

# The Traveling Beekeeper



## BEER, BRATS, AND BEES:

### WHEN BEEKEEPERS COME TO VISIT

by Dr. LARRY CONNOR

Wicwas Press, 1620 Miller Road, Kalamazoo, MI 49001

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*Usually I write about visits to other locations and other beekeepers. This month there is a switch—I get to write about a group of beekeepers who visited me at my home farm and apiary.*

Pittsburgh, PA, beekeeper Steve Repasky and I met when I was teaching a Queen Rearing class in Maryland in 2011. He is passionate about learning everything he can about raising queen bees, with the objective of producing queens in an urban setting in the city of Pittsburgh. A Penn State graduate in wildlife biology, Stephen is an EAS Master Beekeeper and owns and operates Meadow Sweet Apiaries. He also serves as Burgh Bees Vice President and Community Apiary Director and focuses on the role of urban beekeepers in providing pollination, as well as local honey for a wide range of local residents. His background in wildlife biology somehow makes him the 'go-to' guy for urban bee removal.

We swapped invites to speak over the following year. I asked him to speak in Las Vegas at the Serious Sideliner Symposium held in conjunction with the American Beekeeping Federation meeting in January, and as VP of the Burgh Bees club, he invited me to speak at the club. We did an apiary visit for a smaller group of members (in what I call a Twilight meeting), and then a talk for the entire club.

After the meeting and over a beer at a local Pittsburgh watering hole, Steve and I discussed many things, and I apparently made the offer for a group of beekeepers from Burgh Bees to travel to Galesburg, MI to see the bees I write about, and to get a little work done in the process. This idea fermented for a while and Stephen was able to recruit six local beekeepers to make the six hour trip from Pittsburgh, mostly on the Ohio Turnpike.

In addition to Steve, the group consisted of Jeff Shaw, who drove his van, Lynnetta

Miller, Leslie Schuch, Brian Johanson, Susie DeBor and Jayne Novak. Jeff has about a dozen hives but the rest of the group are around five colonies and have been keeping bees for a 'few' years. They all have other jobs. Brian and Lynnetta were attracted to beekeeping because of their day jobs, at a computer terminal at Carnegie Mellon University and Jayne is in law enforcement. Jeff is a commercial printer (including honey labels and fliers for the club) and was pretty interested in my work in book publishing.

The group arrived about 7 pm from Pittsburgh on the first weekend of August. I had done the shopping for the beer and brats (as well as other items) and the group was well enough organized to cook and prepare meals, with Brian doing much of the grilling.

From Galesburg, Craig Fuller and Cathy King were on hand to help out, and I suspect that Cathy made about 200 trips in her bag-lady golf cart to run home and get something. She was often gone before she heard



Beekeepers from Pittsburgh and Michigan hosts pose with the bees in Galesburg, MI.





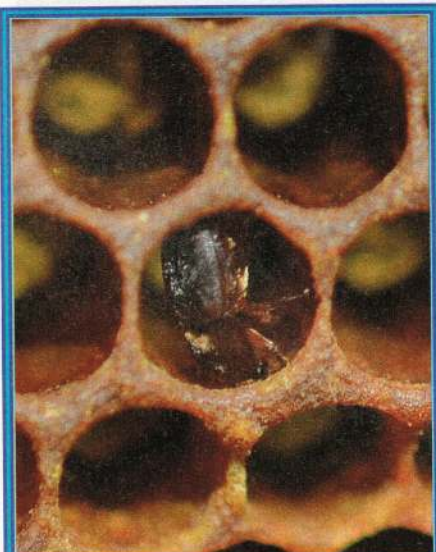
The Burghs beekeepers took every opportunity to photograph all the problems I had with my hives!

the entire list of things we needed. No problems, she was always willing to go back. She has started a small equipment business called Bugs Nest West, and has samples of just about everything we needed that I don't already own.

