

Beekeeping 357 with Joe Lewis - KM099

Full Show Notes can be found at <https://kiwi.bz/joe>



This week we are talking to Joe Lewis from Maryland, USA. Joe discuss his Beekeeping 357 method of Sustainable Beekeeping through Nucleus Colonies.

Thanks to our amazing Patreon supporters, we bring you this full transcription of this interview.

Margaret: Welcome to the kiwimana buzz. Hi, this week we are talking to Joe Lewis from Maryland in the big Ol' US of A. This is episode...

Gary: ...99!

Margaret: O-ho... of our beekeeping podcast.

Gary: And we're screaming along to number 100.

Margaret: Woo-hoo!

Gary: This is episode 99 of the beekeeping podcast, and this week we'd like to thank our great sponsor PATREON, Lisa Morrissey. And she's been supporting the kiwimana buzz for over a month, and she's enjoying her new cap, isn't she?

Margaret: Yes. And her new what?

Gary: Kiwi LIFESTYLER Hive.

Margaret: Yeah, man! So it's all awesome, so thanks Lisa. Awesome, thinking of you. And yeah, thanks so much. And if you also value what we do, please consider supporting us on...

Gary: <http://kiwi.bz/banana>

Welcome to the kiwimana buzz. Hi, I'm Gary.

Margaret: And I'm Margaret.

Gary: And we are beekeepers from the hills, the Waitakere Ranges in West Auckland, New Zealand. And our podcast is about beekeeping, gardening, and a bit of political issues about environmental issues, or effects on environmental issues, and we've also been known to go off on tangents.

Margaret: Yes, well some of us more than others I guess. So this one, this show today, there are a ton of resources in this week's show, so check out the show notes for this podcast at...

Gary: kiwi.bz/joe

Margaret: Woo-hoo!

Gary: This is recorded in October 2016.

Margaret: Absolutely. And thank you for taking time to listen to our show, we know life is busy for you, but we appreciate you taking time to come and be with us and have a listen and see what Joe's got to say for himself.

Gary: Absolutely. And Joe is a beekeeper and writer from Bel Air in Maryland, which is between Baltimore and Philadelphia in North America.

Margaret: Oh yeah, that's where the Fresh Prince is from, isn't he?

Gary: He's from Philadelphia.

Margaret: Oh yeah, good old Will Smith.

Gary: Yes, and he has a passion for honey. That's not Will Smith, that's Joe Lewis.

Margaret: Aha.

Gary: And took up the hobby after retiring from the US Army. He was self-diagnosed with the "not enough bee disease" 11 years ago, and spends his days trying to locate a cure.

Margaret: The best way to deal with the cure is to face it head on.

Gary: Yep. Buy more nukes. So Joe, how did you get started in beekeeping? We hear you've been doing it for 11 years.

Joe: Yes, this will be my 11th year.

Gary: What got you involved in the bees?

Joe: I kept bees very briefly when I was a teenager, and I knew it was something that was fun, and I wanted to do. And so I had a career as an army officer and always moving around, I couldn't really have a hobby like that. So when I finally retired, I said, "It's time to do it."

And so I jumped in and started. I wanted to start out my beekeeping with six hives. And when I thought that I could just start any time and get six hives, but the fellow who was selling bees at the time said, "Oh no, we're really short on bees this year, you can only have two." And of course, if you tell me I can't have something, then I am definitely going to have them.

Gary: Yeah.

Joe: So, I made two hives into 12 by the end of the season, into 12 double deeps, and took them through the winter in a horse shed that I converted into a bee barn. Came out after the winter was over, with 11 hives, and said, "Man, this is so easy, anybody can do this. I'm going to get rich. And I'm going to make so much honey."

Gary: Yeah.

Joe: And then the bees began to teach me some lessons.

Gary: Yeah, exactly. So, you had that disease: "not enough bees disease", ay? How's that going?

Joe: I did. I got it bad. But I think I'm ok now. Because my second year I said, "I want everybody to have as many bees as they want, and I'm going to have as many as I want." And so I took my Christmas bonus and I ordered a hundred nukes from Merrimack Valley Apiaries. And sold 60 of them and kept 40 for myself. And since then I've fluctuated up and down, but I definitely have as many as I can take care of and still have a full time job.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. So that's quite a bit of work isn't it? So you've got about 40 or 50 hives at the moment?

