A ROOKIE’S FIRST YEAR WITH BEES

Michelle Burke

I’ve always been fascinated by bees, but my decision to become a beekeeper was completely impulsive. When Oscar, my beau Curt’s nine-year-old son, got an ant farm for Christmas, I began digging around on the ‘net for live ants and stumbled across a page that had both ant farms and observation hives. One link led to another, and before I knew it I was at Ruhl Bee Supply in Gladstone, ordering a package and buying woodenware. I knew I could justify the purchase with the beau (ants are his Kryptonite), and I figured Oscar would appreciate the upgrade.

Winter is a long time for an expectant beekeeper, so in the months leading up to the scheduled package arrival in April, I happened upon a forum advertisement by Andrew Schwab, who was selling nucleus colonies. (Took me about five minutes to realize that “nucs” were not WMD, but starter colonies in four- or five-frame boxes.) I placed an order for two and cancelled the package order at Ruhl’s in exchange for more woodenware. I also signed up for their bee school, which I attended even after undergoing jaw surgery the day before. At least once a week I practiced tying my bee veil, and I continued to cruise Internet forums. The obsession had clearly taken hold.

Now, I’m guessing most of my fellow beekeepers remember how uncooperative the weather was last year and how long it took for mated queens to become available, right? I thought I’d die from anticipation before the third week in April arrived. When Drew told me the nucs would be delayed a couple of weeks, I felt like a six-year-old who’d been informed that Santa’s Workshop had been shut down by a labor strike. I continued to indulge my obsession by scouting out used equipment to add to my growing toolkit. Not long after hearing Drew’s news, I arrived at the bee supply store to find it abuzz—literally—with package bees. As I stood in line to purchase two honey sticks and a copy of the Capital Press, I overheard the customer at the register say he needed only one of his two reserved packages.

Well, I thought. It’s rude to use a credit card to buy a newspaper and two ten-cent candies. “Um, if you don’t want it, I’ll buy the

Continued on page 7
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Today a letter came from the State Department of Agriculture to renew our Honey House License. It must be time to think about extracting honey. It is the first week of June, and time to refit and clean the extraction room. Where has the year gone? I guess it is a wake-up call for planning mite control before that sneaks up on us also. By the time you read this, most beekeepers will be extracting their honey crop. It seems only a week ago we were wondering if there was going to be honey to extract. In the past two weeks the blackberries have come into bloom, and the bees have started to fill the supers.

For those with bees in the meadowfoam, it has been a year to remember. For the first time, the weather cooperated for the entire season. While moving the bees in and out, the trucks and forklifts didn’t get buried in mud. The days were warm and sunny. The honey didn’t come in buckets, but, for meadowfoam, there was more honey than usual. Meadowfoam always seems to grow great bees, and this year is no exception. Moving bees into honey crops should keep the kids working in the extraction room.

During the mid-year OSBA Board of Directors meeting,* we decided to make available one paid registration for the fall convention to each affiliated club. This registration is to be used as a money-raising raffle. The suggestion came from Andrew Schawb, president of the Tualatin Valley group. By selling tickets for the raffle during each club meeting before early registration ends, the fall convention will be kept on everyone’s mind. I hope you are making plans for the fall conference. Make it a working vacation with your old beekeeping friends and the new ones you will meet. Mark has lined up a great group of presenters to help us with our most pressing problems and with increasing our enjoyment of beekeeping.

Thinking of enjoying beekeeping, have you thought about showing your honey at the County or State Fair this year? If you have done this before, I hope you will again. If not, talk to others who have and start preparing now. There are many categories for honey and wax, as well as apiary displays.

Chuck

*Note: Minutes from the meeting are being reviewed. They will appear in a future edition of the newsletter.
MISCELLANEOUS

Agricultural Production
Oregon leads the nation in the production of more than a dozen agricultural commodities.

- How does your county rank?
- What are the leading products produced in Oregon?
- How much is exported?

The latest Oregon agriculture production figures, based on data gathered for 2006 by OSU Extension and the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Oregon Office, are now available in the brochure: “Oregon Agriculture: Facts and Figures.”

The brochure is online at: http://oregon.gov/ODA/docs/pdf/pubs/ff.pdf; hardcopies can be obtained from: Katherine Kennedy LeaMaster, Publications and Web Coordinator, Oregon Department of Agriculture, 635 Capitol St NE, Salem OR 97301–2532. Phone: (503) 986–4560; e-mail: kleamast@oda.state.or.us.

