

Dry weather hurting honeybees

Beekeeping can be hugely enjoyable and sometimes very frustrating.

The dry summer seems to have held back the normal goldenrod honeyflow that usually gets going by Aug. 20. So far I have seen very little sign of a goldenrod flow in Hampden, yet in other areas, there has been one. It may be that it's just late this year, but worse, we may not get one. If the flow fails to materialize, beekeepers face the very real possibility of their hives starving this winter unless they take action.

In a normal year the goldenrod honeyflow starts like a light has been switched on. The bees are listless and hanging out around the entrance of the hive on one day, and they are as busy as can be the next. In the evenings, the air in the bee yard becomes thick with a kind of funky smell of the bees curing the goldenrod nectar. I have seen hives pack on more than a super of goldenrod honey (35 pounds) per week on good years. So far this fall it does not appear to be one of those years.

Most hives built up some honey stores in June and July. Then we entered the "dearth" where each year in most of Maine there is little to no honeyflow. At this time, hives are consuming their stores of food quite rapidly as their populations are quite high. The goldenrod flow usually fills the hives with honey for the winter plus a bit to spare for the beekeeper.

The way things look right now there seems to be hardly more nectar coming in

than the bees are consuming each day. If this does not improve, beekeepers will need to feed their bees to see that they have sufficient stores of food for the winter.

For a typical beehive with two deep supers, we would be looking for the top box to be completely full of honey by mid-October. After that time, the weather is too cold for bees to cure the sugar syrup and evaporate sufficient water from it. If the syrup (or nectar) has not been cured before this time, it can ferment in the hive giving bees a high risk of dysentery in the winter. So it's important, when feeding hives for winter preparation, that we feed a concentrated sugar syrup, two parts sugar to one part water. They also should be fed early enough and fast enough for the bees to cure and store it by mid-October.

Now that fall is almost here, I am starting my next round of beekeeping beginner and intermediate classes. If you have been thinking of taking up beekeeping, you can sign up for one of these adult education classes.

Beginner class start dates: Bangor (992-5522) Sept. 7; Bucksport (469-2129) Sept. 13; Readfield (685-4923, ext. 1065) Sept. 19; Newport (368-3290) Oct. 3; Mount Desert Island (288-4702) Oct. 25; Ellsworth (664-7110) Oct. 26.

There also are intermediate classes in Bangor (992-



PETER COWIN



GABBY COWIN

Examining the health of the brood and levels of food in the hive are an essential part of good honeybee husbandry.

5522) starting Sept. 28 and Bucksport (469- 2129) starting Oct. 4.

I have been asked a lot recently about the effect on beekeepers of the impending legislation making antibiotics used to treat European foulbrood no longer available over the counter. Many old-school beekeepers routinely treat new hives or hives going into the winter with antibiotics looking to

prevent foulbrood occurring.

As a biologist, I can tell you that this prophylactic treatment is a very bad idea and is the one good thing to come out of the new law. From Jan. 1, it will be necessary to have a licensed veterinarian prescribe these treatments. Many beekeepers are worried about this because what is now a very inexpensive treatment will require a vet's bill to ac-

quire the stuff, but also by the time the beekeeper sees he has a problem that would require this treatment, it is usually well advanced, and time is of the essence.

Then they have to find a veterinarian who knows enough about bees that they are prepared to issue a prescription. Therein lies the next problem. Most veterinarians have not, until now, needed to know and recognize honeybee diseases. In many cases they will initially need to rely on the beekeeper to tell them what they are looking at.

With hindsight, the beekeeping community could have done more to help itself in the last few years that we have known this legislation was coming. What we should have been doing is offering veterinarians the chance to come and look inside our (hopefully) healthy hives so they could get a feel for what an unhealthy one looks like. So, if there are any veterinarians reading this column that have never put on a bee suit and looked inside a live honeybee hive, I offer you the opportunity for me to give you a tour inside some of my hives. Just give me a call.