Joe: Yes, it ranges upwards of 60 and 70, and I try to take some nukes through the winter as well.

Gary: Oh that's good. So are any other members of your family involved in the beekeeping, or is it just you?

Joe: My son started with me when we went to bee school, the short course, when he was 10 years old, and after two or three years he lost interest, and then it's just me.

Gary: Oh, ok. And so are you working full time as well as managing all those hives?

Joe: I am, I still work a 40 hour week job.

Gary: Wow, that's an achievement!

Joe: But here's the secret: you keep some bees close to your work, and between your work and home, and you keep a lot of bees, or bee yards close to your home. And so on weekends I work bee yards near my house, close to where I live, and then on week days I work the yards between work and home, because I have to travel that route anyway.

Gary: Yeah, that's a good idea.

Joe: It's the best kept secret, you know? Everybody has some place that they have to go on a regular basis. Maybe to visit their mother in law, to work, wherever they have to go, or maybe to church, but they have to go somewhere on a regular basis. So keep your bees along that pathway and you won't have an excuse for not stopping to check your bees.

Gary: But you'd never be home and your wife will complain.

Joe: Well, she's pretty good, she texts me and says, "What time do you want dinner tonight?" And then I tell her, and then I'm punctual, and I make sure I'm home when I tell her that I want to eat, and we sit down for dinner every night.

Gary: Oh that's fantastic. Do you have a funny beekeeping experience you'd like to share with our audience?

Joe: I would. I think it was the nuke experience, when I said, "You know, I think I'm going to order a hundred nukes." And I had just finished reading the book 'Following the Bloom', which is the story of Andy and Crystal Card and the Merrimack Valley Apiaries, they're from Massachusetts.

And so I got in touch with them, and they were making nukes down in Louisiana. And they said, "Look, we don't normally just drop off a hundred nukes anywhere, but since we're going to be doing blueberries in New Jersey in April, we could put 100 nukes on one of our trucks and drop them off in

New Jersey, and you could just drive 60, 80 miles over there and get them, and this'll work out just fine." So I thought, "Ok, this is great."

And so I didn't have a truck at the time, so I thought, "I'll rent a truck." And I went to the rental place and I said, "I'd like to get the 12-foot truck." And they said, "Oh, I'm sorry sir but all we have is this 28 foot flatbed." And I said, "Oh, ok." So I get over there into the middle of the blueberry barrens along the Atlantic Coast to pick up my nukes, and the Cards look at me and say, "You came all this way with a 28-foot truck and we're going to give you two pallets of bees?" It was really ridiculous.

The other thing was that I was so worried about hauling these bees back home that I had asked, "How should I do this, should I cover them?" And they said, "Oh yeah, you can get a cover." And so I ordered a tarp, a bee tarp for a 24-foot truck, big enough to cover a huge truck load of bees. And I got over there and I said, "Ok, I'm ready to put this net over top of the bees." And they said, "Well, it's the middle of the night, why would you want to cover the bees? Just drive home." And I said, "Oh, well of course."

Gary: Oh fantastic, that's a good experience ay?

Joe: It was a lot of fun.

Gary: So what excites you, Joe, about the bees?

Joe: I think it's their natural reproductive tendencies, and the fact that they want to succeed, they want to build, they want to grow and multiply and make honey. It's just exciting, you know? To see this god's creature expanding and multiplying.

Gary: Yeah, they're pretty special little girls aren't they?

Joe: They are.

Gary: And do you think with the beginning beekeepers that want to start with one hive is a mistake?

Joe: Oh, one of the biggest mistakes. And I tell people, I said two is minimum, and five is the right number. There's a whole bunch of reasons why five is the right number. And I explain it in my talk and say, statistically, simple binomial probability will show you that if you have five going into the winter, your statistical odds of coming out in the springtime with one, two or three is really good. But if you only have one your statistical odds are really pretty bad. And you just do the numbers.

Gary: Absolutely. And the other good thing about having multiple hives is you can move resources can't you, between them?

Joe: Absolutely, it gives you tremendous flexibility to be able to make splits and to cross level strength, you know? The more you have, the more flexibility you have, and it's all about options and alternatives.

