May meeting minutes were accepted by motion of Gary Feuerhelm and seconded by Larry Macurda and vote of members in attendance.

Secretary Report:

Vice President Report:

Treasurer’s Report: Cheryl Housden reported that the next Bee School, scheduled in July, has been cancelled.

Regional Representative’s Report:

OSU Liaison’s Report:

Old Business: Randy Oliver will be our speaker at our July 2 meeting. It will be held at the Medford Library, 205 S Central Ave (at RVCC/SOU Medford Campus area)

New Business

Let’s Talk Bees

Dewey Caron, our featured speaker this month, talked about the Oregon Bee Project, the importance of native bees and his annual April survival survey. SOBA beekeepers had one of the best winter survival rates of all clubs in Oregon.

Dewey stated that the first questions new beekeeper should ask themselves are: “Why do you keep bees?” and “How do you keep bees?” Beekeeping approaches vary from “hands-off” to “industrial management”.

Darwinian, or api-centric beekeeping, mandates “survival of the fittest”, while responsible stewardship mandates treat and feed as needed to manage healthy and productive bees. IPM (Integrated Pest Management) is critical in this approach. The question is NOT “Does my colony have mites?” The answer is always “Yes”. The question that should be asked is “How many mites are in my colony?”
Based on Dewey’s overwintering survey, it appears that the best feed for overwinter survival (besides honey in frames) is hard candy or fondant. The survey has consistently shown (over the years) that commercial beekeepers tend to have about half the losses of small quantity backyard beekeepers. Nationwide, the numbers for colony losses are going down overall.

Dewey’s opinion is that Treatment-Free, aka Darwinian, Natural Beekeeping, Bee-Friendly or api-centric beekeeping is NOT stewardship friendly or bee friendly. Your bees will die unless they receive management. It is the beekeeper’s duty to foster colony health by letting bees live as naturally as possible to allow the bees to use their toolkit for survival, with assistance as needed.

He listed 10 Darwinian things that can be used to move your colonies toward Treatment-Free Beekeeping:

1. Keep your bee stock locally adapted. Don’t import bees from other areas.
2. Space hives as far apart as possible. In nature they space themselves approximately ½ mile apart.
3. Keep bees higher off the ground.
4. Keep smaller hives. Feral hives are usually no more than one deep box in volume.
5. Encourage bee use of propolis.
6. Use hives with thicker walls (better insulation)
7. Raise more drones
8. Use minimal & sensible inspection techniques. Get in & out of the hive quickly.
10. If you do ALL of the above, your colony will die in 2-3 years unless you use sensible proactive mite control.

Some of the control methods Dewey listed were:

1. Use natural comb with no foundation
2. Use an alternative hive (top bar, Warre, skep, tree hive), though these have shown an average of double the overwinter losses of Langstroth hives.
3. “Let ’em swarm” and move away from the mites
4. The James Bond method – “Live or let die”
5. Grow more drones then cull the drone comb before the drones emerge to control mite reproduction
6. Split a colony into two or three colonies with screened bottom boards

If your bees survive the above methods, they MAY have a genetic predisposition to mite resistance. But if you find a colony with a heavy mite load, you must be willing to cull (kill) that colony. If you have a colony with lots of mites, organic chemical acids have been proven to work. Also essential oils can be used to help control mites. There have been better chemicals developed that don’t go into the honey or wax but target only the mites. Total chemical management DOES NOT develop stronger bees. All stressors reduce the bees’ ability to fight mites. Mites are strong and adapt more readily to develop resistance to miticides. The ultimate solution will involve developing stronger bees (queen stock) and weaker mites.

A beekeeper who wants to be Treatment-Free must be smarter and more diligent than one who treats because api-centric beekeeping is MUCH HARDER than following chemical management techniques

Dewey Caron’s data and blog can be found at http://pnwhoneybeesurvey.com/ Additional information on methods a Varroa Management can be found at https://honeybehealthcoalition.org/

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm