused about the fogging process. "George Steffensen, a great guy who's in our bee club down here, saw the fogging machine on the Internet, contacted me, and helped get things going. He's our 'resident scientist' for the bee club, which is very helpful."

The Southern Oregon bee club membership is "pretty active," Morris adds, "usually about 30 people or so. Stan Kee (the club's president) and all of us work together."

Beekeepers in Southern Oregon face different climate characteristics than, say, those experienced by the Willamette Valley or Coastal beekeepers. In the high desert in summer, the  
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## Oregon State Beekeepers Association

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## President's Message

By Kenny Williams

Spring comes earlier in California, where I am writing this month's message. Conditions are more dry than we have had for several years and delivering the bees has gone smoothly. Somehow the absence of mud can affect your entire outlook on life.

However, in order to keep the position of honeybee entomologist at Oregon State University, it will be necessary to slog through the political process. I would like to remind everyone how important it is to write your state representative and senator. Please see Fred VanNatta's sample letter in the last issue of *The BeeLine*.

*Editor's note: see first item in BeeMail, page 5.*

## Haiku for Computers

Having one of those days on your computer? Here are some actual error messages from Japan, written in haiku (form of poetry used to convey a timeless message, often achieving a wistful yearning and powerful insight through extreme brevity).

*Chaos reigns within.*

*Reflect, repent and reboot.*

*Order shall return.*

*Serious error.*

*All shortcuts have disappears.*

*Mind. Screen. Both are blank.*

*Yesterday it worked.*

*Today it is not working.*

*Windows is like that.*

*Your file was so big.*

*It might be very useful.*

*But now it is gone.*

*Three things are certain:*

*Death, taxes and lost data.*

*Guess which has occurred.*

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## Beekeeping in Western Oregon

By Harry Vanderpool, WVBA

### March:

- March is the month to begin regular hive inspections and construct records for each hive. Hive records will allow us to make safe and timely decisions in our operations.
  - Include such issues as: Disease, Queen right, Number of frames of brood, Stores of feed, Combs needing replacement, etc.
  - Numbering hives is an important chore for a clear morning. You may consider painting 2 inch numbers on the front and back of your lids for easy identification. Numbering the lids rather than the hive bodies allows for better flexibility in terms of tracking splits or die-outs.
  - Swarm management begins in March with our thoughtful evaluation of hive inspections and notes. Equalize brood between healthy colonies. Don't get carried away! Make sure there are enough bees to cover frames of brood added to colonies.
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- Equalize frames of feed between healthy colonies. Don't let colony stores get below 15 lbs. Feed light colonies light sugar syrup (1 or 1 ½:1 ratio).
- Test hives for varroa population. Treat colonies for varroa as early in the month as possible. Follow the label instructions to the letter on chemical acaricides in order to reduce resistance. Make a note to retest a sampling of treated colonies within a month to assess the efficacy of your treatment strategy.
- If you find a queenless colony, move it 30 feet from its original position. Slide adjoining hives toward the failed hives location. Shake all of the frames of bees onto the ground. They will drift into the hives nearest their original hive location.
- Prepare your nuc boxes as was outlined thoroughly at the conference last fall. You weren't there? That's too bad! Well, now what are you going to do?
- Finish assembling equipment and supplies for this year's splits and increase.
- Check stored frames for wax moth infestation.
- Remove mouse guards and entrance reducers on all but the weakest hives.
- Look for colonies with nosema disease (fecal matter streaked on the hives and top bars). Treat with Fumidil-B according to label instructions. Mark the hives and make notes in your hive records. Continue treatment for at least 3 years to see an improvement. (Mussen)
- Scrape bottom boards clear of debris. Repair or replace failing bottom boards
- Order queens or packages as soon as you can. Queen breeders are busy during this time of the year. Give them as much lead time as you can
- Program some balance into your beekeeping schedule. Plan ahead to attend upcoming events in your beekeeping community.

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thermometer can climb to 100-110 degrees F. Rainfall averages just 18-10 inches per year, and very little snow falls in the valley where the Curtis bees are kept. Sometimes, getting through the Siskiyou Mountain range to pollinate the California almond crop can be challenging, Morris says, "but we can pick our travel dates pretty much, since we're in such close geographical proximity. We generally load up bees the night before the planned trip, then, depending on the weather, we may wait until the snow's off the road." Morris says that the Weed area is worse than the Siskiyou for snow on the road.

