

OSU's "Bee School" Introduces Basics of Beekeeping

By Scott Laird

I recently attended a workshop on Beginning Beekeeping sponsored by the Oregon State University Extension Service, held at their office in St. Helens. The workshop lasted from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm and provided a wealth of information to a group of about 20 potential beekeeping participants.

The workshop was a great overview of the trials and tribulations that beginning beekeepers experience. Throughout the workshop it was clear that beekeeping is not an easy endeavor, but one that requires a scientific and inquisitive mind, diligence as well as patience, and financial resources. You also need to document your work and observations, learn from mistakes, and be willing to start over if necessary.

Although the workshop did not really cover this directly, I felt like it was implied that beekeepers in general are encouraging more people to get involved because of recent dramatic losses of bees and other pollinators. Our environment is struggling and one sign of that is the significant die-offs of bees we've seen in the last decade, and especially in the last few years. Helping bees find a welcoming shelter and location to thrive is one way humans can have a positive impact, in a very local way.

The workshop was presented by a group of six volunteers, some who are part of a group called Columbia County Beekeepers. The presenters were a mix of both beekeeping experts and some newcomers. Each participant received a thumb drive with all the materials covered during the day, plus additional resources and information.

Ron McLaughlin is a new beekeeper who is getting ready to start his second season. He provided a list of commonly used terms and made a short presentation about the history, noting that evidence shows beekeeping has been going on since 7,000 BCE. He said there were no native honey bees in North America until England shipped them to the Virginia colony in 1622.

Linda Zahl, an experienced beekeeper who is part of the Oregon Master Beekeeping Program (similar to the Master Gardener™ Program), introduced honey bee biology, and discussed the many different species of honey bees and their characteristics. She explained the physiology and life cycle of honey bees and how they collect pollen on their bodies to pollinate plants and bring the pollen back to the hive to make honey. She talked about the different kinds of bees in a hive, the queen, the male drones, and the female workers, and their functions, and explained how bees communicate with each other to share food sources.

Another first year beekeeper, DeeAnn Herschback, talked about the equipment needed to get started, including the series of stacked bee boxes called an apiary, and the gloves and bee suit most beekeepers wear. She also discussed a few of the lessons she learned during her first year.

During the lunch break, Amanda Shaw from Portland Urban Beekeepers performed an autopsy on a dead beehive to look for clues, and discussed why the bees in the hive might have died off.

Shaw is a well known and experienced beekeeper – she hosts a podcast "Beekeeper Confidential," and is a volunteer at Zenger Farm, a working 16 acre urban farm site in SE Portland that promotes sustainable food systems, environmental stewardship, and community development.

Following the lunch break Shaw made a very informative presentation that explored a year in the life of a first-year beekeeper. Shaw discussed how and where to acquire bees - either

ited use of chemicals, provided a fascinating look at diseases and pests that can harm a hive, including the Varroa mite, an external parasite which is currently attacking Oregon beehives. Gomes said other basic concerns that can harm bees include poor nutrition and the use of pesticides. Gomes talked about how to identify problems in the hive and possible ways to monitor and treat issues that arise. He suggested most beginners should try to find a mentor and stressed the need for all beekeepers to share information and work together.

Gomes later discussed in detail how to trap and move a swarm, with an emphasis on moving potentially dangerous or unwanted bumblebee swarms found in urban areas. He said he is working to create a regional group of trained volunteers who could provide this service.

The final presentation was by Deb Brimacombe, a BugNut with the entomology group of the Columbia County Master Gardeners™. Brimacombe is part of the Bee Atlas volunteer program which is helping collect, identify, and record the bees found in Columbia County and what they are feeding on. Brimacombe discussed the numerous bee species found in this area. She talked about ways to help bees prosper, including how to make nesting places for Mason bees and other species, and flowering vegetation you can plant around your home that provide nutrition for bees.

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by purchasing them from a breeder or by capturing a swarm, and talked about how to set up an apiary, and whether or not you need to feed your bees. Shaw discussed the seasonal cycles of bees, when and what they are feeding on, how to harvest honey, as well as what happens and how to care for the bees at the end of the season and over the winter.

Steve Gomes, a retired wildlife biologist and Master Beekeeper who practices creative beekeeping with lim-

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