Peter Cowin, aka The Bee Whisperer, is president of the Penobscot County Beekeepers Association. His activities include honey production, pollination services, beekeeping lessons, sales of bees and bee equipment, and the removal of feral bee hives from homes and other structures. Check out "The Bee Whisperer" on Facebook, petercowin@tds.net, or call 299-6948.

Pilot

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ing similar tales about the state's vast north woods.

"I flew [for a living], and I saw the perfect opportunity to have a fly-in lodge," Jake Morrel said. "There was just something in me that liked that lifestyle, [the idea] that I could use a plane, and you had to use it, rather than just play with it."

In order to get their hands on Hardscrabble Lodge, they had to take on a business partner. Luckily, Jake knew just the man to talk to.

"I bartended with a guy at Squaw Mountain [in Greenville], a nice guy from Philadelphia," Jake Morrel said. "We had a few too many beers one night and decided we'd make an offer on the place. I can't remember, they wanted \$50,000 or something like that and we offered \$21,000. They accepted."

That was in about 1977, Jake Morrel said. But now, they were faced with opening up a sporting camp — and finding guests who would visit — in a short time window.

"So now we've got a business, whether we wanted it or not, and we only had that winter to get everything ready to operate," he said.

He and his partner, along with Beth, got down to work, rebuilding what they could, and visiting sporting shows in the northeast to tell potential "sports" what they could expect.

One of the benefits of the location: The lake consisted of two large pieces separated by a narrows, and protected by ridges. If the wind



COURTESY OF JAKE MORREL

Wood piled up, ready for winter at Hardscrabble Lodge.

blew one direction, pilots could land on one piece of the lake — into the wind — and tie the plane down in the protected narrows. Then pilots could take off out of the other piece of the lake.

The stories included in the book recount life in the Maine woods, where they raised their small children and welcomed guests who often returned year after year. Morrel's plane was a workhorse, and he often used it to carry deer that his clients had shot, or ferry canoes into remote ponds for

fly fishermen to use.

And though he loved the life he chose, he says now that each day he headed out in his plane, he knew that his margin of error was slim.

"I'm flying all day long, and all it takes is one small mistake in that airplane, and we're belly-up," he said. "There is definitely tension behind what seems to be an idyllic situation."

Jake Morrel had a few close calls, including one in which a sleepy passenger in the back seat leaned against the throttle control and

nearly forced an emergency landing.

After a short run at Hardscrabble Lodge, the Morrels realized that the idyllic life they'd enjoyed was going to change.

Once accessible only by plane or an 18-mile four-wheel-drive ride over very rough roads, civilization — or something like it — was heading their way.

"[In the mid-80s] Scott Paper started to build a major highway into that country," Jake Morrel said. "It took 'em about two years to get as far as Hard-

scrabble. By that time, all of a sudden, everyone in the world could drive in there."

And that wasn't what he'd signed on for.

"I was basically dealing with fly fishermen only. I was flying them, every day, to all the little ponds in there," he said. "I realized, right away, that was going to change. So either I'm going to go into the recreational vehicle business and have [ATVs] lined up out front, or I needed to get out."

The Morrels chose to get out about 30 years ago, and both say they think fondly about the times they spent there.

They also know their memories of the place — and the stories that Jake wrote for the book — are the only Hardscrabble experience they'll ever get.

The main lodge was torn down by one subsequent owner. And attempts to visit the old property, which is no longer a sporting camp, haven't turned out so well.

"We did go back with our daughter, because she grew up there," Jake Morrel said. "We were told in pretty straight terms that we weren't really welcome. We wanted to picnic, and they said, 'No.'"

Having spent several years living in that remote section of the state, being turned away is tough to take, he said.

"When you live in country like that, where in the winter there's nobody within 14 miles of you, even though [we stayed] for a pretty short duration, you get this feeling that 'this is mine,'" Jake Morrel said. "Then, there's that old saying: You can't go home. It's true. You can't go home. Not to a place like that."

