

It Takes A Golden Touch To Examine Beehives

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Varroa mites are the most devastating and biggest continuing problem for the industry. With high infestations, bees are noticeable with deformed wings and obvious weakness.

She shakes several bees from each hive into powdered sugar.

This monitors the presence of Varroa mites in the hive and determines the threshold of tolerance the bees have to the mites," Troutman explained.

She scoops up about a half of cup of bees (about 250 bees) from the brood frame and puts them into a glass jar. She adds about two tablespoons powdered sugar, and tightens the lid on the jar.

The mites are parasites that would be clamped to the bee's body, sucking its blood. The powdered sugar on the bees irritate the mites and causes them to fall off the bees. By shaking the jar, the mites come out of the powdered sugar and can easily be seen in the sugar.

Varroa mites are about the size of a pin head and are reddish brown. If they are present during the powdered sugar test, the mites are usually laying on their backs in the sugar, kicking their legs. This helps to determine the mite levels that might be in the hive.

Less than five mites might be a level the bees can tolerate without medication. More than 20 mites indicate a severe infection that requires treatment, or the hive will collapse.

All medicines used on a honey beehive are strictly regulated by the government. Medicines should only be used before or after honey flow so that no chemical comes in contact with the honey.

Of the many different diseases and viruses that attack hives, Troutman said, "If I don't have an answer, I look it up," she said of relying on what she calls her "bible" — "Honey Bee Pest, Predators, and Diseases."

Not every harmful invader is a virus or bacteria. Hives are often damaged by skunks, bears, raccoons, mice, squirrels, opossums, chipmunks, and livestock.

Irresponsible pesticide use can kill a whole colony of bees.

Farmers and orchardists should spray early in the morning or late in the evening when bees are not flying. Fields and trees should not be sprayed during the blooming season such as an alfalfa field covered with dandelions.

"I love the job," Troutman said of bee inspection. "I wanted to meet more beekeepers. I learn from them, and hopefully they learn something from me."

Renee said that if 10 beekeepers are in a room, they'll probably have 12 different answers to a question. Each one has a slightly different perspective from which she gains information.

She maintains 25 of her own hives in four different locations. She sells honey privately.

"This hasn't been a good

honey year," Troutman said of the impact weather has on production. "Rain dilutes nectar and the bees can't fly."

The harsh winter also played a toll on beehives. "Lots of beekeepers lost 70-80 percent of their hives. There's lots of disease because bees are so stressed from the long, cold weather and wet spring."

"Good bee weather helps diseases clear up," Troutman said. Beehives kept in a sunny location are also healthier, and the bees are happier.

"Bees housed in full shade are more aggressive, and not as productive," Troutman said.

Many broods starved in May because working bees could not collect enough nectar to feed the hive. Many beekeepers provided sugar syrup to help nourish their beehives.

The small harvest of honey causes prices to rise.

"Beekeeping is an expensive hobby, but very rewarding," Troutman said. Of living on a dairy farm with her husband, Troutman said, "I like to milk cows, but bees are definitely my thing."

To learn more about beekeeping or to find a local beekeeping association in your area, call the Pennsylvania State Beekeepers Association, (570) 673-8201.

Any questions about registering hives and inspections, call Dennis van Englesdorp at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (717) 772-5225.



Ron Rinehart, beekeeper, and Renee Troutman, bee inspector, examine hive for signs of disease or viruses.



Sign of a healthy hive can be determined by the appearance. A healthy hive has lots of bees, a solid brood pattern, and a healthy capped brood. During inspections, Troutman looks for punctured capping, indicating that the larva has died from a disease and the bees have attempted to open that cell to remove and clean up the dead larva.

Whitetail Wetlands Offers Getaway

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might choose to play it themselves. It's a perfect room for after-dinner cocktails or sing-alongs. A wide porch with a sofa bed invites some to snooze outside on a moonlit summer evening.

There are additional two bedrooms, two private baths, and a kitchenette. Most guests prefer to prepare their own meals while some will take the short drive to Bedford seeking out restaurants and shopping.



A close-up view of a killdeer egg which never hatched.

