

# COMB Courier

Mid-Michigan—Land of the bee

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Editor: mike ffrench

## **Aura wrapped in mystique**

Beekeepers have an aura of mystery about them. When you tell someone you keep bees, watch the expression on their face, is one of awe and respect. Beekeeping is a hobby that commands their admiration. Working amidst thousands of stinging insects requires nerve and courage. We beekeepers tend to be blasé about the dangers, but the general public is all too aware of them. Being stung is no small matter if you are allergic to bee-stings. Because they don't understand our affinity for bees, the public also tends to see us as eccentric oddballs taking unnecessary risks for little reward. But, and quite rightly so, we see ourselves as part of nature's grand plan for the health of the planet. A grandiose statement indeed, but one that speaks to truth.

## **Beat the tar out of them**

Imagine this scenario. Bill Clanger is having a house built in one of Michigan's small towns that is bigger on the map than it is in real life. Let's say, Laingsburg. Clanger wants to limit costs, so he has a conflagration with the contractor on what he wants.

"What about heating and cooling systems?" says Al Humbleson, the contractor.

"Well Al, I'm having fans which will help me cope with the Michigan summers."

"What about heat for the winter months?"

"Don't you worry about that Al, I'm a beekeeper, I'm going to wrap it in tar paper."

Al is aghast. "Tar paper? Tar paper? You are going to wrap tar paper around your house? Your pipes will freeze, and so will you."

"If it's good enough for my bees, it's good enough for me."

Obviously, Clanger is in for a big surprise. Realistically, if we need the help of a furnace in winter, shouldn't the bees have a better system too? A winterized hive! Please don't mention tar paper. The Langstroth hive is an excellent home for bees, but it was designed for worldwide use without regard to geographical locale, and the problems inherent in those diverse locations. Just like Clanger, we can save costs by using a cheap alternative (TP) but in the long haul we are cheating ourselves as well as our charges—the bees. Many beekeepers in Michigan have ideas on winterizing their hives, most of them have merit, but we need a commercial winterized hive that can be purchased by a new beekeeper just starting out, who doesn't have an array of woodworking tools and a pole barn much less the time to manufacture his or her own equipment.

So, where do we go from here? May I humbly suggest that we ask our leaders, both local and state, to form a think tank that can smooth out the wrinkles that make beekeeping so complex and challenging. There's money to be made off of this boys, don't laugh me off the stage.

## Unsolicited advice

A response to beekeepers who think their beekeeping practices are the only way to go. “You can shove your mandible up your thorax.”

## Bee pond

All beekeepers should have a bee pond handy just in case your bees turn ugly and decide to *off you* once and for all. A swimming pool, or suitable body of water to jump in, will suffice in an emergency. Why would bees attack me? Because you are disturbing them you idiot! It is well known bees can't swim—or need to. I myself have been swarmed, when I got over confident and neglected to smoke 'em. They came out of the top of the hive like a living rope. They climbed all over me looking for a weakness in my suit. So, make sure you are fully zippered up, and the seams in your gloves have been taped over.

## Catbirds and bees

The catbird is a common gray bird rarely seen because it inhabits the shadows of the hedgerows and thickets in Michigan. A sports announcer in the press box behind home plate may be described as being in the catbird seat—seeing all, but seen by few. If science is observation, then observation is science.

To me beekeeping is the most difficult and complex hobby I have ever undertaken. A degree of difficulty, somewhere in between algebraic astro-physics and understanding women.

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## Bee addiction

Beekeeping is addictive. In fact, if I ever had to give up beekeeping for any reason, I'd have to go into re-hab.

### C.O.M.B. Monthly meeting.

2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of the month 6:30pm.

MSU Pavilion, Farm Lane, E. Lansing

## Cuban Rueben

Now that Fidel has departed hence, and replaced by his brother Rueben. They have scrapped plans to invade Ft. Lauderdale, so we can concentrate on better relations with the Cuban people—and in our case, Cuban beekeepers. The isolation of Cuba for 50 years must surely have had some effect on their bees (*apis fidelista*), i.e. stronger queens, varroa free (?) resistance to disease, to name only three. Presently visitation to Cuba is limited to specific groups, I think that beekeepers would fit into that category. Another bonus is a chance to see the ivory-billed woodpecker, which is believed to be extinct in the U.S. despite reports to the contrary. The IBW is hanging on by a slim thread in an isolated refuge in Cuba. Called the god-bird by many ornithologists, this beautiful creature could be re-introduced into the U.S.

Deadline for next issue is September 8th