Mainer wants swarm back

BY ABIGAIL W. ADAMS
LINCOLN COUNTY NEWS

EDGECOMB — In early August, a swarm of honeybees from Ray Shadis' Edgcomb farm took off to find a new home. The swarm will not survive the winter without help, Shadis said.

While a long shot, Shadis is encouraging his neighbors to be on the lookout for the small, winged creatures with furry bodies.

There's an old saying, Shadis said: "A swarm in May is worth a load of hay, a swarm in June is worth a silver spoon, but a swarm in July is not worth a fly."

The swarm that left in August has a young queen that just hatched in June, Shadis said. This late in the season, the bees will not be able to produce enough nectar or honey in their new home to survive the winter, Shadis said.

However, if the bees are fed sugar water, it will give them the sustenance needed to make the wax and honey that will enable them to survive, he said.

Shadis has tended bees off and on since moving to Edgcomb about 45 years ago. It is a family tradition inherited from his grandfather in Lithuania. "In the old country, there isn't a homestead without honeybees," Shadis said.

Honey was one of the only natural sweeteners people in Eastern Europe had access to at the time, he said. A typical hive can produce 40-50 pounds of honey, he said.

A bee colony is composed of a queen, worker bees and drones. Worker bees are responsible for gathering pollen and nectar, building nests and tending to the brood. The primary duty of drones is to mate with the queen bee. Each colony has only one queen, which largely determines the unique personality of the colony, Shadis said.

Some colonies are docile, and some are temperamental, Shadis said. Honeybees, however, are the only domestic insect in the world, he said.

If bees are having a productive season, the hive will become overcrowded and the brood, or nest for bee eggs and larvae, will be packed in tightly.

It is at that point the colony of honeybees will begin to search for a new home, Shadis said. Scout bees will go out to search for a new location to accommodate the growing hive. "At a certain point, they decide it's time for the queen to take the bees and go," he said.

The honeybee swarm will create a new hive in an enclosure, such as a hollow log or a tree, Shadis said. They usually have a 2-mile flight radius, Shadis said, so the missing swarm will be within 2 miles of Shadis Road, off Cross Point Road, in Edgcomb.

If bees are seen entering or exiting an enclosure, it is a sign the enclosure is home to a bee colony, he said. The honeybee is never too far from its queen, and in order to move the hive from a natural enclosure to a hive managed by a beekeeper, the queen must first be relocated, Shadis said.

Shadis has gone through the process of moving a colony to a new hive before. The bees actually walked, like they were in a bee parade, into the new hive where the queen was located, he said.

In an effort to save the missing swarm, Shadis took out an advertisement in The Lincoln County News. "It was a little goofy," Shadis said, but with people taking advertisements for missing dogs and cats, he figured it was worth a shot.

The area surrounding his farm is largely wooded, and Shadis is doubtful he will see his swarm again. However, for anyone interested in starting out as a beekeeper, Shadis has offered to help get them established.

Anyone who believes they have spotted the missing bee colony is encouraged to contact Ray Shadis at 380-5994.

Holyoke

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many shades of green in my life," St. Clair said.

After devoting much of his time over the past four years to the effort to achieve federal status for the land, St. Clair said he planned to unwind a little with a trip to Acadia National Park.

"[Our family is] going to go stay at my mom's place on the coast, and just have some down time," he said.

Down time? Maybe. But will he actually shut off his cellphone?

"No. I can't," he said with a chuckle. "My wife and I joke all the time. She says, 'You can't stop working. I know you can't stop working.'"

And he knows there's plenty of work left to do.

After the trip, Jewell also seemed ready to unwind a bit. Over the previous seven days she'd been to Arkansas, New York, California and Montana to celebrate the park service's birthday.

But she said she was glad to have capped off the travel binge with a stop at the newest national monument in the country.

"It's been an uplifting and incredible week because we're looking to the future of the National Park Service," she said. "To have Katahdin Woods and Waters protected as a national monument this week, forever to be here for future generations, particularly of young people, that's just the icing on



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top of the birthday cake for our 100th anniversary."

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