Gary: Yeah, exactly. And do you want to briefly explain your 3, 5, 7 principle?

Joe: Well, sure. I call it "Beekeeping 357" because it's kind of an easy to remember name. Basically, there's a lot of things in beekeeping that need to be done in multiples of threes, fives and sevens. But the three is: do the three essentials. Which are: control Varroa mites, unless you live in Australia, re-queen, and feed your bees as needed. And I call those the three essentials.

And then the five: keep five hives or more. And then the seven, make seven nukes. And then make splits, and using the three, five and seven rule for early in the spring: three frames of brood to make a split, a little later, five frames. And then if you're making late splits, seven frames of brood ensures success and guarantees that you're going to succeed. So three, five and seven in terms of making splits and making nucleus colonies.

Gary: Yeah absolutely. I encourage everyone out there to have a look at Joe's full video because it's about, a good hour isn't it?

Joe: It is, and it's kind of long. I apologise for it being so long, but there's a lot of material to cover and I give away a lot of secrets.

Gary: Yeah. No it's good. I'll include that in the show notes.

Joe: The three, five, seven – also, I kind of got the idea for three, five and seven on the frames of brood by reading a new book by Jeremy Rose called "Beekeeping in Coastal California." And of course, every place is different, and California beekeeping is different than East Coast beekeeping in the United States.

But he has a lot of interesting tips and techniques that he uses, and one of them is making splits early, middle and late using three, five and seven. Basically a little, a little more and a whole lot of brood to make your splits.

Gary: Yeah absolutely. And at the beginning of the season the bees are a lot more likely to produce a lot more bees aren't they.

Joe: They've got more time, and time is on your side early on and then as time goes on, you know, it's not on your side. It's going against you.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. Because any kind of splitting or queen rearing is very time dependent isn't it?

Joe: It is. You can get away with making a split with a single frame of brood, if you do it at the very earliest time. And then give them a chance to grow and give them plenty of resources, and if they've got great nectar coming in all summer long, you've got a huge advantage if you start early.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. What do you think is the best make up for a five frame nuke?

Joe: Well, clearly, a little bit of everything. They call it "the little bit of everything", but it's brood, different ages of brood, honey, drawn comb, foundation, and bees need foundation. The young bees need a place to build comb.

And so you need to give them foundation. So, you know, the basic plan for a nuke which has been known for a long, long time and explained by Doolittle and all the old beekeepers, it's a recipe for success.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. I love your queen rearing calendar wheel, that's awesome.

Joe: Oh did you find that? I'm glad.

Gary: Yeah I saw it in the video, I'm going to print one out. I'll have to do it at work because they've got a colour printer, but we don't condone that do we.

Joe: Exactly. You know, I should give credit to Lyson, the Polish manufacturer of beekeeping equipment that provides that laminated wheel as a part of their product line, promoting their product line. And it was shared with us by a company called Better Bee. And since it was not copywrited, I made it available to everybody so that you don't have to go to a show and try to get one from Lyson. You can actually just print one yourself.

Gary: No, that's awesome, I'll print one off. It'll be really useful when we're doing our queen rearing as well.

Joe: It's so cool to be able to turn that wheel and say, "Ok, now if the queen larva is this big right now, then actually the egg was laid here, and it looks like it's going to be capped in two days, and then it's going to hatch in five more days." It's so cool to be able to visually look at it and say, "What I know, and what I can see from this queen cell, now I know what's going to happen and when it's going to happen."

Gary: Yeah, exactly. And it's cool you've got the calendar so you can match it to the normal calendars.

Joe: Yeah. That's the best thing, is being able to spin it around to the day of the month and say, "Ok, today is the 30th, I know that this queen is going to hatch on the 5th."

Gary: Yeah exactly. So you can apply for holiday leave at that time.

Joe: Exactly. You've got to plan your holidays around your beekeeping don't you.

Joe: You do. Also the bee conventions and all the important bee seminars that you need to go to. You have to make sure you've got enough leave saved up to go to those.

Gary: Yeah, exactly. And so you're actually doing a lot of writing for the American Beekeeping Journal aren't you?