CCD Continued
Take care to check for updates on Colony Collapse Disorder at: http://maarec.cas.psu.edu/pressReleases/ColonyCollapseDisorderWG.html. In addition, the May newsletter of the Washington State Beekeepers Association is on their web site at: http://www.wasba.org/. It contains information and links to information about CCD. Send feedback to: Paul Lundy, Newsletter Editor, Washington State Beekeepers Association, PO Box 1331, Kingston WA 98346–1331; phone: (425) 527–4250.

Note: A reminder that links do not work from the newsletter pdf—for the links, click on “Important CCD News,” which appears just below “May 2007 Newsletter” on the web site.

USDA Seeks Comments
The US Department of Agriculture is seeking comments on a proposal for a new national Honey Packers and Importers Research, Promotion, Consumer Education and Industry Information Order. The proposed rule is published in the June 4, 2007, Federal Register, along with a proposed rule on the procedures to be used in the referendum to determine if the program will go into effect. Comments on both rules must be received by August 3, 2007. Mail comments in triplicate to: Research and Promotion Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, Stop 0244, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250–0244; phone: (888) 720–9917; fax: (202) 205–2800; or e-mail: regulations.gov. Copies of the proposed rule and comments that are received may be requested from the same address or viewed at: www.ams.usda.gov/fv/rpdocketlist.htm or www.regulations.gov.

Free Registration for OSBA Conference
One paid registration for the 2007 OSBA Conference is available to each affiliated regional association. This registration is to be used as a money-raising raffle for the association. Tickets can be sold at each monthly meeting prior to the end of early registration for the conference, which is to be held in Newport this year, November 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. Plan to attend, no matter the outcome of the drawing!

In the News
Shannon and Glenda Wooten on the cover of the May/June 2007 issue of California Country. The issue features a story about Wooten’s Golden Queens, which uses modern science along with processes started by Glenda’s Father, Homer Park, and others in breeding queen bees.

Note: Do you have a story to share, an idea, a special technique, a wondering? Please help make this newsletter a resource for folks wanting to know more about bees and beekeeping in the region. Take some time one fine day soon and send comments to the Editor. (Thanks!)
OREGON STATE BEEKEEPERS’ ASSOCIATION RESOURCES

OSBA REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Columbia Basin: Debbie Morgan
3800 Benson Rd, The Dalles; (541) 298-5719

Eastern Oregon: Jordan Dimock
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Metropolitan Area: Doug Woods
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North Coast/Webmaster: Thom Trusewicz
90041 Logan Rd, Astoria
(503) 325-7966; ccbee@intergate.com

Southern Oregon: Pat Morris
1333 Rogue River Hwy, Gold Hills
(541) 855-1402

Willamette Valley: Harry Vanderpool
7128 Skyline Rd S, Salem; (503) 399–3675
shallotman@yahoo.com

OSBA REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Central Oregon Beekeepers
Meets 6:30 pm, third Tuesday, Bend
Deschutes Public Library, Hutch Rm
President: Dennis Gallagher
(541) 389-4776; denbend@coinet.com
Secretary/Treasurer: Glenda Galaba
(541) 383-1775; galaba@msn.com

Coos County Beekeepers
Meets 6:30 pm, third Saturday (except Dec)
Olsen Baxter Bldg, 631 Alder St, Myrtle Pt
President: Thomas Kyelberg
(541) 297-4017; usvi@charter.net
Vice Pres: Spike Richardson; (541) 267-4725
Secretary: Marda Burgdorff; (541) 888-5695
Treasurer: Jane Oku; (541) 396-4016
jane_oku@hotmail.com

Lane County Beekeepers
Meets 7:30 pm, third Tuesday, Eugene
EWEB Meeting Rooms, 500 E 4th Ave
President: Morris Ostrofsky
(541) 685-2875; ostrofsky@pacinfo.com
Vice President: Judy Scher
judy_scher@catdreams.com

Secretary: Barbara Bajec; (541) 767-9086;
mbartels@bbastrodesigns.com
Treasurer: Nancy Ograin
(541) 935-7065; woodrt@pacinfo.com
web site: www.lcbaor.org

