

# Beekeepers Gazette

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## Echo Parrots and Africanized Bees

In August, our area's Apiary Inspector Rob Horsburgh, traveled to the island of Bonaire in the southern Caribbean with University of Florida, PhD student Caroline Efstathion.

Bonaire is an island of about 15,000 people off the coast of Venezuela and home to the critically endangered Yellow-shouldered Green Amazon parrot.

Rob and Caroline's goal was to assist the Echo Parrot Project with an ever daunting Africanized bee problem. The Africanized Bees are taking over nest cavities of the critically endangered Yellow-shouldered Amazon parrot and are endangering the safety of biologists who monitor their nests. In some cases the bees are actually stinging the baby parrots to death to take over the nest cavity. Other threats to the parrots include poaching for the pet trade and habitat loss.

Before the Echo Parrot Project was started in 2010, the parrot population was down to about 300 birds. With close monitoring, public education and anti-poaching efforts the parrots have rebounded to about 800 birds.

This year, 30 known nests were monitored and several of them were found to be occupied by Africanized bees. To help mitigate this threat Rob and Caroline built and installed swarm trap boxes along cliff edges throughout parrot nesting areas. In addition, they obtained samples of Africanized bees for DNA testing and pest and disease analyses.

While on the island, they also presented two workshops to the local Junior Ranger students and local beekeepers to educate them on beekeeping management practices.

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## Parrots, continued

There are only around 7 people keeping bees on Bonaire, usually keeping between one and seven hives.

The plan is to start a cottage beekeeping industry where the captured swarms from the parrot nesting areas will be placed into managed apiaries and honey can then be gathered and sold. The proceeds would go to help fund protection efforts for the parrots. This trip was funded by an emergency grant from the Walt Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund.

To hear more about the Echo Bonaire Project, go to;

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UutGMu7ZVU&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UutGMu7ZVU&feature=player_embedded)

To see a portion of Rob's workshop, go to;

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_detailpage&v=YQdEvtZLwoY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=YQdEvtZLwoY)



## Comments from the Editor

Now look at what you've done.

You've fussed about the summer heat so much that winter is coming. Now what are you going to do?

This month, we'll discuss just that; fall and winter preparation.

The fall nectar flow is rapidly slowing down. We have to inspect, equalize and feed up. It's time to prepare for the winter.

I cannot stress how important it is to be ready for the coming months so your beehives will survive the winter healthy and ready for the spring.

Again, I'll say; you'll only get one chance to prepare for a season.

Additionally, as you know, I occasionally find things that may not be honeybee related that I feel you'll enjoy. This month is no different.

Here is a video from David Attenborough with the BBC that is remarkable. Just follow this link and enjoy;

[www.youtube.com/embed/auSo1MyWf8g?rel=0](http://www.youtube.com/embed/auSo1MyWf8g?rel=0)

Until next month,  
Happy Beekeeping,

*Ray*

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## Old Man Winter is on the way.

We've been talking about it and Old Man Winter's getting nearer...

The short lived fall nectar flow is almost, if not already, over.

We've been discussing numerous ways to keep your bees healthy. Now we need to make sure they survive the fall months and December.

Remember, our winter is technically just one month; December. Our spring starts in January, so we aren't going to fight the same battles as those in northern climates.

Let's start by inspecting your hives. Are they queen right? Are there several frames of bees? Do you still have plenty of brood (eggs, larvae, and sealed brood)? Are the bees disease free? Are you experiencing a problem with  Varroa and/or Small Hive Beetles?

This time of year, it is quite common to inspect a hive and find the queen, but no eggs or larvae. As we have discussed before, the bees communicate throughout the hive the presence of or lack of a nectar flow

The absence of a nectar flow can, and usually will cause the bees to send a pheromone  to the queen to either stop or slow down egg laying, thereby leaving a gap in the brood cycle. This could ultimately weaken the hive going into the winter months, causing problems with Varroa mites and Small Hive Beetles.

The queen will almost surely cease to lay if there isn't any means of the hive supporting the young larvae, i.e. pollen and nectar. The colony will only support enough eggs as can be cared for. If there isn't a nectar flow, they can't feed as many young larvae. As we discussed in the past, this is one of, if not the main reasons to feed your bees during a dearth; to stimulate the queen to continue to lay eggs.

Do not worry though, as the break in the brood cycle can be and usually is healthy for the colony. Most of the maladies in a hive will benefit by the breaking of the brood cycle. Consider that if nature hasn't caused a break in the brood cycle, it may be something you want to do

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## Old Man Winter (continued)

I personally believe a break in the brood cycle is healthy.

If you haven't already, now is the time to do mite counts, check for excessive SHB and check for any other problems you may have.

Varroa and SHB grow exponentially during the heat of the summer. That can lead to a severe problem this time of year. If your hive needs attention, now is the time to give it.

As I have said previously, now is whenever I get to confuse you. I try to teach holistic methods of controlling problems. Sometimes, that simply isn't an option.

Sometimes problems such as a high mite count will force you have to resort to more extreme measures. One of the options you can consider is to force a break the brood cycle. Whenever you have a break in the brood cycle, the mites will have lost their source of sealed brood. As we have learned, the mites feed on the hemolymph of capped brood. If we break that cycle, it may have positive results.

If you have a situation that can't be

treated with a break in the brood cycle or holistically, consider treating.

As I've said, I prefer to treat the hives holistically, but sometimes you have to consider the alternatives. If you decide to use chemicals, remember, the label is the law.

After you have inspected the hives, we should consider equalizing the hives by moving frames like we did in the spring. By equalizing the hives or collapsing the weak hives into the others, we have given all of the hives a fair and equal chance to get through the coming months.

