

# THE HIVE TOOL

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Location, location, location. As in real estate, producing a good honey crop comes down to location. Nationally, there are several regions of the country which have a long, prolific nectar flow or a series of them which produce great quantities of honey. Unfortunately, we do not live in one of those regions. Ours is a short burst from a few sources, the locust blossom being the most important. But again, location is the biggest factor in the quantity (and quality) of the honey our bees produce, even on a local basis. There can be great variations from one locale to the next. When I lived and kept bees in Rodgers Forge I had large, consistent harvests of nearly pure locust honey thanks to the landscaping of Towson University. Since moving to the country, I've not had anything similar to that delicious abundance. Maybe it was the lack of competitors, but I doubt it. It was the location.

The other major external factor in producing a good honey crop is the weather. Was there enough winter/spring rain for the trees to produce copious amounts of nectar? Have the temperatures been warm enough for the plants to flower vigorously? Will there be sunny days throughout the nectar flow so the bees can forage effectively and handle all the nectar coming in? A few years ago, just after the locusts bloomed, the weather turned cold, with heavy rains for several days which knocked the blossoms off the trees and limited the bees' ability to fly and forage. There was little one could do and there was little locust honey that year.

There are many factors which affect our honey yield; some we can influence, others not. A good beekeeper learns what those factors are and does what he/she can to manipulate the ones that can be controlled and leave the rest to nature. What amazes me is how much of my beekeeping work throughout the entire year comes down to this month, these few short weeks. And here we are, eager with anticipation, watching and waiting. Imagine what it must be like for the bees! In some biological sense, I think they feel it too.

I'm pleased to announce that CMBA has funded three proposals submitted to the Board of Directors (see related article for a full listing of the remaining proposals still under consideration). The first is to offer First and Second Place Awards for honey exhibits at the Baltimore County 4-H Fair in July. The awards will be \$75.00 and \$50.00 U.S. Savings Bonds. The second is a \$300.00 donation from CMBA to the Maryland Department of Agriculture Apiary Inspection Enhancement Fund which supports the inspection of colonies throughout the state. And the third is a grant of \$450.00 to Cylburn Arboretum in Baltimore City to purchase an outdoor bulletin board to display

honeybee/beekeeping information near their garden hive. As President, I'm pleased we are now actively financially supporting programs and organizations which share our goals and objectives.

Next I will ask for your personal support in the form of your time and energy. We need volunteers for two upcoming projects. The first is our hosting of the MSBA Summer Meeting here at Oregon Ridge Nature Center on Saturday, June 7th. We need volunteers to help with set-up and clean-up, parking, signs, and registration (for lunch). I will have a sign-up list on the stump at our May meeting, but feel free to call me and offer to help as well. Along with guest speaker Kim Flottum of Bee Culture magazine there will be Open Hive demonstrations and a full program. Whether you volunteer or not, whether you are a member of MSBA or not, you are encouraged and welcome to attend.

The second project for which we need volunteers is the Baltimore County 4-H Fair which runs from July 10th to 13th at the Baltimore County Fairgrounds. This is a wonderful opportunity and the perfect venue to introduce the idea of beekeeping and how important it is to agriculture to young people (which in many ways should be our target audience). We are looking for volunteers to talk about bees and beekeeping with an observation hive and volunteers to do some extracting demonstrations and likewise talk about beekeeping. You do not need to be a Master Beekeeper to do this, just someone with a desire to share your interest in bees, answer questions from the curious, and be a Bee Ambassador. CMBA will provide the observation hive and extracting equipment; will you provide the manpower?

Our May meeting will begin with an Open Hive Demonstration at ORNC at 6:00pm in the bee yard. We'll look at some recently installed packages; if you just started a package this is a good opportunity for some comparison observations. We'll also demonstrate how to make splits and introduce queens. Our regular meeting begins at 7:30. Our guest speaker is Ms. Ann Harmon who will be talking about her extensive experiences with Africanized Bees and how we can learn to live with them (which we will in some form or another!). Ann is a life-long, well-known and devoted beekeeper and an excellent speaker. She will also be on hand for the Open Hive Demo.