Tillamook County Beekeepers
Meets 7:30 pm, first Thursday, Tillamook
Forestry Building, 5005 Third St
President: Bob Allen; (503) 322-3819
Vice President: Terry Fullan
(503) 368-7160; tfullan@nehalemtel.net
Secretary/Treasurer: Wayne Auble

Tualatin Valley Beekeepers
Meets 7:30 pm, last Friday, Beaverton
OSU Ext, #1400, 18640 SW Walker Rd
President: Andrew Schwab
(503) 537–0506; pry4ausi@verizon.net
Vice President: Todd Balsiger
(503) 357-8938; toddbalsiger@comcast.net
Secretary: Preston Gabel
(503) 530-1436; preston@gabelhaven.com
Co-Treasurers: Michael and Brigette Hendrickson
hendricm@ece.pdx.edu

Willamette Valley Beekeepers
Meets 7:30 pm, fourth Monday, Salem
Chemeketa Comm College, Bldg 34, Rm A
President: Richard Farrier; (541) 327–2637
Vice President: Harry Vanderpool
(503) 399–3675; shallotman@yahoo.com
Secretary: Mike Rodia
(503) 364-3275; drodia@yahoo.com
Treasurer: Susan Rauchfuss
(503) 391-5600; smokfoot@cyberis.net
REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Lane County Beekeepers

Ken Ograin notes that blackberries were blooming in May! Ripe cherries in June! He cannot remember cherries this early. Everything is two–three weeks ahead of last year. At the same time, yellow jackets seem to be behind. Ken still sees queens looking for nesting sites.

What does all this mean? Ken says you can blame it on anything you want, but the one thing you can count on is that the honey flow is very early and will be over long before August. Now is the time to start thinking about winter. For the past several years, Ken has been pulling his honey supers by July 15th, which has allowed the bees to store winter food. This season he will be pulling sooner. Ken adds that, since he has been doing this, he has not had to do any feeding. He advises folks to plan for an early end of the honey flow. Also, when planning fall treatments, keep in mind that Nosema is one of the suspects of CCD.

The first weekend of June several members of the Lane County group visited Lynn Royce’s place for a picnic and field day. Lynn gave a demonstration of how she tests queen offspring for hygienic behavior. Ken says that the demo was especially nice as it included making ice cream with the extra liquid nitrogen. Lynn will have Oregon bred and raised queens for sale about the time this newsletter is in the mail.

Note: See a write-up and images of the field day in the June issue of the Lane County newsletter as it becomes available at: www.lcbaor.org.

Portland-Metro Beekeepers

Peter Forrest reports that he visited Anita Alexander at her home in Boring with Marge and Ernie McCormick to present Anita with the group’s Lifetime Membership Award and Hive Tool. Along with her late husband, Lu, Anita and the McCormicks were the NUC of the Portland-Metro group for many years.

From left to right: Marge, Ernie, and Anita during their visit with Peter at Anita’s home in late May this year.

KEEPING BEES IN WESTERN OREGON

Todd Balsiger

- Unless you’re near a commercial crop or at higher elevations, the summer nectar dearth will begin about mid-July. At this point we should be thinking about nest consolidation and harvesting honey.
- Unlike spring, start to crowd the bees. We begin this in earnest in August, but for now don’t leave much empty comb on colonies light on stores in the brood nest. Also, avoid having too many unfilled supers on colonies as the nectar flow tapers off. The bees will put honey only in the center-most combs, an inconvenience at harvest time.
- Continue to keep an eye out for colony health. One indicator is productivity compared to its peers. Any colony falling behind indicates that something may be amiss. Find out what is going on. Did the colony swarm? Is it queenless or diseased?

Continued on page 6
Requeen any colony with undesirable characteristics, such as poor production, poor brood pattern, foulbrood, mean temper, and the like.

For colonies with laying workers (i.e., multiple eggs per cell resting haphazardly and comb riddled with drone cells), quickly remedy the problem. Drone layers damage comb, and the colony is doomed without intervention. Possible remedies include retiring the colony or shaking the bees out a distance away and reassembling the colony in place with an added nuc.

Keep on the lookout for foulbrood. Foulbrood-infected colonies make easy targets for robbing. Foulbrood is highly infectious, and early detection will prevent the disease from spreading as well as make control much easier. The most important step in control is the destruction of long-lived bacterial spores by burning.

