

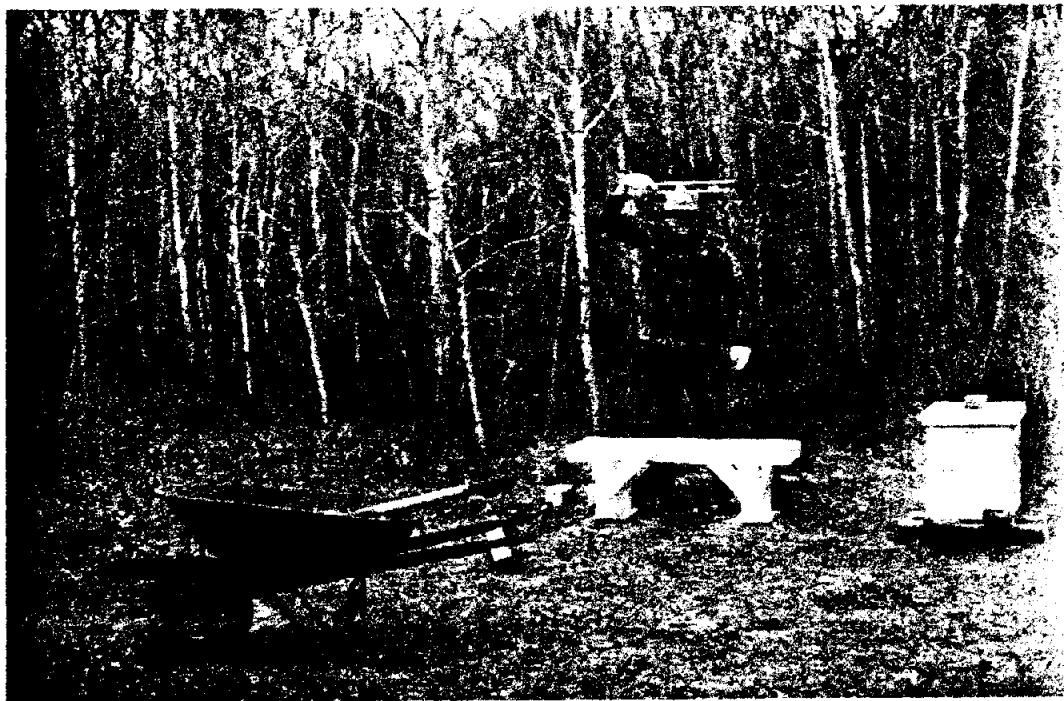
Red River Apiarists' Association

Bee Cause



Volume 2, Issue 3

March 2000



*Beekeepers have to keep a level head when
setting up the Apiary ???*

Meeting Location

River Heights Community Center

**1370 Grosvenor St.
(intersection of Oak & Grosvenor)**

Meeting Date

Mar. 14th

**7:30 PM in the upstairs meeting
room**

Guest speaker(s):

**Rick Neilson (Rainy River District Bee-
keeper)**

Topic(s):

**Raising Buckfast Queens (Mite resistant
strain I'm told)**

**Guests are always welcome and coffee will
be served as usual, byob&b's :)**

RRAA Website URL:

<http://www.blazeinet.com/rwayne/RRAA.html>

The *Bee Cause* newsletter is published by the *Red River Apiarists' Association* eight times per year (monthly excluding June, July, August and December).

Membership in the *Red River Apiarists' Association* is \$20.00 per year and includes a subscription to the *Bee Cause*.

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President's message:

As we move along into March, we are very anxious to recheck our colonies for successful over wintering. As we heard back in January, treating with Apistan in the Fall may not entirely ensure survival of the colonies infected with Varroa. It appears that the population has been stressed during the honey flow and are going into winter in a very tired state. Thus despite the treatments, and ample food, they still do not survive. It is very clear to me that the Spring treatment is critical to get the upper edge. It is also quite evident that we all must check our colonies for infestation. As some of our members indicated, an easy method is to pull out capped drone brood. If you discover any little friends on the brood, you must take action. Appearance of five mites per drone is a sure sign of a short life for your hive. Thanks to Ted for providing us with some insight on when to check our hives this spring.

Thanks to Ted Scheuneman for the Hive Top door prize, and to Jim Campbell for the Ari-taki calendar.