Looking ahead, invite anyone interested to our June meeting with Ross Conrad, author of the book *Natural Beekeeping*. We'll begin June's meeting with an open hive demo as well. The Bee Research Laboratory in Beltsville will hold an open house on Friday, June 27th. A full schedule of events will be in our next newsletter. And, hey, isn't it about time for a picnic! CMBA will have it's own on Saturday, July 19th. Details to follow. Now let's all get out there and super-up, give your colonies an upper entrance, adequate ventilation and pray for good weather.

Good beekeeping to you!

# The Ohio Project

## A Collaborative Project Initiative

By Joseph Latshaw

Reprinted from Bee Culture March 2008

With the recent challenges of parasitic mites, Africanized Honey Bees (AHB), small hive beetles (SHB) and colony collapse disorder (CCD), beekeepers are readily exploring a variety of ways to dampen the sting of their losses. In the past two decades, the beekeeping industry has seen a multitude of new management styles and chemical applications introduced in an effort to alleviate some of the challenges. While management practices play an important role in the success and survivability of a honey bee colony, recent research has shown the genetic foundation of the colony is important to colony fitness and survivability. The recent studies into the complex genetic underpinnings of the honey bee and recent challenges faced by beekeepers present a unique opportunity for beekeeping. Beekeepers are expressing a greater interest in queen rearing and honey bee breeding throughout the United States in an effort to establish sustainable beekeeping practices in their own regions. The Ohio Queen Project (OQP) is one such .ck improvement program that was developed based on the need and interest expressed by Ohio beekeepers. The OQP is a two pronged approach designed to provide queen rearing training and to develop a locally adapted stock for beekeepers.

In 2007 the OQP was initiated by Dana Stahlman and the Ohio State Beekeepers Association (OSBA). There were two primary objectives set forth. **The first objective** was to provide training in the art of queen rearing for Ohio's beekeepers. For a beekeeper, acquiring the skill and ability to raise queens provides a multitude of options for growth and development. To facilitate this training effort the state of Ohio was divided into nine regions and a regional coordinator was selected for each region. The establishment of regions reduced the distance that beekeepers would need to travel in order to attend the queen rearing sessions.

Eleven queen rearing classes were taught by regional coordinators in 2007 with over 120 students participating. The classes were designed to provide participants with the basic skills to successfully rear their own queens using grafting methods. To establish a successful queen rearing system it is important to be able to consistently graft and raise queens. It is then up to each beekeeper to decide how to best use their queen rearing skills, whether that means having a better understanding and appreciation for what is involved in producing high quality queens, raising queens for their own colonies, or undertaking a larger commitment to raise queens for sale. Queen rearing is the foundation for providing beekeepers with the skills to become more self sufficient.

Having the skill and ability to raise queens is only the beginning. For the 2007 queen rearing classes, participants were given the opportunity to graft from instrumentally inseminated breeder queens. In coming years instrumentally inseminated breeder queens will assume a larger role in the OQP as we develop a stock

improvement program. To establish a breeding program we require resources and colonies, which unfortunately are in short supply. However, there is no shortage of enthusiastic beekeepers willing to participate in the OQP. Therefore, the structure of the OQP stock selection program is based on the willingness of Ohio's beekeepers to assist with the development of their own regionally adapted stock.

**The second primary objective** of the OQP was to establish a sustainable breeding program based on exceptional stock selected from around the state of Ohio. In addition to providing queen rearing classes, regional coordinators were responsible for identifying exceptional colonies from across the state that survived the difficult Winter of 2006-2007. To establish a strong foundation of stock in 2007, and what better year than after a tough Winter of ruthless selection, coordinators produced daughter queens from selected colonies. The daughter queens produced by each regional coordinator were then instrumentally inseminated. This method of establishing a breeding population ensures a great deal of genetic diversity in the initial program. Please keep in mind this program is a work in progress which is bound to change and transform based on the needs of beekeepers! After reviewing the needs and conditions present in Ohio, a Carniolan based stock was selected to be the focus of our efforts. However, initial queens selected by regional coordinators were not limited to Carniolan heritage, but rather their merit as being strong, gentle, and productive colonies coming out of the winter of 2006/2007. The long term goal of the OQP will be to transition the breeding program to a more Carniolan based stock.