Remove and extract supers. At this time of year, half-filled cells may have been sufficiently dehydrated, and the bees simply ran out of nectar to cap the cell off. Strike the frame and see if raw nectar falls out. If not, the frame is ready to extract.

Provide water continuously.

Test random colonies for Varroa load. Be prepared to treat colonies for Varroa and for brood diseases in early August.

BEES SEEKING WELLNESS & SE HOMES

Peter Forrest

On the first weekend of June a swarm tried to check into Providence Hospital on Glisan Street in Portland. With recent national attention regarding the plight of bees, this swarm was probably concerned about CCD and decided on its own to get checked out by the medical personnel there.

From what I have been able to learn, the bees had gathered on the second floor window of a patient’s room throughout the weekend. Although they had thus far been unsuccessful in getting examined, the patient who occupied the room where the swarm gathered enjoyed watching their activities. No doubt the marvel of watching a swarm quickened his recovery. (Only hearsay.)

My friend and beekeeping partner, Ernie McCormick, had been in the same wing (one floor up) the previous week. When I asked Ernie, “Do you think they came to visit you, but didn’t know you had been released?” Ernie chuckled. He laughed even harder after I said I had gotten stung after collecting the swarm—not by one of his bees, but my bee. This is a long-standing joke between us. When he gets stung in our apiary, it was my bee—and vice versa.

This has been a year for swarms in the Portland area. After two calls for swarms in Beaverton, I got a call for a huge swarm on the backside of the Oaks Bottom corridor. Too bad it was over 35 feet up a tree on a hillslope. I tried a 24-foot ladder with a 15-foot extension pole and 5-gallon bucket. The swarm left as I was ready to put foot to ladder. Ernie was with me as the swarm flew and said it too high, too dangerous. I am sure he was right, but I still think about the colony that swarm would have made.

Included in all the SE activity are eight swarms that Ernie and I have caught in his backyard—one collected the day he came home from the hospital. They have gone into equipment that we have cleaned, painted, and left out to dry. Of course, the equipment contains drawn frames and a feeder with a little simple syrup. (I think some folks might call them bait hives.) Yet we haven’t claimed all the swarms in this area of SE Portland. Paul Hardzinski, Kerry Haskins, and Jim Barlean have gotten into the act here as well. What a swarm season to remember. Let’s hope for a productive blackberry nectar flow.
package,” I blurted. Next thing I knew, I was driving home, white-knuckled, with a flimsy box of ticked-off bees in the back of my Subaru wagon. And with absolutely NO idea what I was going to do next.

I’d been counting on Bee Day, scheduled for that weekend, to gain my first hands-on experience. I’d never even fired up my shiny new smoker! With shaking hands, I set to work. By myself. With my phone pre-set to 911 should I inconveniently discover that I am deathly allergic to bee venom.

I didn’t know what to expect as I slammed the package container to dislodge the bees from the screen. I do know that I squinted and braced myself for chaos as I shook the bees into the open hive box. “Sorry!” I whimpered to the bees as they piled onto the bottom board. I placed the queen cage between two center frames, brushed the crawling bees away from the rim, and carefully slid the cover back on the hive. It was then that I realized I hadn’t taken a breath in quite a while. After moonwalking backwards toward the back door, I dashed inside to stare out the window for fifteen minutes at what I had just done. Had I become a beekeeper?

Bee Day at George Hansen’s in Colton was a family event as I forcibly dragged Curt and Oscar along for the ride. Oscar and I had new bee suits, and we glowed as we approached the check-in desk—Oscar robot dancing along the way. Curt didn’t have a suit, so Thom Trusewicz graciously loaned him a veil. Although everyone was friendly and welcoming, we felt a little out of place and a little nervous about the millions of bees flying around. By we, I mean me—before I knew it, Curt and Oscar were elbow deep in colonies, learning how to check nucs for successful requeening, how to find eggs, and how to diagnose diseases. Curt was handling frames of bees barehanded while Oscar patiently showed me how to find the tiny white eggs in the bottoms of cells. “Keep the sun over your shoulder,” he said. He may as well have added, “Duh!”

During lunch, we wandered around the ware-

house in awe, ogling the rafter-high stacks of supers. I couldn’t imagine having so many colonies! And Foothills Honey has THOUSANDS! I wondered what it would be like to order sugar syrup by the truckload and admired the flatbed trucks and forklifts.