"I say 'we,'" Morris pauses. "Actually, I've turned over most of the bee business to our youngest son. I sure can't do the heavy lifting much anymore, my shoulders and arms are giving out." Morris says that they've also quit doing summer pollination runs, because the climate is just too hot and dry. Instead, they concentrate on honey production. "There are good crops of summer vetch, manzanita madrone, blackberry, wildflowers, clover, and so forth. We get plenty of honey."

"Of course, the summer crops must have rain in June," says Morris. "Other than that, there's a silver lining to having so little moisture and fog, such as the northern and coastal beekeepers face. We don't have the hassles of Nosema, which is great. Typically, we'll have perhaps one total cold month—half of December and half of January where temperatures can drop to 15-20 degrees at night. It'll be about 40 degrees then if it's raining. So, we luck out that way."

The Curtis bees are kept on pallets, and Morris and his son follow standard treatment procedures for American Foulbrood prevention. If there's not enough early pollen, Morris often sprinkles a substitute on the ground, during very dry weather only. Otherwise, he's found that setting out a bee box with a dry bottom board and sprinkling a one-inch layer of the pollen substitute on it works well. "The life span of bees on spring pollen isn't as good," Morris comments, "They do better with drier pollens." Morris believes that pollen traps are still a

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good indicator of a hive's health. "If you're trying to make a quick assessment, you can read quite a bit from a trap," he says.

He quotes *Apimondia* as a terrific research source, saying that he read its research papers on pollen studies avidly when he started keeping bees. "That's where I found out that flowers containing nectar give off an ultraviolet light that the bees detect, and also, what to do with a drone layer," he chuckles. "You can learn all kinds of stuff there."

One of Morris' big concerns nowadays is the use of chemical sprays by farmers. "If bees leave the hives and don't return, and we're not told what kind of spray is used on or around a crop, then there's a problem. All we can do is wonder. It's so important that we be accurately informed."

Nowadays, Morris and his family are kept busy with more than just bees. They also run a truck garden, selling organic vegetables in local grower's markets as well as operating their own farm stand. "That garden keeps us so busy, we wouldn't have time for pollination service even if the climate was different," he says. "We're knee-deep in lots of hot and sweet peppers, okra, ever-bearing strawberries, tomatoes, greens, root stuff (except for potatoes), and all those good things."

An anecdote from the recent Herman Larsen story (*Bee Line*, January 2003) brought a laugh to Morris. "That business about where to put the hives in an orchard rang true," he says. "Some people don't realize that setting bees in the middle of the yard or field *is* probably the best choice. Or you can put 'em in a row down the side. Now, here's an example with a similar situation: you've got a bunch of mushroom pickers out in a field. Some will fan out and get away from the competition; they probably get more mushrooms that way. Well, bees come out of the hive, make a big circle in the air, and then each hive's field bees find a section to work and pretty much stick together."

Ignorant beekeepers who don't know these things are a hazard to farmers, says Morris. "Is the beekeeper on track or just full of 'b.s.'? The farmer's scratching his head, wondering. Sometimes, though, the ignorance *is* on the farmer's part, like

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the guy in Herman's story. I've had my own run-ins with 'em, and have had to stop and say, "Hey--did you know that those bees can *fly*?" He laughs.

Then Morris grows serious. "Really, though, the beekeepers who don't know what they're doing, who are cheap, stingy and always cutting corners on medications and other necessities--they are a pain! I won't sell bees to inexperienced beekeepers." Morris says flatly. "I tell the person, "Join a club first and learn all the 'hows,' *then* we'll sell you the bees. Otherwise, the bees will die."

In his years as a beekeeper, Morris has enjoyed working with 4H and FFA clubs. "We had lots of fun, got the kids catching swarms; they're good little beekeepers. If they really get into it, they'll find that 'bees is a disease,'" Morris chuckles. "I may not be able to heft 'em around like I used to, but I'm still 'in there' and interested. Once you get started with bees, ya can't quit!"