Joe: I have written several articles for them. I don't write as extensively as Randy Oliver, but I've got a few articles out there. Particularly 'Beekeeping 2.5', 'Re-queening a Drone Laying Colony', and one of the ones that I'm kind of proud of is 'The 52 Most Important People in Your Beekeeping Club for 2016.' And it explains how you need a lot of volunteers to make a good club.

Gary: Yes, absolutely. A lot of different skills involved, isn't there?

Joe: There are, and there's a lot of opportunities for people to lead committees, and do things that can help each other and, you know, it's a group effort. It's teamwork. It needs to be teamwork. You can't do this by yourself.

Gary: No. Absolutely. So you've got 52, that's amazing. I'll have to have a read of that. Because I can't think of 52.

Joe: It's in the January issue of American Bee Journal, January 2016.

Gary: Yeah, ok, that's cool. For people out there with iPads you can actually subscribe with an iPad and read it on your tablet. So it's not expensive either, is it?

Joe: No it's not.

Gary: No, it's a good magazine. How did you get involved in writing for them? Did they approach you or did you approach them? Or how did that work?

Joe: I just emailed a note to the editor. He said, "Well let me see what you've got." And first thing you know he was publishing. And so, I was pretty amazed, and I was even more amazed that he sent me a cheque as a writer's fee afterwards. Like, really? I didn't even expect to get paid.

Gary: Yeah, that's a double bonus isn't it? And so, Joe, if you could travel back in time before you were a beekeeper, what's one thing you'd tell yourself to improve your beekeeping today.

Joe: Gary, I think I would say, I would read a little bit more. I would go a little bit more slowly, and I would say don't be afraid, but take time to enjoy it, and you want to savour some of these moments. That's what I would do.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, and try and avoid the "not enough bee disease" at the beginning ay, just start with four or five hives and just get those through the seasons I guess, ay?

Joe: Yes. But there's nothing wrong with having a lot of bees, but I think trying to enjoy them more is what I would do.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. Sort of smell the roses.

Joe: Yes.

Gary: If you could recommend one beekeeping resource for someone, what would you suggest as either a book or website, or what would you suggest?

Joe: You know, I think one of the greatest resources is Randy Oliver's Scientific Beekeeping website. Some of his articles are priceless. Such as, 'Queens for Pennies' explaining how to raise queens. I'm just very impressed with his material, his resources. But of course there's some great websites and some great opportunities. I love the Northwest New Jersey Beekeepers YouTube channel. Just tons and tons of great material there.

Gary: Yeah, Kevin and them do a lot of work don't they? It's really good.

Joe: They do, and they don't mind sharing. That's the key thing is it's not financial, it's not what's in it for them, it's what can they give to others.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. And you mention in your video, that video from, is it Landi Simons? about Simons?

Joe: Landi Simone.

Gary: Yeah, about nuclear colonies. I'll be watching that later on, so...

Joe: It's a really good video on making nukes. And then if you get a chance to look at the Vimeo video by Bill Bundy, called 'A Practical Guide to Re-queening,' he explains (he's a retired queen rearer) and he explains re-queening in a way that I've never seen anyone do it so well.

Gary: Oh yeah, that sounds good. I'll include that in the show notes as well. And the show notes for this show guys is going to be kiwi.bz/joe. And what do you think is the biggest issue facing beekeeping in Belair at the moment?

Joe: I think it's the same in most places, it's loss of habitat. You know, we just don't have enough wild country for bees anymore. And so, if you're in a great location, be thankful and you are truly blessed.

But getting past the third year as a beekeeper seems to be the challenge that everybody has. It's like, can you last until the third year? And then still be beekeeping? That's a huge challenge for new beekeepers, they either lose interest or they get discouraged. And so we've got to help people get past the challenges of that third year.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, that's when a lot of hives succumb to mites as well, ay?

Joe: Right.

Gary: What's your treatment cycle like for mites, or do you treat bees?

Joe: Well, I would tell you that it was very precise and religious and I always do it right, and I uses soft chemicals and soft treatments, but the truth is that sometimes I don't get around to it. In that way I guess I'm a bad beekeeper. But I do treat, but I respect those people who elect not to treat. I understand the treatment-free attitude and I've read the books. I'm

a big fan of Michael Bush and Ross Conrad, and others. But commercial beekeeping, I think, cannot be treatment free right now.

