

Bee Photography by Susan Oberstar

Even the average person would be able to tell you that honey bees are important, but could they delineate why and how? Bees pollinate over \$20 billion worth of crops each year. The honey bee is the only insect that produces food eaten by man and it is the only food that includes all substances necessary to life.

Bees are fascinating in other ways also. They use a “waggle dance” to communicate about food sources and hive locations. They fly around 55,000 miles to make just one pound of honey. A typical hive makes 60 pounds of honey, which is more than adequate to produce the 25 pounds they need to survive a winter. It takes 2 million flowers being tapped to make just a pound of honey. The average worker bee produces only about 1/12th a teaspoon of honey in her lifetime so the colony of bees must be around 20,000-60,000 with a queen bee to survive and be productive.

Photo club members were invited by an experienced (23 years) beekeeper to photograph his hives; it provided a great opportunity to see these fascinating insects close up. His experience as a photographer and beekeeper gave us good shooting advice. He recommended a long telephoto lens for those who were unsure about how close they'd like to be (or might suffer allergies) and a macro lens for those wanting close ups. Of course, everyone's number one question was the following: “Will I get stung?” Willie offered bee garb to don if wanted but not one photographer dressed in beekeeping gear and no one experienced a sting! This surely can be attributed to a very experienced beekeeper, who knew how to smoke the hive, handle the flats, and read the bee behavior he was seeing.

When considering macro shooting, one must realize bees doing the constant “waggle dance” make totally sharp images a challenge even when using closed apertures and high shutter speeds. Shooting just before the Golden Hour also added challenges to capturing sharp images. Therefore, a fast lens and higher ISO's might help image quality.

Bees are attracted by caffeine so grab a cup of coffee, your camera gear, and an experienced beekeeper to get some interesting images of these fascinating insects.