Still others test Connie's culinary skills.

The wetlands themselves are reached by mowed paths and dikes around the impoundment's where one can watch the numerous species of waterfowl feed, mate and nest. Recently, an extended family of Canada geese watched their fluffy offspring turn into teen-agers.

"Then, it will be flight school time," says Connie. "It is such a joy to watch those youngsters learn to fly."

To date there have been 72 species of waterfowl sighted in the wetlands; 16 species of raptors, more than 100 songbirds, twelve species of amphibians and reptiles, 33 species of butterflies and 90 of moth and 40 plus of dragon and damselfies.

All of this has added to the mammal populations and plant life.

The wetlands had been made as accessible as possible with golf carts and hay wagon rides in the summer and sleigh rides in the winter. Bicycles and horses with stable accommodations are welcome. Four-wheelers are prohibited.

Guests to date have been mostly from the Pittsburgh/Harrisburg area although some have come from as far away as Florida. The wetlands is associated with both the Audubon Society and Ducks Unlimited. For those who live so close they might not want to stay overnight, day passes are available for a nominal fee. Other groups such as church organizations, women's groups, etc. might wish to come for a meal, a wagon ride, and a social time on the wide front porch.

Jerry says he only wishes more farmers would think about doing this with wet spots on their farms. They would be doing both mankind and nature a favor.

For more information on the wetlands, take a look at Connie's extensive website at whitetailwetlands.com

Whitetail Wetlands can be reached by writing to P.O. Box 368, New Paris, Pa., 15554, or calling (814) 839-2622. They can be E-mailed at HYPERLINK mailto:wtwetlands@pennswoods.net wtwetlands@pennswoods.net.



This glass-walled bedroom doubles as a reception area.



An outside view of the lodge.

How 'A Mazing'

WYALUSING (Bradford Co.) — How "A Mazing" would it be to find your way through a four-mile maze?

How "A Mazing" would it be to find your way through twists and turns of a 13-acre cornfield?

The Howard Family farm welcomes everyone to come see "How A Mazing" it is starting September 6 at their corn maze in Homet Ferry.

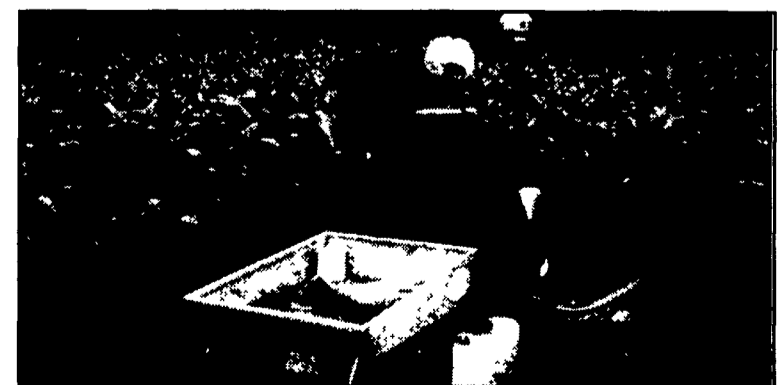
Richard Howard first got the idea to build a maze after doing some research on the Internet. Howard found Rob Stouffer, Lee's Summit, Mo., who worked with farmers out west using the Global Position System (GPS) to cut out a maze using his G.P.S.

After his call to Rob, Rich discussed with the family the possibility of using one of the farm's corn fields for their own maze.

Rob gave them a choice of designing their own or having a pre-cut design done, which was at more cost to the Howard Family farm. So, the family got together and came up with their own design. After Rob arrived he took the Howard's corn maze design and transformed it into his GPS. The next day he began his task of cutting out the maze. The maze had to be cut at an early stage of the corn growth so that the corn would grow up to the design.

Beginning September 6, the Howard family will open the gate of their corn maze to the public with hours each weekend, and by reservation only during the week. Groups are welcome.

For more information, contact the Howard Family Farm (570) 746-1883 or email at drhoward@sosbbs.com.



Rob Stouffer of Lee's Summit uses his G.P.S. to cut the Howard Family Farm corn maze in Wyalusing.