And so I have MiteAway Quick Strips, the MAQ strips, and then I've also started doing the oxalic acid vaporisation. And I teach classes on how to do it safely. I also use the ApiLife Var [0:23:10 inaudible] treatments. So I'm just not as consistent as I would like to tell you that I would like to be.

Gary: Yeah, no that's fine. We have a lot of success with the vaporiser, we also use ApiLife Var as well. They seem to work pretty well.

Joe: You do have to be careful, especially regarding temperature. And I don't treat in the same strength all the time. I back off on MiteAway Quick strips, for example, and use about a quarter as much as is sometimes recommended. But I think treating with smaller amounts, but more often, is more effective for me.

Gary: How do you safely use the vaporiser then? What do you teach your students?

Joe: Well, to be very careful and I recommend wearing a gas mask while you're doing it. And gas masks, military surplus ones are really cheap, so there's really no reason not to protect yourself. But, to seal up the hive and make sure that you keep the vapour inside. People that have screen bottom boards and don't do a good job of sealing the bottom, they're kind of wasting their oxalic acid vapour.

Gary: Yeah, it just comes out the bottom ay? And it's not fun to breath is it?

Joe: No, it is not! It's something to be very, very careful about, and to take seriously.

Gary: Yes, absolutely. And one idea I saw, we got from a beekeeper called Frank Lindsay on a recent interview. And he actually puts a bag across the whole hive. If you've got a screen bottom board, so that the vapour stays within the bag, kind of thing. You still lose a bit out the bottom I think.

Joe: What a great idea. What a great beekeeper. I met Frank at the Eastern Apiculture Society meeting recently and I have to say, two of the greatest beekeepers in the world: Isaac Hopkins and Frank Lindsay.

Gary: Yeah.

Joe: Both from New Zealand.

Gary: He's a great guy.

Joe: He is.

Gary: I think he listens to this show so he'll hear this, so it's good. He's awesome. And what do you think is the biggest mistake beginners are making at the moment?

Joe: I think that they don't investigate enough and learn enough early on to know what they're looking at. And so it's a difficult balance to know how much to study, and how much to have for practical hands on. But if they don't know what they're looking at, they really just don't know what actions to take.

And so if they can just get a mentor to explain some of this to them, and then it will back up all the reading and book learning that they're getting. So I think it's a combination and a balance, of learn as much as you can, read as much as you can, but then find someone to be your mentor.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. And I think you're right, you've got to learn what normal looks like, and then you can make a decision. So if you see a strange disease you could ask your mentor, or ask at the local bee club, ay?

Joe: Exactly, and if you only have one or two hives, you really don't know what normal looks like.

Gary: No, that's another really good reason to have more than one hive, because you might think that that stringing out brood is normal, things like that.

Joe: Or you might think that these bees are queen-less, but actually they're not, because they're Russians and they have shut down brood production in a period of dearth, and that's normal for Russians. You've got to know enough about your bees to know what you're looking at, and every beehive is different. And every strain of bee acts differently and has different characteristics.

And so the first thing, when somebody calls me and says, "I've got this problem and I need you to tell me what I should do, I have to stop and say, "Well tell me what kind of bees they are first." Because that means everything. If you have Carniolans, that's a big hint as to what you ought to be looking for at a particular time of the year, versus Italians.

But most people haven't moved to that level. Let's admit this, let's be honest. This is graduate level beekeeping, and you've got to graduate, and you've got to get up to that higher level and figure out: why are they different? How do they act differently? What should I be looking for that's different?

Gary: Absolutely. Yeah, I had one beginner ring me once and say that the hive was full of queens, but there was no eggs. But then I went there and it was a drone layer. So you've got to work out the difference between a queen and a drone and things like that. If you've been doing it a while, you kind of, you assume everyone knows the basics. You know? But not always, ay?

Joe: The basics take some time to think in, and so getting a mentor will speed that process along.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Joe: And then also having somebody to talk to. Even if it's not a person that you can be with and a mentor in person. You need somebody that you can call and say, "This is what's going on right now with me and my bees." And having somebody to bounce stuff off of and share ideas is very important.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. How do you actually do your queen rearing? What's the most successful method you've found?