I have always wondered how some things develop. Just to stimulate your mind a little, have you thought about what contributes to the call to protect bears? The Humane Society has been lobbying to stop spring bear hunts. Someone from Swan River prepared a report on the benefits of hunting, and noted it supports 100 jobs in the area, generates about \$7 million in business, and likely preserves several airline jobs. Doesn't it seem strange that the call comes from the Humane Society, run by people who mostly live in Winnipeg, a place where some requested a law to prevent dogs and cats from running loose, pooping and making noise. This is damaging property and an annoyance, they say. Yet several hundred bears were a dangerous nuisance in the Gilbert Plains and Grandview area last year. These are to be permitted to run loose, kill

livestock, and destroy beehives. Thought provoking??

Just a reminder, if you have a favourite topic for our meeting, let any of the Executive know. We can discuss how or when to fit it into our plans.

See you at our March meeting!!!

Jim Campbell

Editors note:

Hummmmm, seems my column is getting smaller eh... That's OK this month as I didn't have much to say beekeeping (yea, that's me on the cover!) wise anyway, EXCEPT!

As most of you know I'm sort of into computers and I'm always harping about how we should move forward in the electronic age. But I'm also told many of you don't own computers. Well I also sell computers on the side and have acquired 4 new systems which I'm offering to my fellow beekeepers to get you into the new age, they are as follows:

*AMD K6 II 500 MHz CPUs with 512k of L2 cache
64 MB SDRAM (100 MHz)
13.6 gigabyte HD (UDMA)
40x CD ROM
3.5" 1.44 MB floppy DD
8 MB AGP 3D video (system shared resources)
3D PCI sound
200 watt speakers
56K V90 internal PCI modem (Motorola chip set)
AT case with 250 watt p/power (USB ports and UDMA cable included)
Standard AT keyboard and PS/2 mouse with pad
Windows 98 Second Edition with manual (Windows 2000 Pro available for a few dollars more eh)
17" SVGA color monitor.*

Assembled, tested and OS installed \$1400.00 per unit (taxes extra of course).

First come first serve, it don't get much cheaper then that eh. Contact me for more information if interested.

Later Ron

Executive Minutes

Red River Apiarists' Association 25 January 2000

Attending: Jim Campbell, Doug Henry, Dennis Ross. Location: Perkins Rest., Kildonan Crossing (Lagimodiere/Regent), Winnipeg, 6:30 p.m.

Jim welcomed the group to the first meeting of our new executive. Hopefully the central location of Perkins will be convenient now that the committee is made up of people in the areas surrounding Winnipeg.

For our next regular meeting on February 15, a Spring Management session was recommended. Jim to contact Ted Scheuneman for a talk. The March 14 meeting could be on preparing a Nuc or Re-Queening by Rod Boudreau. April 11 could be reminder about Apistan and Tetracycline treatments. May 9 would be open for supering information and general discussion. September 12 -honey preparation for competition October 10 -help for staffing display/information booth November 14 -Year end windup./ nominating committee??

Jim to bring Sunglasses from Rod for the draw in February. Dennis will provide a super and 10 wooden frames for March.

Jim advised that MBA would be supporting a Field Day on June 24 at home of Terry Fehr, Gladstone. Cost for supper to be about \$10.00 each. Day to start at 1:00 p.m.

The group discussed possibly returning to St Vital or going to Polo Park for the Honey Show in October 2000.

The next Executive meeting to be February 22 at Perkins at 6-30 p.m.

Jim C for Ron Rudiak, Sec'y RRAA

Question Bucket

To ensure everyone is given time to ask questions at our next meeting, I will place a "Question Bucket" alongside our regular draw bucket. If you have a question, place it on a slip of paper and drop it into the bucket. This way if you are shy, or think your question may be too basic, we will still be able to help. If we do not get to the question during the meeting, we will answer the question in the next newsletter. Perhaps this could be a regular feature of our newsletter. Let me know what you think of the idea, or at least, let me know your questions

Jim C.

Red River Apiarists' Association

Minutes of the Regular Meeting

February 15, 2000

The **regular meeting** of the Red River Apiarists' Association was held at the River Heights Community Club on February 15, 2000 with twenty-three members and guests present.

Jim Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

Minutes: Jim read the minutes of the previous, executive meeting.

Motion: To accept the minutes accept the minutes as read. (Moved by: Walter Wright Second by: Brian Schewfelt) **Carried**

Committee Reports:

Program: - Jim Campbell reported on suggestions brought forward at the executive meeting.