*Mary Moss is a beekeeper and freelance writer who lives in Forest Grove. She is a past officer with TVBA and a member of the OSBA.*

## Bee-Mail from the Honey Board

**Share the story with elected officials:** *The Story of Pollination* and *The Story of Honey* ([nhb.org/pollination](http://nhb.org/pollination)) can help your neighbors, customers, farmers and elected officials understand the critical role honey bees play in home gardens, wildlife habitats and agriculture. Teach them about the value of honey and its many uses in foods, health and healing throughout the centuries. Each story can be ordered in sets of five for only \$2.50/set.

**Cold and Sore Throat Season Calls for Honey:** Try something warm and cozy to keep the winter chills away – a cup of Hot Spiced Tea ([honey.com/recipes/bevs/spicedt](http://honey.com/recipes/bevs/spicedt)). Got a sore throat? Try Honey-Citrus Soother ([honey.com/recipes/bevs/soother](http://honey.com/recipes/bevs/soother)).

**California Nut Growers Increase Demand:** The *Modesto Bee* reports that in a time of California crop surplus and pullouts, growers of almonds, pistachios and walnuts (some facing record production) show no sign of backing away from crops they grew on 848,000 acres with a total value of almost \$1.4 billion. Through tough aggressive marketing campaigns in the US and abroad, some touting nutritional claims, growers have increased demand to keep pace with production.

**Shortage of Bees for Almond Pollination Noted:** According to the California Farm Bureau Federation beekeepers and almond industry officials agree there is a shortage of bees for almond pollination this year. Requests from almond growers keep coming but beekeepers say they have committed all their hives. Mites have colony counts down and beekeepers have stayed home because honey prices are high enough to offset potential pollination revenue.

**Famous Beekeepers presented:** Many famous people were also beekeepers. Discover who they were and what they said about honey and bees. See [ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Beekeeping/fame/](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Beekeeping/fame/).

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**Bee-Mail** is available online at [honeybuzz@nhb.org](mailto:honeybuzz@nhb.org).

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## American Honey Producers Conference Report

By Dirk Olsen

I was fortunate in having the opportunity to attend the AHPA convention held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana recently. It was a well-attended meeting with people coming from all over the US and Canada.

As you can imagine the beekeepers there were very upbeat with the rise in honey prices over the last year. Vendors and equipment dealers were busy with orders as folks were updating and replacing items long overdue to be replaced. I hope beekeepers can take care of some of their debt load at the same time!

Who could have imagined just a few months ago that we would be enjoying these high honey prices? Did they come about on their own? No. Several factors can be attributed to these high prices. Chinese honey was found to be contaminated with illegal chemicals. Much of the country was in drought and honey production domestically was down. But undoubtedly the most important contributing factor was the efforts of the AHPA, Sioux Honey Association and beekeepers from all across the US and Canada to successfully push through the anti-dumping measure to stop Argentina and China from dumping their honey here into the US. This was not an inexpensive endeavor. Nearly a million dollars was spent getting this through. Was it worth it? Consider this: honey has risen in price by about a buck a pound since the anti-dumping measure began to come into effect. It is estimated that honey production in the US last year will be about 185 million pounds. I'm no mathematician but that tells me that we got 185 million dollars back into beekeepers' pockets for a one million dollar investment. I think it was worth the effort! I am also proud to report that most of the legal bills have been paid up and the law firm retained by the AHPA is satisfied.

Now comes the bad news. Mike Coursey, an attorney from Washington DC who is the point man for us in the anti-dumping matter told us we have achieved our goal for now. Dumping by Argentina and China as stopped. But now new shipper reviews have come in, thirteen of them in all. It has been learned that these foreign honey exporting companies have hired a most prestigious law firm to represent them. As explained, if we do not have legal counsel at these reviews it will be almost certain that these companies will soon be right back at it, dumping their honey in the US, and we will be back to square one. It will be difficult if not impossible to win back the ground we have gained. This will take about \$600,000 in legal fees. Expensive indeed, but consider the alternative. Two years ago this month I sold my light amber honey for 40 cents a pound and was lucky to find a buyer for it at that price. This fall I sold light amber honey for \$1.50 a pound and the buyer was thankful to have it. When the time came up for a vote at the convention if we should continue to pay these fees

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and keep the importers at bay the vote was unanimous. It has been recommended that we donate a penny a pound on our production legal fund. A check sent to AHPA or Sioux Honey will do the job. I gave \$2,500 and figured it was a wise investment. I'm not a tax man, but I see no reason why this can't be written off as a business expense for legal expenses. Please help out with your financial support. You don't need to be a member of AHPA to keep the honey dumping importers where they belong – and it's not here!