The queens produced by the regional coordinators and inseminated with semen from Carniolan drones were returned to the regional coordinators to be established in their colonies to be monitored and evaluated as potential breeder queens for the next generation. From the selected breeder queens, the coordinators will raise another generation of daughter queens in 2008 to be instrumentally inseminated and monitored. This program is an ongoing stock evaluation project with the objective of evaluating a large number of queens each year and selecting only the very best as potential breeders and drone stock for the next generation. In addition, the breeder queens will be used as a source of grafting material for the 2008 queen rearing classes. In this manner, stock will be distributed throughout Ohio from the selected queens. This system of producing a successive generation of potential breeder queens using stock from each of the nine regions around Ohio ensures diversity within the stock program, but also takes into account the varied environmental conditions throughout the state.

In addition to distributing the OQP stock through the queen rearing course, regional coordinators also have the option of producing naturally mated production queens for sale. The sale of naturally mated queens will greatly encourage the use of the OQP stock throughout Ohio and surrounding states, especially for those beekeepers who do not have the time or the resources to produce their own queens. Producing naturally mated queens in Ohio presents a challenge, which is easily overcome if beekeepers are willing to modify their beekeeping

practices. The weather conditions will influence the availability of queens produced in Ohio. Naturally mated queens are easily produced in most regions of Ohio during the end of May through the Summer months. Ohio raised queens will be available if beekeepers are willing to wait an extra month or two.

The initial development of the OQP was intended for Ohio's beekeepers, however it was soon realized this stock improvement program is a valuable resource for the entire beekeeping community. As previously mentioned, regional coordinators will have the option of raising queens from the instrumentally inseminated breeder queens to sell to the beekeeping public. What about other beekeepers or organizations who wish to utilize queens from the stock developed by the OQP? In an effort to make this stock readily available to as many beekeepers as possible, the OQP will also sell instrumentally inseminated breeder queens. Beekeepers or organizations that are not affiliated with the OSBA or the OQP are strongly encouraged to contact us for information on how you can obtain stock from this program. As this program grows, we would like to be able to distribute stock to other regions.

By this point, you may be asking yourself, what is the catch? There has to be a catch as this sounds too good to be true, and it is! The catch is that we are relying on the efforts of Ohio beekeepers to assist with the selection process. Remember how I stated earlier that the OQP has a very limited number of resources? This project has been possible in part by financial support from OSBA, but has largely relied on the generous resources and time donated by all of the regional coordinators. As a beekeeper, you may be asking what you can do to assist the OQP. It is simple. We are asking beekeepers closely involved in the OQP through queen rearing classes or those who use naturally mated queens produced by the coordinators to closely monitor their colonies' performance. If you use naturally mated OQP queens in your colonies and are willing to keep records of production and performance, we ask for contributions of superior queens back to the OQP. While naturally mated queens will not produce pure daughter queens, they will produce pure drones. Keep in mind a drone is produced from an unfertilized egg, so it does not possess any genetic material from the drones your naturally mated queen mated with. We would like to use drones from some of the exceptional naturally mated queens from across the state each year for the instrumental insemination of the new generation of potential breeder queens.

The idea of a beekeeper donating a good queen back to the OQP has been a difficult aspect of this program. Why would someone be willing to give up one of their best queens? In order for this stock improvement program to be successful, it must rely on the resources of many. With the lack of a huge budget and the inability to set up and maintain some very organized and closely regulated yards, we are using the large number of Ohio beekeepers to assist with our efforts to develop this stock. In place of a large well regulated apiary of potential breeders, the evaluation of a very large number of naturally mated queens will serve to increase the selection pressure on the population. This IS a sloppy selection program, but

with enough beekeeper participation and support, it will be successful! In addition to utilizing naturally mated queens to facilitate genetic diversity and selection, the central core of the breeding population will be the 50-100 instrumentally inseminated queens. The instrumentally inseminated queens will be under the close supervision and evaluation of the regional coordinators, but we are also asking for additional beekeeper support in developing an "OHIO QUEEN".