March 14 - Preparing a Nuc or Re-Queening by Rod Boudreau

April 11 - Drug and antibiotic feeding and strategies for controlling disease

May 9 - Supering for maximum honey production and a general discussion

September 12 - Preparing for the honey competition *FALL FEEDING - MEDICATION, SYRUP*

October - Our display booth, staffing and layout for maximum promotion

November 14 - Year end windup. Nominating committee.

Honey Show Report: Jim reported on the discussions that took place at the executive meeting. The executive decided to try for space in Polo Park this year to have more exposure.

MBA Report: Jim Campbell outlined the Picnic and Field Day on June 24th being planned by the MBA. It will take place at the Terry Fehr farm in the Gladstone area. Some of the activities which are being planned are:

A presentation on Off Farm Income (investments)

Arial application of herbicides and pesticides, minimizing risks.

Canola production.

Representatives from government ar also invited.

A barbecue, approximate cost will be in the range of ten dollars for each person.

More information will be presented for our members as plans finalize.

Ted Scheuneman gave a presented tips and techniques for getting the bees ready for honey production.

Draw prize: The draw prize, an insulated hive cover, donated by Ted Scheuneman, was won by Ray Hourd.

Ron Rudiak (Secretary - RRAA)

Notes from the Beeyard

Buddy can you spare a paradigm?

by Tom Theobald

Niwot Colo.

(part 1)

par.a.digm a pattern, model or overall concept accepted by most people because of its effectiveness in explaining a complex process or idea, thus a paradigm shift is the changing of the basic model.

Seattle, Wash., erupted in chaos this past week as frustrated demonstrators protesting the meeting of the World Trade Organization clashed with police. The protesters represented an odd amalgam of environmentalists, labour unions, farmers and concerned citizens. Colorado had its own contingent of farmers in Seattle.

The agricultural contingent represents a wide spectrum of concerns, with some seeking assurance that world trade will provide for exports of US agricultural products and others troubled by the prospect of an increased influx of low priced imports which would further depress the American market for agricultural commodities. Whatever the outcome of these debates, the movement toward a globalized economy is likely to have a significant impact on large segments of American agriculture, and it appears that beekeeping will not escape these changes.

In the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th, beekeeping blossomed as a viable agricultural industry. Prior to Langstroth's discovery of the "bee space" in 1851, and his development of the movable frame hive, beekeeping had been primarily a peasant industry, with only rudimentary management and low production. Even at this though, the products of the hive --- primarily honey and beeswax --- were important items of commerce for thousands of years.

Langstroth's hive laid the groundwork for a paradigm shift in beekeeping --- a dramatic change from the way things had been done in the past to the way they would be done in the future. It provided for much more intimate management of a colony of bees, as well as the non-destructive harvesting of the surplus honey crop. These changes in management and equipment came at a fortuitous time for American beekeepers, and nowhere was this more true than along the Front Range of Colorado. As new agricultural lands were opened up and brought under irrigation in the closing years of the last century, bringing increasing acreages of important honey crops such as alfalfa and sweet clover, the potential for honey production increased exponentially.

By 1900, my home base of Boulder County was the leading beekeeping region in Colorado and one of the leading beekeeping regions in America. With only 21,000 souls in residence, the county supported 8,000 colonies of bees. This compares to a current population of about 300,000 people and fewer than 1,000 colonies of bees. In 1900, roughly half of those 8,000 colonies were in the hands of individual farmers, with half of the remainder managed by hobbyists and the balance owned by "specialists". The specialists were the ones pursuing beekeeping as a livelihood, and at that time a family sized operation might consist of 100 -

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150 colonies, often less. Today we would call these specialists commercial beekeepers, and there are commercial beekeeping operations in Colorado which can trace their origin to grandfathers or great-grandfathers who were turn - of - the - century specialists.

It was these specialists who would be the catalyst for the next paradigm shift in beekeeping, and all that was lacking was the appearance of the automobile. The horseless carriage expanded the potential range of those early specialists, enabling them to manage a larger number of colonies over a wider region, and it wasn't long before some of the more progressive ones put the first Model T's to some innovative uses. Early trucks were soon to follow the Model T, and this accelerated the changes. While many beekeepers simply grew in place, expanding their operations over a local area or a portion of a state, by the teens the first migratory beekeeping operations began to appear. Migratory beekeepers moved their bees for three primary reasons: to escape cold winter weather, to move to blooming crops, or to provide pollination for a fee in those regions where agriculture required it.

