



April 2009

The Buzz

MR. CHARLIE SAYS...

By Deborah Sasser

Mr. Charlie Says... # 8
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Mr. Charlie and I have been waiting for the perfect day to open my hives. The weather has been very windy and rainy with a chill in the air. Finally, the winds calmed, the rain stopped and the day was perfect.

Mr. Charlie came over and we went through all nine of my hives. We were looking for queen cells to remove, so the hives would stop swarming and for queens that had not been clipped.

I have had seven swarms and we have managed to catch five of them. The two I lost were led by queens that had not been clipped. They were able to fly high into the top of oak a tree. (I needed the bucket truck).

We took out quite a few queen cells. Searching the congested frames was not easy. If we missed even one cell, the hive will swarm. Mr. Charlie said if you want to make sure your bees do not swarm, you should check the hive every ten to fourteen days to make sure no queen cells emerge.

This was my first time clipping the queen's wings. I was a little nervous, I didn't want to hurt or

cripple my queens. We were searching frame after frame for cells and queens, when we did spy the queen Mr. Charlie reached down and confidently picked her up by one wing and told me to clip the other. I was not sure what I was doing. I could only hope for the best. We used a small very sharp pair of scissors. Mr. Charlie says taking the tip of her wing off would keep her from flying to the top of a tree. Hopefully this will give me time to get some hives put together and painted.

This month I will celebrate having bees for one year.

I do not think I have truly earned the title of beekeeper yet...But I am feeling more and more comfortable with my girl's everyday.

Next Month in the Bee Yard

May

About once a week, check each hive and determine where the bees are working. If one colony is working in their third and top super and another colony is only working in the bottom of three supers, shift the supers around. This is sometimes called equalizing the supers. Move a

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super from where it is not being used to a hive where it will be used. Add another super when the bees begin working in the top super. If the super to be added is drawn comb, it may be placed on top of the other supers. If the super to be added is foundation, it should be placed above "their super" and below all other extracting or foundation supers. Toward the end of the month, add an additional super only after the last super added is mostly capped. When the nectar flow stops, remove any unused supers of foundation. This will prevent the bees from chewing and damaging the new foundation, as they will do, when no nectar is available.

If the supers of new foundation are to be used for comb honey, then these supers should be removed as soon as all frames are fully capped. If left on the hives, the combs will become travel-stained as the bees walk over the dark brood combs and then track pollen and propolis onto the new white cappings.

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Before any supers of comb honey are removed, check and make sure that all cells are capped. If all cells are not fully capped, delay the removal a few days. Unsealed cells may contain unripe honey with high moisture and could cause the honey to ferment if removed.

Once a super of comb honey is removed from the hive, put it in a plastic airtight bag and place it in a freezer for two or three days. The plastic bag prevents moisture from forming on the honeycomb while the exposure to the low temperature of 0F in the freezer will kill all stages of the wax moth. The super of comb honey can then be removed or it may be stored in the freezer for several months. When the super is removed from the freezer, the honey should be allowed to thaw at room temperature before the plastic bag is opened.

Catch The Buzz

Watching The White House Bees

Toni Burnham

If there is one eternal truth in beekeeping, it's that committed beekeepers always get a bit nervous when someone else inspects their hive, especially if that someone else has kept bees even one week longer. I've got a few years on Charlie bee-wise, but not that many. Even so, it makes my heart get all warm to see such concerns, because only people who really care have them. And the bees do so much better in the hands of those who care. Which is my way of saying that Charlie let me have a look at the White House honeybees today. Thanks, Charlie!

Before I go on, this needs to be said: everything touching on that particular place tends to get wrapped up in spotlights and drama, and there is a real danger of feeling self-important or personally special just because of that

place and this time. When I share this with you, please keep in mind what this is really about: the bees, and their way of both supporting our environment and inspiring great wonder in those who look after them. I feel that we all owe Charlie a whole lot, and I want him and the Obamas (remember, it's their back yard right now!) and Sam Kass (whose garden project makes it all possible) to get their credit, too. But I bet you want a look in, too.

This is how you work the White House bees: on a board set on two sawhorses, so you are high enough to work the top super of a hive that sits on a four foot hive stand. It helps to coordinate your movements and to balance anything you are up to with the other person up there! It is a surprisingly stable solution, with the plus that the bees that fall during a manipulation don't end up getting stomped, and you don't have to tuck in your socks to keep them from crawling up a pants leg! One unforeseen benefit of the hive scaffold: it is really easy to look up through the screened bottom board to see where/how tight the bees are clustering.

As you might imagine, a couple of key concerns for bees in this location are swarm control, and monitoring temperament. Our visit today was mostly around the former; to keep tabs on how they are building up and reverse the hive bodies if that seemed useful, and to make sure there were enough supers in place for the current and soon-to-be-upcoming nectar flow.

To my mind, Charlie's queen is a good one for the job. The bees were extremely peaceful and gentle, and her pattern was OK, though not gangbusters. In a situation like this, I am all for the happy medium in terms of brood production! The drone brood was in the right place; she seemed to lay more from right to left than in a spiral starting in the center of the frame.

When we opened some drone brood, there was a minimal presence of varroa. There were no k-wings and I saw no mites on bees. The hive has

three medium supers with drawn comb; there is a fair amount of nectar in the first two, so Charlie is out ahead of this one. They had put aside some honey down below, but I am seeing that at home, too. Nice white cappings.

Finally, as I was saying goodbye, Charlie got a call about another swarm at the north gate! I said I would take it if accessible. So we checked it out. It was clearly a second swarm, probably thrown off of the same nearby hive that produced the famous one last week: about 2 pounds (1 kg) of bees. Since I am giving away a split this weekend, I thought my friend might want this queen to go with it!

Charlie got me a box, poked some holes in it with a nail, and we borrowed some bolt cutters from the carpentry shop to lop a small limb off the swarm bush. Sorry bush! He sealed the box shut with blue gaffer's tape.

To visit the White House Bees with Toni, visit her blog at <http://citybees.blogspot.com>. And watch for the May issue of Bee Culture, with an interview with Charlie, the White House beekeeper.

COOK'S CORNER

Orange Honey Butter

- 2 TB honey
- ½ c. softened butter
- 2 TB frozen orange juice concentrate

Add honey to butter, beating till light and fluffy. Continue beating while slowly adding juice.

Makes ¾ cup.

Editor: Janice Harmon

Assistant Editor: Ann Beach

Format & Organization: Nathanael Beach

Chief Publication Officer: Vickie Browder

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