For those of you who have heard of the Ohio Queen Project already or for those of you who participated in a queen rearing class, I hope this information has helped to shed some additional light on the project. For those of you who have not heard of the OQP, now is the time to get involved. I would encourage all beekeepers who are interested in the OQP to get in touch with your regional coordinator or myself. The most up to date information will be posted on the Ohio State Beekeepers Association website at [www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org](http://www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org). From there you can follow the link "OSBA Queen Rearing Project" to find out who your regional coordinator is, when and where queen rearing classes will be offered for 2008, and who is selling "OHIO QUEENS".

*Joe Latshaw is the owner of Latshaw Apiaries where he specializes in insemination equipment design and production of II breeder queens. He is the 2008 OH Queen Project coordinator.*

## Proposals for Funding

Central Maryland Beekeeper's Association is actively seeking proposals which support our goals and objectives as a not for profit organization dedicated to beekeeping education, research and extension. All proposals receive full consideration by the Board of Directors. Every active member of CMBA is encouraged to participate and influence the selection process by attending board meetings and/or voicing his/her opinion. Following is a list of proposals currently being considered by the board:

1. Heifer International/Gifts of honeybees and training (\$30.00 per gift).
2. Apiary Inspectors of America/ Resolution seeking support (February 2008). No specific dollar amount requested.
3. York County Beekeeper's Association - Request for funding to purchase books to start an association library. Amount requested: \$250.00.
4. Baltimore County Agriculture Center/Honeybee-Pollinator Garden - Request for funding to establish a permanent demonstration garden at the new Ag Center in cooperation with Baltimore County and other groups.
5. CMBA Honey House at ORNC or the Ag Center - Request to fund the construction and equipment for an extracting facility for the use of CMBA members and for educational purposes.
6. CMBA Affiliation with Local, Regional, National Organizations which share our goals - Request to support through membership organizations such as all MD beekeeping associations, MSBA, MAAREC, EAS,

ABF, AHPA, etc.

7. EAS Research Grant Fund Support - Request to supplement the EAS research grant fund. No dollar amount requested.
8. Establish CMBA research and Extension Grant - Request to establish an annual(?) grant to be awarded to individuals/groups who submit a proposal for research or extension work related to CMBA's goals.
9. Establish an Annual Award in Jerry Fischer's Name - Request for funding to establish an annual award given to an individual from Maryland to recognize and support his/her work in beekeeping education and extension.
10. Scale Hive Project/Wayne Esaias - request for funding to purchase scale hives to support the project in Maryland.
11. Varroa-Resistant Honeybee Stock Project/Wyatt Mangum - Request for funding to continue work with colonies of bees shown to be resistant to varroa mites.
12. Pesticide Study/ Jody Johnson, U. of MD School of Medicine - Request for funding to research the influence of chemicals in pollen on honeybees (in cooperation with Jeff Pettis, BRL, Beltsville).

## For Beginners

By Kelly Ross

Reprinted from Bee Culture April 2008

***Before we get bees, and after we get bees, we are all, still, beginners.***

I dream of bees. I dream of Spring, of course, but that is discrete. I dream of bees.

I suppose a soothsayer would tell me that I dream of industry, of collectiveness and being surrounded by family and colleagues. Perhaps that is so - for one who does not think of bees.

I think of bees.

I ponder bees. I am fascinated by their ability, and their effortless skill at perfection. I consider their architectural mastery - or is it mistressy - their unwearied assumption of duty, and their utter disregard for the factuality of others' reality. They do fly, and very well. So, I ponder bees.