While we are discussing equalizing your hives, put your nucs into hive bodies and equalize them as well. In reality, a nuc will only have 2 or 3 actual frames of bees and will start the colder months at an extreme disadvantage.

Now that you have addressed any pests and diseases and have equalized your hives, your number one task is to feed them throughout the next couple of months.

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## Old Man Winter (continued)

We have discussed the viscosity of the syrup in the past, but it is important we address it again. If your hives have little or no stored honey, a ratio of 2:1 (two parts sugar to one part water, by volume) will provide syrup thick enough for the bees to store part of it for future needs.

Syrup mixed at a ratio of 1:1 or less will likely replicate a nectar flow, thereby stimulating your queen to continue laying throughout the next couple of months. I feel this is the ideal scenario for our hives so they will continue to produce brood, therefore maintaining their strength to survive the winter months and to be strong enough to resist mites or SHB.

In the past months, I've said time and again, you have the ability to control the outcome of your hive. This is more evident now as ever. You have to decide if you need to equalize your hives, if you need to treat your hives, and what syrup strength you need to feed your bees.

The core message I'm trying to convey is for you to decide.

Please, believe me whenever I say, the worst thing to do in these coming weeks and months is nothing.

Good luck...



*Photos curtesy of  
[basicbeekeeping.blogspot.com](http://basicbeekeeping.blogspot.com)*



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## Questions and Answers

**Q:** In last month's issue, you mentioned leaving honey on the hive. If enough honey was left on the hive to sustain the bees do you still need to feed them? Ruth.

**A:** This is a great question. The short answer is yes, you need to feed the hive. It is the nectar flow that will keep the queen stimulated to lay eggs. If there is no flow, you will need to simulate that flow with sugar syrup.

Conversely, the lack of a flow or sugar syrup will signal a situation where the queen will not need to continue to lay eggs.

Our mission here is to keep the hive as strong as possible for as long as possible.

The honey  that is stored is merely food. The bees will eat it to stay alive and possibly do nothing more.

We are going to try to replicate the conditions to keep the queen laying. We need brood to keep the hive strong enough to survive the colder months.

**Q:** I have a friend that is into "organic beekeeping" and  he is adamant of letting nature take its course. I am trying to find the balance between the two. In a past article you were saying one way to control the mites is to cage the queen to break the brood cycle. Don't you think if the queen stops laying that it would be nature's way of controlling the mites?

**A:** That is a double sided coin in as much if, in late summer, you lose your nectar flow, then the queen will likely stop or decline laying and "naturally" break the brood cycle. Yes, that may be good.

However, what my intent is, by feeding the hive, to stimulate her (the queen) not to break the brood cycle unless you have a severe mite problem. This will maintain plenty of bees.

This can be a narrow plank to walk across. If your hive is weak and you or nature breaks the brood cycle, the hive can likely crash. This would explain my suggestion to feed. These are decisions you have to make. I like holistic beekeeping, but sometimes you need to intervene.

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## Questions and Answers

**Q:** Knowing how honeybees dislike rain, is it normal to see them boarding during rain? What causes them to do so? Greg

**A:** By boarding, I am assuming that the bees are congregating on the landing board in front of the hive. Usually whenever you see boarding such as this, unless it is excessive, it is normal behavior. The honeybees can be there to assist in guarding the entrance of the hive, possibly fanning the pheromones of the hive outward so the foragers can better negotiate their way home, there could be something on the front of the hive that they believe needs to be groomed off or possibly, they just find it comforting to be outside of the entrance.

If you are referring to bearding on the front of the hive, that is more than likely do to over-crowding or over-heating in the summer.

In any of these events, I believe it to be nothing to worry about. I also believe the stories of rain and the dislike of it by honeybees may be somewhat exaggerated. If the bees are out foraging and a shower appears, the bees probably dislike the probability of getting bombarded with raindrops almost half their size. But, whenever they are in a cluster, such as on the front of a hive or with a feral hive, it is merely nature's way. The bees are more than capable of shedding of a little moisture.

**Q:** We placed weed cloth and rocks underneath and around the hives when we first began beekeeping. I planned on going out early in the morning and hand pulling the weeds that have grown up close to the hives. I found out quickly that I need to wear a veil as the ladies of the hive are not fond of weed pulling near the hive when they are up and about. I wanted to use the round up about two – three feet from the hives to create a buffer in the area that we have to use a yard trimmer.

**A:** I've found that if you smoke the bees a couple of minutes before weeding or running a weed eater, they don't seem to mind your working very much, thereby eliminating the need for chemicals. Give it a try.....

**Q:** Is it safe to spray round up or another weed blocker around the hive at night?

**A:** If you do it right after dusk, it should be ok. Hopefully the morning heat will dissipate any residual by the time the morning foragers go out.

Usually the bees aren't going to forage around the bottom of the hives unless it is something really desirable.

Understand though; even though Round-up is an herbicide and not a pesticide, there is always a chance for poisoning. The label is the law. Follow it strictly.

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## And Finally



If you have a subject you would like to see in a future issue

If you have something going on in your bee yard or club you would like us to consider

If you have questions that you would like answered, let us know.

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Online at  
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Our web page, [www.unklerays.com](http://www.unklerays.com) will have the current issue of the Gazette as well as back issues beginning with issue 2. (Issue 1 has been retired)

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**Remember, your participation is important to the success of this newsletter.**

**If you have questions, please submit them.**

**If you can contribute to the plant calendar, please do so. What is blooming in your area?**

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The Editor

*Ray Claxton*