This was a four-day conference with many talks given on a wide range of topics. I don't want to review them all but would like to share with you a few things that were meaningful to me.

Dr. Frank Eischen from the Weslaco Lab gave a talk on the effect of fungicide sprays on honeybees and almonds in California. Bottom line is his research shows that the spray Captan is harmful to honeybees and does affect bloom set. He said a short publication should be appearing in the American Bee Journal soon.

Dr. Gordon Wardell gave a talk on his search for a honeybee protein diet to be fed with your syrup. He thinks he has found a formulation that will work but it hasn't been released to the public yet.

The highlight of the convention was the day we spent at the Baton Rouge USDA-ARS Honeybee Breeding Lab. After a morning roundtable discussion with beekeepers that have been using Russian honeybee stock that was developed by the Lab we were treated with a Cajun shrimp feed prepared by the local beekeepers club. The hospitality could not be beat – it's a fact that wherever you go in this world when beekeepers get together there's a chemistry that can't be beat.

The Baton Rouge Lab's mission is to develop bees resistant to disease. They have a program of bringing in Russian stock and developing it to the point where they can be released to the public. This is now occurring and the beekeepers that have had them reported excellent results with them. I am planning on ordering a couple hundred of them this spring and giving them a try.

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The afternoon was spent at the Lab attending different ongoing sessions. The small hive beetle was there to see and an example of the damage they can do. We don't need them here.

Another group session was given by Dr. Jeffrey Harris. He really knew his stuff on varroa. His advice was – don't treat varroa until your levels warrant it. Each year is different and some years varroa treatment may not be necessary.

We got a chance to look at some Russian colonies in the field. They looked good. Not big boomers, but just about right for the month of January. The fellows that have them say they don't consume much honey over winter, are gentle and don't get too swarmy in the spring. Also noted was they work at much lower temperatures than the typical Italians.

Then of course there was the gadget session going on. It seems like nowadays every convention has to have one of these going. The fellow running it had something I've got to get - I've never seen one before. It was a four-arm clamp that you put around those difficult drum rings to suck them in so you can put on your bolt and nut. Anyone know where I can get one, or do I need to have another one made?

Well, I've rambled on long enough. One last thing, though. I was a member of the American Beekeeping Federation for 25 years. It is a good organization with good people in it. But after a lot of thinking I felt my needs and views were not being reflected there. I cautiously joined the AHPA and have now attended two of their conventions. I've had the opportunity to mix with their membership and talk with their leadership. They are good people working for the benefit of the industry on a volunteer basis. Without their leadership and dedication our honey prices would not be where they are now.

The purpose of writing this summary is not to be divisive but to let beekeepers know there is another organization that is working for their benefit. The ranks of the AHPA have swelled from 350 two years ago to nearly 1,000 today. I feel it's important that beekeepers be aware of everyone's

views in the beekeeping community. Again, thanks for reading and let's donate to the antidumping fund, keep the importers at bay and keep honey prices to where they belong for good this time.

*Dirk Olsen owns Olsen Honey Farms in Albany, OR..*

## Executive Board Meeting Highlights January 15, 2003

**Entomology Position at OSU:** Fred VanNatta reported that the Bill he is creating will go to the Ways and Means Committee for \$200,000 for the biennium. The sponsor will be Tom Butler, Representative from Ontario and Kurt Schrader will be noted as "at the request of" on the Bill. Fred is trying to get organizations and businesses involved to support this bill. He created a draft of the bill for interested parties to sign and return to him. Fred asked for help from all attending to approach organizations, companies and individuals for their help. He feels that the most impact will be from organizations and businesses. Harry Vanderpool asked when the bill is introduced, do they need speakers. A suggestion was made to have our next meeting coincide with a Bee Day at the Capitol Building. We could talk to legislators, bring honey bears and inform them of the usefulness of a research position. Kenny asked Fred to write articles for the next few BeeLines to ask for help and inform people of our plans for Bee Day at the Legislature.