Anticipation is another matter. Anticipation expects.

I expect bees. I have read and studied, pondered and assessed. I know bees are imagined a sign of rebirth and fertility and green growth. I imagine activity, purpose, and realization. I anticipate the arrival of bees. My bees.

Like an expectant mother, as I have been, heavy with future and promise and the anticipation of joy and industry, I have prepared. I have prepared a nest, provisioned it for the awaited arrivals. The perfume of new wax, fresh wood, and clean paint delight me when I check and double check the completeness of the nursery of my anticipation.

As with all things eagerly sought and readied for, I think it likely the truth of my anticipation will be fuller, richer, harder, sadder and distressing when compared to

But we will manage. Some will live and thrive and some will perish, unnamed but keenly missed. And the flowers will bloom and fade and fall. The human children will run and play and call for me: "Mama! Come look! Your bees are on the flowers!"

There has been some Winter of discontent. But I long for Spring, when proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim, Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing. the imagined. I recall ear infections, strep, colic, and the unknown upset that plagued the infants and brought about hours and weeks and endless dark nights of cries and wails and tears. Some mine.

I cannot soothe *Varroa*. I cannot rock away small hive beetles. I cannot cure with lullabies the misery of nos em a as I sang away tummy ache. I can only shed tears when I find it has come to pass.

And yet, I anticipate. Impatiently, I await the arrival of a royal court and attending thousands. Who will become tens of thousands. I can coax nutrition and medicine and vitamins in the name of health, and hide the bitterness in sugar and honey and candy. I know they need me, but they do not.

Like my other beloved, I can bleed for them but I cannot learn for them. I encourage and prompt and watch with my heart aching tight, full of burning breath and swallowed correction. No! Do it this way, not that! And they will allow me some small consideration - the shape of the wax and the blossoms I have planted for them. But they hear the correction of another Mother. And she is not so tender-hearted as I.

I anticipate bees.

*Kelly Ross lives in Texas with her husband, two daughters, and a Siamese kitten. She is an unfinished English Lit major, quilter, and now a beekeeper with five hives, and many thousands more daughters.*

## For Beginners

By Russel Aceto

Reprinted from Bee Culture April 2008

***Before we get bees, and after we get bees, we are all, still, beginners.***

When I was six or seven I had a fascination with various creepy crawly things. My parents enrolled me in courses sponsored by our local museum where, imitating the super heroes we all wanted to be, we "hunted bugs." I still have my costume today. Though the t-shirt with the grasshopper head and Kool-Aid stains on the front is just a couple of sizes too small. While I was always the first to "fall in" the water, (I had to be the first to capture that newt, water bug or bull frog), I never envisioned myself an entomologist or even a beekeeper, just a bug hunting super hero. Thirty years later I still find myself enjoying the odd "bug hunt." Only the bugs I am now hunting are the bees that live, check that - *lived*, in my backyard.

When I purchased my first colony four years ago, little did I know that it would blossom into not only a passion but a small sideline hobby that so far, has

more than paid for itself. What started out as two colonies grew into four last year, then expanded to the six we have now. Here in northern Vermont we have a fairly steady honey flow throughout the Spring and Summer months. We have dandelion and clover in the Spring and early Summer. Here on our hilltop, we also have a reliable Basswood flow and in the Fall goldenrod, asters and the invasive Japanese Knotweed. We try to pull all supers early in the Fall, following the goldenrod flow, so the bees can go into Winter with the slower to crystallize knotweed honey.

When we expanded the number of colonies we managed last year, we did so through a reliable, local beekeeper. We were excited when we received the much anticipated "the nucs are ready," call in early May. Last Spring was miserable! It rained almost every day the dandelion and apples were in bloom. Our bees were not terribly thrilled with the idea of being cooped up for days on end. However, the colonies were strong. They promised to be good honey producers and we were excited about bringing proven stock into our apiary.