After morning coffee at my home in Kalamazoo and a quick look at the hives behind the garage, my thoughts of starting with the bees on Saturday morning were outvoted by a trip to the Kalamazoo Farmer's Market, where sweet corn and a wide range of locally produced food items were purchased for a picnic Saturday night. When we finally did get into the bees, we started with a group of mating nucs that I hope will go into the winter, at least some of them. I had been in Alaska for a few weeks just prior to the visit and the colonies were a textbook of prob-

lems of nucs, from laying workers to queens that were produced by the bees (ignoring the virgin we gave them), and some European foulbrood that I link with both varroa mite infestations and blueberry bloom (which was not the case with these bees). Fortunately, most of the EFB was gone by the time the class got to the colonies, but by not hiding anything, I suspect the class saw more in a few hours than they might see in their own colonies for a number of years. There were a few nice colonies, too, and we discussed the possibility of wintering the colonies and how I planned to do this. The nucs were in both five-frame Langstroth wood hives and a few were in polystyrene nucs that hold the same size frames. I stressed the importance, to me, of having just one-sized frame in the operation, and my decision to go to eight-frame deep hives instead of using medium ten-frame boxes for both brood chamber and honey supers.

After a lunch of leftovers and cold cuts, we went into the larger hives, including the colonies we use for grafting and for queen cell production. I was able to put the entire group to work using the whole-colony powdered sugar method to both estimate varroa populations and as a control. Sunday we counted the mite drop on the trays in the screened bottom boards. We discussed the difference between using powdered sugar as a sampling technique and as a control method. A single treatment of one cup of powdered sugar spread on a screen and brushed onto the bees in a strong hive provides a good indication of the mite levels on the adult bees in the colony, but there is no counting of mites in the sealed brood. As a treatment method, we talked about repeat treatment, to capture the varroa mites that are sealed inside the brood comb. This requires repeat visits every three or four days to retreat the colony and capture the mites on the sticky board at the bottom of the hive.



For some it was the first time to see small hive beetles darting cell to cell in a weak nuc.

Continued for several weeks, it reduces the mite load in a hive when repeated twice a week for four weeks. It seems like a lot of work, but the actual application of powdered sugar only takes a minute or two, plus a few minutes to count the mites.

The method is far from popular and certainly not endorsed by many researchers. The key, as I explained to the group, is the frequency of retreatment. I pointed out that I was headed for another Bee Wellness clinic in Ballston Spay, NY and then a week at EAS in Burlington, VT so when they left, I was on the Ohio turnpike less than 24 hours after their return home. The possibility of retreatment was not an option for these colonies, but could be for beekeepers with small colony counts and more access to their colonies.

Then, we discussed the use of trends in mite counts, and how I hoped to have three or four treatments by fall to see which way the mite numbers were going for the rest of the summer of 2012 and into the fall. This idea is something I read in Dr. Ignemar Fries' article in a new book edited by Sammartaro and Yoder. There, Dr. Fries suggests we monitor the trend of mite levels, up, down or stable, as a predictor of the bees' tolerance against varroa mites. It is not necessary that we know the mechanism of mite resistance (hygienic behavior, grooming, developmental rate or a physiological mechanism), but that the mite numbers be monitored as far as trend analysis.

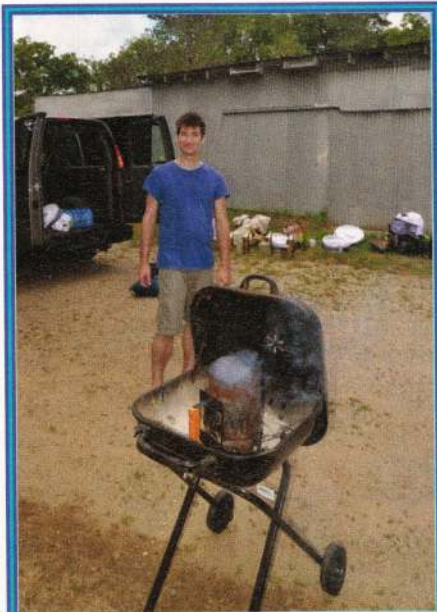
The bees in my apiary are colonies developed by bees from Tom Glenn's breeder queens I purchased in 2011, and have been naturally replaced as a result of swarming in most colonies during the remarkable "swarmy" season of early 2012. To this we have some survivor stock colonies that have made it through at least two winters. Kalamazoo area beekeepers just brought in Buckfast queens from Ontario (under permit), but there has not been enough time for any genetic input from drones produced by these colonies.

