

# COMB Courier

Mid-Michigan—Land of the bee

Vol. 2 No. 5

May 2015

Editor: mike ffrench

## Losing the price war

I started keeping bees in 2008. Checking my records I find that I paid \$62 for a 3lb package of bees back then. In 2010 the price had risen to \$68 — an increase of \$6, I can handle that! Fast forward to 2015 the price has risen to \$112. In just five short years, the price has risen an astronomical \$45. NUCs, which perhaps offer more sustainability, have climbed to \$150. Where are the Koch brothers when you need them?

I sell honey at \$10 a quart, which helps me to break even. With prices escalating as they are, how much longer can I continue to invest in beekeeping? I know beekeeping helps the environment, and I am proud to be a part of that aspect of beekeeping, but it won't be much longer before my hobby evolves into a charitable investment.

Truth in lending—I have eight hives.

My previous winter losses, as predicted by one of our speakers at a COMB meeting, are close to 100%. This year I had two surviving hives, which are doing well thank you. I am afraid to put my package bees in the same vicinity as my survivor hives, in case of infestation by varroa. As you can gather, this is not a scientific piece of reporting but, if observation is 60% of science, it is!

I am not losing my bees to starvation, since all hives, in all years, have had honey in the frames—often leading to a winter harvest, which I do not sell due to possible contamination, so I keep it for my own use. I don't think it is the cold either; in previous years I have used tarpaper wrap, and this year I tried 2" polystyrene foam wraps. All to no avail!

No, I don't spend every living moment with my nose in the hive. I followed Larry Connor's admonition, "Leave them alone!" So I did. Whether I cosset them, or leave them to struggle with the elements, the results remain the same—winter kill!

Our efforts to control varroa, the latest and greatest scourge of beekeepers, have seen little improvement toward solving the eradication of this pest. Attempts to attack varroa via powdered sugar have produced little or no results. Attempts at using pesticides have produced contaminated hives of which there has been no definitive study. Are we to assume the residue of the pesticides goes up the chimney or stays in the hive? The jury is still out on that one.

There seems to be no organized frontal attack, a full court press for you sports nuts, on varroa. Why? Don't we want the problem to go away? In my humble opinion, we don't want make the sacrifice that goes with the suppression of this pest. It was reported that South Africa had solved their problem with varroa, why haven't we followed their example? Surely, we are not going to allow them to teach us how to keep bees.

There has been a lot of chatter about the 'northern bee' but this is not being well supported

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as far as I can see. Should we have a full court press for a northern bee? Is it workable? We won't know unless we try.

I came into beekeeping late in life, as many of you did too, so I find a lot of the opinions and advice of seasoned beekeepers to be conflicting and confusing. Crikey mates, we can't even decide which size hive is best: 8-frame, 10-frame, 9-frame, deep, shallow, medium?

## Bee ads

Advertisements not likely to appear in your favorite bee catalogue.

*Hive Heat*: New this year! A winter bee hive so efficient, it can be moved into your family room for supplemental heat.

*Wax Recliner*: A chair made from beeswax—easy to slide into—easy to slide out of.

*Dorprop*: Door hinges treated with propolis: When you shut that door—it stays shut!

## What is your sign, Leo

Leo Tolstoy, Russian author of *War and Peace*, was a beekeeper. How did he find time to write? How did he find time to keep bees?

## Hopping the fence

If your neighboring beekeeper uses your drones to mate with his queens, should you charge him droneage?

## Heavens preserve us

Honey as a preservative. Has anyone out there used honey to can fruit or other foodstuffs? If so, let me know the results, success or failure? If we can get a successful method of canning with honey, we can set up a whole new line of bee products. This begs the question: why do we call it canning, when we use glass mason jars? Get on that Sherlock, right away.

C.O.M.B. Monthly meeting.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of the month 6:30pm.  
MSU Pavilion, Farm Lane, E. Lansing

## Bee Read

If you have a comment, query, problem, or an interesting story or anecdote concerning bees that you would like to share with your fellow beekeepers, here is your chance. Send it in to [mjbusybee@frontier.com](mailto:mjbusybee@frontier.com) or [debbie.foote@hotmail.com](mailto:debbie.foote@hotmail.com) or hand it in at the meeting. Jane Carhartt may be contacted at [janesbees@yahoo.com](mailto:janesbees@yahoo.com)  
This is your newsletter, make use of it!

**Next month:** A report on what Steve Forbes, of *Forbes* magazine, thinks of bees.

## Bee Classifieds

If you have any bee-related items you would like to buy, sell, or trade, this section is for you. This service is free for members of C.O.M.B. You may submit ads to Mike French or Deb Foote. There will be a nominal fee for associate members.

Deadline for next issue is May 29th