My parents came up for Memorial Day last year and one afternoon as we were working in the yard, my father, who despite being allergic to bee stings, is fascinated with bees, said, "What's that noise? Why are there so many bees in front of that hive?" Taking a quick glance and quoting several experts, I said, "Probably just orientation flights." To which he replied, "Ummm, I don't think so."

My father was right of course, (he is always right!). I was witnessing my first swarm. The noise at first was just slightly above the normal "hum" of the bee traffic in our yard. It gradually rose to its almost deafening crescendo as the bees started to gather on the end of a branch in one of our sugar maples. As more and more bees congregated, the branch swung lower and lower. My wife and mother were snapping pictures, my sister hid indoors. My father got right into the fray, fearless. As the noise receded, we realized that the "great bee escape" was over. So was my honey crop from that new colony, or so I thought.

The mass-e-bees swung like a pendulum in the tree.

It was both intimidating and spectacular. As they were about 20 feet in the air, I could think of no good way to get them down. I set out a nuc box, baited with "swarm bait" and hoped. My father, ever the engineer, hatched a plan. A plan any good super hero bug hunter would be proud of. Using a ladder, some rope and a saw, the plan was to cut the branch and SLOWLY lower it to the ground and the bees would just walk right in the front door. You know what they say about a "good plan" ... as the saw made its final pass through the branch and just before my father could compensate for the added weight, the branch jerked. It twitched just enough to dislodge most of the bees showering the nuc box, the

ground and my father's feet in bees. We lowered the "hangers on" to the ground and watched as low and behold they all marched into the nuc box. We looked for, but could not find the queen. We hoped she had not been hurt in the cascade of bees. We let things settle for a couple of hours, before moving the nuc box into our beeyard.

When I checked a couple of days later, the queen was there, they had started drawing comb and she had begun laying. In a couple of weeks they were ready for the second hive body! I was surprised to see that soon, that too was full of drawn comb, honey and brood. The queen is what I call a Vermont mutt, though she really is carefully bred from several strains of *Varroa* resistant stock. She is quite a prolific colony leader. I could count on her to lay absolutely full frames of eggs, making her a great queen to breed and make nucs from. By the end of July they were producing surplus honey, (we pulled about 40 pounds of honey from this colony) and by the end of September, they were making preparations to swarm again.

WHY? What did I do wrong? The only conclusion I could draw, was that resources were readily available and moving on was the next best option. Though I tried to prevent them from leaving, by cutting cells and saying hearty prayers to the bee gods, by mid October they were gone. I eventually lured them down from the tree above my garage (this time they figured 50 feet was too high for me) and set them up with plenty of drawn comb and capped honey. They made it through the Winter.

When I checked them this Spring, they were once again my strongest colony. I made sure I pulled out at least half of their brood and gave them supers right away, all in an effort to get her/them to stick around. Apparently it was not enough. Last week, I discovered that they again wanted to leave, and this morning I watched them go.

I don't know where they went and I have not received a call from a distressed neighbor. I believe they will be OK. Perhaps this Fall when they swarm again, (I'm sure they will), they will come home. For the time being, I have a couple of her children working for me. When and if she does return, I'll be ready, with the official bug hunter cape and cowl in hand. I think I will turn that Kool-aide stained shirt into a flag, for times when the swarms are buzzing, all will know where to find the fearless "*Bug Hunter*."

*Special thanks to Bill Mares and my wife Penny for their endless support, encouragement and of course edits*

## **IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS**

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## **DATES TO REMEMBER**

**General Meeting – May 6, 2008 – at Oregon Ridge Nature Center. 7:30PM.** The May speaker is Ann Harman, Master Beekeeper, author, and speaker as well as a volunteer teaching beekeeping in many countries around the world. She is credited with being the first to recognize the initial Africanized bees in Haiti and has worked with AHB in many regions. Her talk, “Living With Africanized Honey Bees,” is something we will need to know about sooner or later—preferably later! Ann was a member of the first group of EAS Certified master Beekeepers when the program started in 1981.

**Board Meeting – May 19, 2008 – 7 PM at Oregon Ridge Nature Center.**

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