Craig Fuller demonstrated grafting, and those interesting in trying had a chance at transferring larvae from worker cells to grafting cups. On Sunday they were able to check their results.

Saturday night was a much bigger production of the brats and beer, plus sweet corn, locally produced chicken, and lots of fresh vegetables. Neighbor Leroy Crabtree showed up with a gas heated turkey cooker to use to cook the corn (in water, not oil). Other neighbors and beekeeping friends were there too. My son and his wife, two brothers and friends of friends were there. Just whisper 'picnic potluck' and stand back!

Just a few miles from the farm is a local brewer called Bells Brewery, and the Burgh's Bees folks were familiar with the many fine beers they sell around the country, even a seasonal honey wheat. Picnickers brought other Michigan brews. There was plenty of ice tea and other beverages for the non-beer drinkers.





Brian took over much of the grill work while everyone else pitched in cooking and cleaning.

Well, for me, this was a lot of fun. It also took a lot of time and effort to get food and other things organized. Some of the visitors stayed in the house and others camped outside. So, the time I saved in not driving or flying somewhere was spent in my attempt at organization. The Burgh Bees members paid me for the pleasure of my company and instruction, plus they were in charge of doing a lot of the heavy lifting as far as cooking, cleaning and organization.

This was also a great concept for developing relationships. Steve was at EAS a week later and was a great help for me in the field sessions I ran, as well as at the book table. Jeff and I are talking about doing a reprint of an American beekeeping classic. The rest of the group is welcome to contact me at any time for feedback. This will give us all a point of reference at future visits.

I had hoped that we would be organized enough to produce a few video programs for use by both Burgh Bees and myself. This did not happen. But there were cameras everywhere, and I know some video was taken. So I have hope that some useful material will come out of all the 'less than

perfect' nuclei hives I exposed to the group!

Steve reports that everyone had a great time, but there could have been more structure to the weekend. I can only agree. But if we are thinking of repeating some sort of weekend 'Camp Beekeeping' with more structure, I know that there needs to be a time period when nothing is structured or planned, because the interaction between different beekeepers and a bunch of colonies has some sort of synergic benefit!

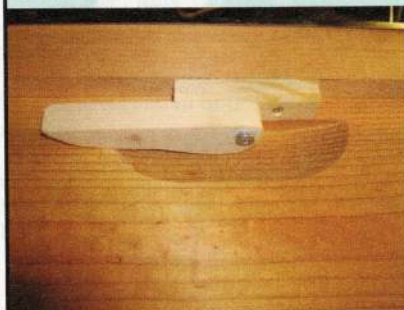
Oh, on their way out, the van stopped at Cathy King's equipment shop and picked up a few items they could not live without. There was room in Jeff's van for this.

My thanks to all for helping me with a pleasant weekend.

For the latest in bee books, see [www.wicwas.com](http://www.wicwas.com), or write Dr. Connor at Wicwas Pres, 1620 Miller Road, Kalamazoo MI 49001.

Make plans to attend the Texas Beekeepers Association Master Class taught by Dr. Connor at the annual convention in November, and make your reservations for the Super Sideliner Symposium to be held in January as part of the American Beekeeping Federation in Hersey, PA.

## No More Rocks!



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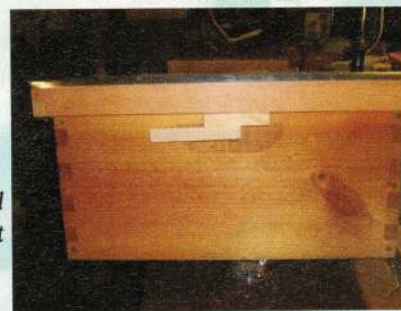
# Lewis Mill

Hive Works

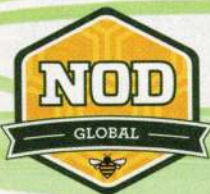
The Camlock attaches to the telescoping cover and locks into the hive body or super handles to prevent the wind from blowing away the telescoping cover.

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