By the time we were driving home, none of us minded our stowaway foragers. We talked excitedly about the fledgling colony and the impending arrival of the nucs. That evening, we watched with fascination the activity around our new hive—me, without any of the fear I’d had only a few days earlier. In addition to the confidence earned, I also gained two enablers in my bee addiction. We were all hooked.

In early May, Drew and I walked to the yard in Newberg where he keeps most of his colonies—followed by Drew’s adorably chatty young son. There, amid boxes decorated with Grateful Dead stickers, sat my new babies. We peeked under the lids and found them healthy and active. Then Drew duct-taped the boxes closed. Having already transported a package in my Subaru, I wasn’t too concerned about bringing the nucs all the way back to Portland; even so, I drove like a grandmother. Upon arriving home, I placed the nucs on my desk. I proceeded to call friends and hold the phone up to the sides of the boxes.

“Listen!”

“What the heck is that?”

“My beeeeees!”

“You’re insane.”

“Absolutely!”

Now, I told myself, I’ve got three colonies. NOW I’m a beekeeper. But wait… Not quite yet…

A few days later, we moved all three colonies to our property near Rainier, Oregon. We installed a portable electric fence against the bears in the area, and, over the next few months, we watched the colonies thrive. Oscar was an excellent assistant, and Curt learned that eating the sardines I’d intended to use to bait the fence automatically volunteered him as “fence tester” the day we first set it up.

Continued on page 8
Every visit we learned something new, and we enjoyed showing friends our “girls” and getting them involved. We hived our first swarm and raised a queen from borrowed brood. We tasted our first home-grown blackberry honey upon pulling our first fully capped super. We mixed and fed gallons and gallons of syrup to prepare the bees for the winter months ahead. And I got my first sting—an event that finally convinced me that I had, indeed, earned the right to call myself a beekeeper.

On my last invasion of the four colonies for the season, I discovered that one of them had become queenless and had also suffered from invasion by yellow jackets. I hadn’t expected to do more than top off their feeders, so I hadn’t bothered to put on my overalls. Dressed in shorts, a loose Oxford shirt, and my veil, I was greeted by some very irritated bees. I later decided that before combining this colony with two of the others I should have taken the time to go to my car for my suit. Laziness had prevailed. And I got what I deserved as bees crawled into my waistband, up my shirtsleeves, and up the cuffs of my shorts. Oscar watched from a shady patch outside the yard and kept count of my obscenities with each sting. I think we were up to nine when I closed up the last hive and staggered out. I popped a couple antihistamines and grabbed a cold drink. In spite of the rising welts, I surveyed my little apiary with a mix of great satisfaction at one completed season and sadness at the prospect of the long bee-less months ahead.

Now, I’ve come full circle. It’s January, and I’m well into bee withdrawal. We’re planning on expanding our apiary. A few weeks ago we picked up 240 eight-frame semi-deeps from an operation up in Washington. To ease the winter itch—which is far worse than multiple stings—I’ve been kvetching with folks on the OSBA message board, goading them into debates over the merits of different truck models and loading equipment while absorbing as much information as possible without donning the veil. This morning a member posted his own solution to bee withdrawal—a stethoscope installed through a hive wall.

I’ve just ordered an observation hive to install here at home this spring. While I was at it, I finally ordered those ants for Oscar’s ant farm. Somehow I don’t think their arrival will be greeted with as much enthusiasm as it might have been a year ago.

Ants? Fffft. We’re way cooler than that.

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Queens, Bees, Honey & Pollination
MEMBERSHIP AND PUBLICATIONS FORM

Membership in the Oregon State Beekeepers’ Association is open to anyone with an interest in bees and beekeeping. You do not need to own bees or reside in Oregon to join. Membership includes a vote in OSBA elections, discounts on publications, and ten issues of The Bee Line. To become a member, send check made payable to OSBA with completed form to: Patricia Swenson, 11665 Webfoot Rd, Dayton OR 97114.

Name: __________________________________________
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Note: The OSBA respects the privacy of members and will not sell any information provided. May we include your name and address in a membership list that will be given to OSBA members only? YES/NO (please circle one).

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This issue of *The Bee Line* is printed on recycled paper by Powell Minuteman Press; (503) 234–2040.