Joe: The most successful method is, in November I call my Florida queen rearing company and say, "I'm just confirming my order for delivery on the 15th of April."

Gary: Joe, that's cheating.

Joe: And he puts 50 queens in a package, and puts them on an overnight air, and I pick them up the next morning and put them in my nukes. That's reliable. I can't make nukes in April, it's impossible. But I can make them in May and June. And so then I start my grafting, and I graft my own queens, and I think preparation is the key. Having the right resources, like Jay Smith said in his book *Better Queens*, "It only takes two things to make queens, and one of those is just pure intelligence."

You've got to be really smart. You've got to pay attention to the details and the numbers and the dates, and you've got to understand the bee biology if

you're going to make queens. And it's got to be just right. But then you can have complete success. And it's like, wow this is amazing!

Gary: Yeah, and your queen raising hive has got to be at the right attitude as well, ay?

Joe: It does, and the right strength.

Gary: Yeah, I think it's a good idea what you mention in your video about you put queen [0:30:39 inaudible] around it, so that the brood doesn't get new broods. So it's like all the broods, not suitable for queens, so they are desperate for a queen aren't they?

Joe: They are desperate for a queen. And like I say, nobody explains it better than Jay Smith in his classic book called *Better Queens* which you can download from Michael Bush's website.

Gary: Yeah, I'll also get that. Yeah, it's a great book and I think Michael's sites amazing, the fact that he gets all those old books, ay?

Joe: It's pretty cool. And he shares it with all of us for free.

Gary: Yeah, he's a great guy. And he's a pretty good guitar player too. What's your plans for the next season then?

Joe: I think I want to try to get my numbers up a little higher, with really good quality equipment. I'm going to be soaking new boxes, the wood material in paraffin and tea tree oil, and soaking them in hot paraffin and beeswax. And a good pine box that normally will last six years when it's painted, I think will last fifty years or more if it's soaked properly in hot paraffin dip.

Gary: Yeah, absolutely. The other trick to doing that is as soon as you've done it you paint it straight away, so it soaks in deeper.

Joe: Yes, that's pretty cool.

Gary: Yeah, I've heard people getting like 10 or 15 years out of a box, so yeah absolutely. I have got to say that's one of the treatments for AFB here, you can paraffin dip your hives.

Joe: Oh, I see.

Gary: Yeah, without the bees obviously, that would just be cruel wouldn't it?

Joe: It would.

Gary: But that's awesome. And so what's the best way for people to get in touch with you?

Joe: Well, people can always contact me through the Susquehanna Beekeepers Association website, which is a great resource, great videos and articles there by all our members. And also on my business website which is harfordhoney.com.

Gary: Yes, I'll include it in the show notes. And also, remember guys you can get that queen rearing calendar wheel from the Susquehanna Beekeepers as well, which I'll have a link on the show notes as well for that. Thanks today for coming Joe, it's been fantastic talking to you, and I really appreciate you sharing your info with everyone.

Joe: It's been my pleasure, keep up the good work. Thank you. Tell Margaret we said hi. Take care Gary, buy now.

Gary: Well that was great!

Margaret: Yeah, awesome and hi Joe. Thanks for your greetings, it's all good, and if you ever meet the Fresh Prince of Bel Air, let us know.

Gary: You know he's fictional ay, the Fresh Prince?

Margaret: What? You're destroying my world.

Gary: That was a great talk.

Margaret: Yeah, absolutely.

Gary: And if you enjoy what we do, please consider subscribing to the podcast, it's totally free.

Margaret: Yeah, so it's all good, and thanks so much Joe for sharing your story with us and your adventures. Awesome!

Gary: Yes, and as we've said before there's some great resources in this one, there's lots of videos from Bill Bundy, and some other videos from Landi Simone. It's awesome, isn't it, and so it's kiwi.bz/joe.

Margaret: Cheers, and thanks for listening guys! And yeah, take care, and be good and be happy and be prepared.

Gary: Absolutely, and we'll be back soon with episode 100!

Margaret: Woo hoo!

Gary: Looking forward to that aren't we.

Margaret: Yes, see ya!

----Transcription Ended----