**Web site:** Thom Trusewicz reported that the website is updated. A student from Clackamas Community College is working at \$10 per hour to help with the update and keep the site maintained. Phase I is complete. Now Phase II is to help George Hansen get his database on line and to get a pollination page set up. There was a discussion about adjusting the fee for a pollination page from \$200 per page to a more reasonable fee so that it will be used more and to charge pollinators to list their business on the site. Another option would be to charge a little more for an advertisement in the BeeLine and that will include an ad also on the

website. We will have more discussion at our next meeting.

**2003 Conference:** Harry Vanderpool explained that the meeting will be in Hood River. It will be a tri-state conference and he already has Dr. Keith Delaplaine, Dr. John Skinner, Dr. Rick Fell, Dr. John Harbo, Dr. Steve Sheppard and Dr. Michael Burgett lined up for speakers. Harry had attempted to satisfy requests. He will check on the possibility of a Columbia River Gorge Riverboat Brunch for anyone that would like to sign up and pay the costs.

**Code of Ethics:** This issue was passed on from the previous Board. There are issues of unmanaged hives, undercutting and safety issues that were brought to the OSBA's attention. A draft was presented by Harry Vanderpool. Please email Harry with any suggestions you might have. Harry will also write a BeeLine article and ask for suggestions from members.

**Contribution to OSU Research Lab:** Kenny stated we will send the traditional \$250 for 2002 but we asked that Dr. Burgett report back to us on how it is used. We will reevaluate in the future.

**Next meeting:** It was suggested that another meeting be held in May. A date and time will follow but it will probably be held in Salem again.

## Nasty Bees Keep Elephants Away from Dangerous Humans

*Newspaper article forwarded to editor*

A new study suggests that aggressive bees might provide a strategy for protecting African elephants by warding them away from potential conflict with humans. With human populations growing, elephants are increasingly likely to be shot for encroaching on farms. Scientists who saw a vicious attack of African bees on an elephant, and the animal's resulting bee phobia, came up with the idea of using bees to mark certain areas as pachyderm-free.

To test the idea, researchers hung logs containing hives from acacia trees along a river frequented by elephants in central Kenya. Elephants commonly strip the bark to get the sap, but no

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damage was found on the trees with active hives. Empty hives and recorded buzzing also deterred them but were not as effective as live bees.

Molecular biologist Bets Rasmussen of the OGI School of Science and Technology in Hillsboro, OR

called the practice “an excellent idea” because it activates elephants’ sense of sight, hearing and probably smell. That should make elephants more likely to remember danger spots, she said.

**Honey Bee Pest and Disease Updates  
For Hobbyist and Commercial Beekeepers**

Learn the sampling techniques for detection, threshold levels, and control methods for a variety of pests and diseases of honey bees in Oregon. This Friday evening/full-day Saturday workshop provides current information and hands-on experience with recommended practices for managing honey bees. The focus includes varroa mites, tracheal mites, nosema and foulbrood. In addition to the information provided during the workshop, participants will receive lunch during the field day, as well as workshop materials and updates on practices as they become available.

**Spring Workshops**

**Clackamas/Colton area: April 25 (7-9 pm) and April 26 (9am-3 pm)**

**Central Point/White City area: May 23 (7-9 pm) and May 24 (9 am-3 pm)**

**Cost per participant \$15\***

Pre-registration is advised. Although every effort will be made to accommodate on-site registration, lunches cannot be guaranteed nor may workshop materials be immediately available. Confirmation and directions will be sent to participants upon registration. Information is available at <http://www.orsba.org>.

For additional information, please email honeybee [workshop@attbi.com](mailto:workshop@attbi.com) or write:

Honey Bee Workshops  
PO Box 42363  
Portland, OR 97242

**Note:** Additional workshops are being planned for the fall. Let us know if you are interested in one being held in your area.

*\*workshops are supported by a grant from the Oregon Department of Agriculture to the Oregon State Beekeepers Association.*

***For each person registering, please provide the following:***

***Name of participant:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Complete mailing address:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Phone:*** \_\_\_\_\_ ***Email:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Workshop materials: Printed version*** \_\_\_\_\_ ***Powerpoint version on CD:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Any special meal considerations:*** \_\_\_\_\_



***Amount enclosed (number of participants x \$15)***\_\_\_\_\_

*Please make check or money order payable to Honey Bee Workshops and mail this form with payment to Honey Bee Workshops, PO Box 42363, Portland, OR 97242.*

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