

No. Bruns. pair get buzz from bee-keeping

BY SUSAN LOYER • STAFF WRITER • SEPTEMBER 26, 2008

NORTH BRUNSWICK —As hundreds of honeybees buzzed around them, William Coniglio and Cynthia Werts carefully took apart each level of their bee hive and checked each frame for honey.

"Each frame holds about 3 1/2 pounds of honey," Coniglio said. "We'll probably get about 60-pounds from these 17 frames. We'll know exactly when we extract it later this evening."

Coniglio, owner of How Lane Farm and Garden Center, and Werts, a contractor, have been raising honeybees for at least five years.

"We have four old, established hives and one young hive that we started this year," said Coniglio, first vice president of the New Jersey Beekeepers Association and a scientist with a master's degree in entomology.



"Four of them are Italian banded bees from South Italy. There's also Carniolans from Hungary. They have become more popular over time because they use less food in the winter and build their populations quite quickly. By having the mix, we are hoping to improve the overall performance and well-being of the population."

Using a smoker to distract the bees, the pair, wearing white hats with netting, gloves and white, long sleeve shirts, headed out to the hives to get their share of honey.

"We always go into the hive late in morning on nice days because the worker bees are out gathering the nectar and there's less chance of being stung," said Coniglio. "We can't take all the honey or they may not have enough to eat. We take half and leave about half for them."

Werts said that there are two kinds of honey.

"The spring honey is light and in late fall it is richer, darker and heavier," she said.

But because of the dry weather, the beekeepers are unsure whether there will be any honey available for the taking this fall.

"Since mid July the honeybees haven't been able to produce any additional honey and have been using some of the food they stored in the spring," said Coniglio, who uses a hive scale to determine the amount of honey being produced in the hives.

Raising bees can be addictive, Werts said.

"A contractor friend of mine raised bees and I would go there and just watch," Werts said. "I watched and learned and wanted some of my own. It's a contagious hobby. I started with two and they kind of grow on you. I really enjoy sitting and watching them come and go. They're so busy. It's also like having a pet. They may not know you, but you want to keep them happy and healthy. You have a sense of nurturing towards a living thing."

But keeping bees healthy these days is no easy task.

"Bees have been very popular in farms and farming," said Coniglio. "They have been a source of sugar since the beginning of time. In those early days, we didn't have the problem associated with mites, stress and other things killing bees. We went through a time period where the population of bees and beekeepers dropped. Then we studied and learned how to control those diseases. Now in the last couple of years, we've heard a lot about Colony Collapse Disease or CCD. We have hives, not individual bees, getting killed."

Coniglio said although the cause of the disease has not been determined, he does have his own theory.

"We don't see it as a very common thing that is hitting the smaller, non migratory bee keeping professional," he said. "If you take a good look at it, those who have been hit hardest are people in the commercial end of it. Those who have moved their bees into crop land, where chemicals are used and only a single type of food is available. There is also a lot of stresses associated with moving those bees."