

The Buzz about Bees by Claire Moody

You might think honey bees hibernate in winter but they don't. When it gets very cold out, they cluster into a ball separated by the combs. The colder it is, the tighter the cluster. They eat the honey on those combs for energy. With highs in the 50s and lows in the 40s they are still active, flying out for "cleansing" flights.

The queen pretty much stops laying eggs in winter. There's little to no pollen coming in for nurse bees to make royal jelly from. Without royal jelly they can't feed the larvae. Also, the temperature in the hive must be in the mid-90s for raising brood and that's very difficult to maintain with the small winter colony. Soon the queen will lay a few eggs and build up very slowly from there. By March the colony size will increase enough that April will begin the real colony growth.

Almost everyone has lost some of their colonies. It was a very, very bad year with regard to varroa mites. I told you about them in the last article in December. It's on the website (www.tillamookbeekeepers.org) in the section About Bees. We did not monitor our varroa mite counts well enough in September and October. The result was what is referred to as a 'mite bomb'.

Many of you have heard about the new vaccine for treating American Foul Brood (AFB). AFB devastates colonies of bees and originates from bacterial spores. The spores can live for forty to sixty years. It is so easily transmitted that colonies with AFB must have all the equipment burned. The vaccine which has been approved by the USDA is fed to the worker bees who incorporate it the royal jelly they feed the queen. All the eggs laid by the queen will then have immunity to AFB. AFB is not very common but when it is found it can wipe out all the colonies in a wide geographical area. So we are very excited about this development!

We have something else we are VERY excited about. We have about ten colonies of bees we are using to raise queens, a project that we just started last summer. Our president, Brad York, is known for his far-reaching ideas and has come up with a plan for creating an educational apiary and garden which would be available to the public, both locals and visitors, at pre-arranged times. Building the apiary and garden will be expensive and take work but the word "awesome" comes to mind. Once completed, imagine being able to don a bee suit and look safely inside a honey bee colony! I'll keep you posted on the progress.

We, of course, take charitable donations on our website. We will also be raising money via our regular bee hive raffle which will be raffled off at the Home and Garden Show on April 30th. The raffle hive is going to be decorated with various breeds of cows and has a barn roof. A showpiece for anyone's garden! More information coming soon on that.

Lastly, if you are interested in learning more about honey bees and beekeeping, the next intro class is scheduled for Saturday, February 25th from 1:00 to 3:30. Registration is required and can be done on the website or by calling Brad York at 719-896-0000. There is a nominal charge.

To read prior Buzz articles check out the Tillamook Beekeepers Association website: www.tillamookbeekeepers.org About Bees. Claire Moody is education director for the association and can be reached at clairemoody503@gmail.com.