By the '20's, commercial beekeeping operations numbered their colonies in the hundreds, sometimes in the thousands. While pollination was important to some, primarily the migratory beekeepers, honey production remained the foundation for most of the commercial beekeeping in the United States.

This situation held until fairly recently. In the beginning, most of these growing commercial operations marketed some, if not all, of their honey, but over time, as their colony numbers grew, they began relying more on packers to take their crop at season's end. This served them well until fairly recently, but the first signs of a problem appeared in the '70's. Mexico, eager to build its beekeeping industry as a means of capturing US dollars, began to export large quantities of honey to the US wholesale market at bargain basement prices. This depressed prices on the wholesale market, and thus the returns for US beekeepers.

In the 80's, China replaced Mexico as the major exporter to the US, followed by Argentina, and the results were the same. A successful anti-dumping suit brought by US beekeepers against China resulted in restrictions on Chinese imports in 1996, and the wholesale market rose almost immediately. For a short time, commercial beekeepers enjoyed reasonable prices for their honey. They paid off back debts, restored equity and replaced ageing equipment, but the good times were short lived, and soon the market began to decline again under downward pressure of imports.

In 1987, the two parasitic mites appeared, resulting in devastating losses for many commercial beekeepers. These losses came on top of substantial pesticide losses, which beekeepers had largely absorbed in silence for decades, and as the market continued to decline through the '90s, the prospects for American honey producers looked increasingly dark. The number of commercial beekeepers dropped in the 1990's, as well as the number of colonies nationally. Largely due to the mites, feral colonies of honeybees disappeared and the ranks of hobbyist and sideline beekeepers declined from about 200,000 to around 120,000.

In the 1980's, the National Honey Board was created to promote honey consumption, but for whatever reason, and perhaps in spite of their efforts, wholesale honey prices continued to decline, to a current level about 20 cents a pound below commercial beekeepers' cost of production. Commercial beekeepers have bolstered their position in the past 10 years by taking a cue from those early migratory beekeepers, and during the '90's more and more of them

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have left home each winter, moving their bees to places such as California and Washington in pursuit of the income provided by pollination contracts from crops like almonds and apples.

While pollination contracts have kept many commercial operations afloat in the past decade, others have gone under. Most of those remaining still rely heavily on the sale of honey to keep their operations solvent, and there is little evidence that the wholesale price for honey will improve. Restrictions on imports from China expire in August of 2000. It's getting darker all the time, and beekeeping may well be facing yet another paradigm shift, one which is likely to be more wrenching, precipitous and disruptive than any seen yet.

Notes from the Beeyard

Buddy can you spare a paradigm?

by Tom Theobald

Niwot Colo.

(part 2)

par.a.digm a pattern, model or overall concept accepted by most people because of its effectiveness in explaining a complex process or idea, thus a paradigm shift is the changing of the basic model.

The Colorado Beekeepers' Association annual winter meeting was the weekend of December 4 - 5, in Longmont, Colo. Like a smattering of other agricultural organizations in the state, this group represents a long and rich history. Formed in 1880 and incorporated in 1888, the recent meeting marks the 119th year for this organization.

At the business meeting on Sunday, Dec. 5, Lyle Johnston of Rocky Ford (currently the state's largest beekeeper) surprised some of his peers by stating that "the days of large scale honey production in United States are over."

This wasn't a case of Chicken Little running around declaring that the sky is falling. I've known Lyle for several years, and have worked closely with him on a number of beekeeping issues. He's a savvy businessman as well as a hardworking and innovative beekeeper who traces his lineage to the entry into commercial beekeeping by his grandfather, Walter Leckenby, in 1908. Along with Lyle, several other Johnstons carry Walter Leckenby's legacy into its third generation, running commercial beekeeping operations in Colorado and South Dakota. Lyle has lived with bees and worked bees all his life --- learning by doing, not just out of books --- and anything he has to say about the bee industry merits close attention.

More than a decade ago, Lyle was one of the first Colorado beekeepers to palletize his colonies and begin moving them to California in the winter for almond pollination. This option arose as depressed wholesale prices for honey began to affect the bottom line for commercial beekeepers. Today, he moves almost all of his bees to California each winter, and serves as a

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broker for thousands of additional colonies belonging to Colorado beekeepers. This winter, more than 20,000 Colorado colonies will make the trek to California, an impressive statistic when you consider that there are only 27,000 colonies in the state.

What Lyle had to say about the future of honey production came as no surprise to his commercial peers, all of whom have seen the handwriting appearing on the wall. Most of them have pursued pollination income over the past several years to balance off low honey prices. Still, the public recognition that commercial honey production may be a thing of the past is like a thunder clap, an acknowledgement of what everyone already knows, but are reluctant to face.

There is little indication that the wholesale honey market will improve. In fact, the likelihood is that it will decline even further under the pressure of foreign imports. This has been the case for more than 10 years despite the efforts of the National Honey Board to increase demand and improve the lot of American beekeepers. While gross demand has increased, this growth has been filled by foreign honey and American honey producers are worse off today than ever.

Until the appearance of the mites in 1987, American beekeepers were still making it, even given low wholesale prices, but the mites were the straw that broke the camel's back. The high losses from mites and the expenses for treatment were piled on top of historical losses from pesticides and the normal ups and downs of agriculture. Without a strong market, no-one can replace a third or more of their livestock each year and expect to remain economically viable, and it isn't any different for beekeepers.

So, as we enter the new millennium, commercial beekeepers are facing what could well be cataclysmic changes, and these changes will affect not only beekeepers, but the nation as a whole.

As Lyle suggests, commercial beekeepers will have to step away from large scale production of honey for a wholesale market which fails to meet their cost of production. This may be a difficult move for most beekeepers, since honey production has been the *raison d'être* since the dimmest beginnings of beekeeping. At the very least, it will be a profound psychological shift for beekeepers who, for generations, have measured their success through honey production and who have taken pride in their product.

Commercial beekeepers face three basic options. The first is to continue business as usual and fail, and many have followed this course already. The number of colonies in the US, as well as the number of commercial beekeepers, has declined steadily over the past 50 years, with the most precipitous decline in the last decade.

The second option is to downsize, to scale down the size of commercial operations to a point where costs of production are reduced and the honey crop can be marketed directly, eliminating the middlemen and the packers. Several large Colorado beekeepers are already moving in this direction.

The third option is to reconfigure commercial operations in whole new ways. Fortunately, bees are a plastic medium, and the resources coming into a hive can be expressed in more ways than honey production. Concentrating on pollination alone is one way to do this. If pollination contracts are high enough --- and they may well be as the number of colonies declines --- then the bees can be "parked" during that portion of the season when they aren't

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pollinating. Another possibility is to combine pollination with the production of queens, nucs, and package bees to be sold to other beekeepers. Under this scenario, most of the resources coming into the hive are expressed in the growth of the colony --- brood and bees --- with little or no honey production.

The real question is how all these changes will shake out. As a smaller operator, I have been somewhat insulated from these market pressures, but not entirely. I've always marketed my own product, maintained a one-man operation and kept expenses to a minimum. The downsizing of former commercial operations may increase my competition and make it more difficult to maintain my little niche. While pollination may be an answer for some, pollination fees will have to rise substantially to replace the loss of honey production.

These changes could affect many other parts of agriculture as well. Pollination from honeybees is the foundation for about \$10 billion in indirect production (home gardens, small orchards, wildlife forage plants, plants which provide erosion control, etc.), and even small changes in American beekeeping could have far reaching consequences. The major crops like almonds and apples, may continue to attract sufficient bees to make a crop if pollination fees are high enough, but minor crops or isolated operations may have difficulty securing pollination at any price. The loss of feral colonies has made this an even more critical issue, and the future of hobbyists, who fill many of the gaps, is still uncertain.

The move toward a global economy may be inevitable and unavoidable, but I think we need to tread very carefully. By outsourcing agricultural products and eliminating family farmers, ranchers and beekeepers, we may well be jeopardizing the food security of the nation, a penny wise and pound foolish philosophy that we may soon regret. Before it's over, we may all be asking if we can spare this paradigm.

Submitted by Ron Rudiak

Trading post

Ted 32 min comments
For Sale: Limited supply of healthy wintered nucs with 1999 queens, includes 4 brood frames with brood covering at least 2 frames. Available from mid April to mid May. \$100.00
Ted Scheuneman, evenings only please (204)338-6066

For Sale: Over-wintered hives in two brood chambers.
Henry Wiebe (204)663-5550

For Sale: 50 plastic hive top feeders. Excellent condition. \$12.00 ea.
Don Kitson (204)239-6824

*of the winter
nuc sale for late this year by 7th day.
3 min.
material dry & size ready to order*