



The Buzzzz

The Monthly Newsletter of the Gilroy Beekeepers' Association

Volume 4

April 2013

The Future Is Bright

The Gilroy Beekeepers Association has had many outstanding young people attend our meetings over the years. Some have gone on to be successful beekeepers. It is without doubt that the most recent is Julaine Mullaney. At the March 12th Bee Meeting, Julaine, age 13, presented a speech to the members entitled "The Buzz About Bees." It discussed the many different types of bees which we can find locally. All present found it to be very informative.



Julaine Mullaney

Julaine has been an active member of the Aromas 4-H for many years. The speech she gave was practice for the Regional 4-H speech

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STARTLING DISCOVERY IN APIARY SCIENCE by Dr. Atsuj Oryp.

(Reprinted from the American Bee Journal, April 2013)
With this my seventh article in this Journal, I am releasing what may be one of the strangest results I have discovered in my thirty plus years of amateur beekeeping. As someone who has a vast background in both engineering and chemistry, the hobby of beekeeping has always fascinated me. The recent increase of common mites coupled with the disturbing rise in what the scientific community is referring to as Sudden Colony Collapse prompted me to begin a series of experiments in simple apiary nutrition that not only appears to have nearly eliminated my loss of active beehives, but has increased the wax and honey production by almost two fold. To be fair, the tests were somewhat less than fully scientific in nature as my baseline records were somewhat skewed due to a frequent loss of hives to unidentified deaths over the past several years. As a result it was difficult to maintain steady records when some of the test colonies ceased to exist without warning.

Without going into the chemical reasoning in this article, I will explain the tests and results and let you draw your own conclusions. This article is being pushed to print in a hurry to get the word out to the beekeeping community in an effort to gather more data and perhaps reverse the trend that we have all been experiencing with the ongoing loss of so many colonies.

While experimenting with various feeding routines for my winter hives, I found myself comparing the ingredients of a popular liquid

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Getting to Know Each Other!

by Vicki Basham

This month, we'll get to know Julie Pryce. She and her husband Steve and their two teenagers live in the foothills of Corralitos.



Steve and Julie Pryce with two of their four hives

Julie has been keeping bees for about three years. But her interest in bees began several years ago when she visited a nursery. She remembers helping the owner, a woman in her seventies, harvest comb honey. Julie remembers thinking at that time that beekeeping would be a very interesting, fun thing to do.

When her interest became a bit more serious, Julie started intense research on the hobby - reading everything she could find on the internet, talking to experts, and studying books. "There is so much information out there. It's overwhelming!" she says. "Basically, you have to try to fit everything in and form your own opinion on how you'll manage your bees."

She started out with three hives. She purchased a package and a nuc, and was given a split from a friend. She was lucky enough to catch two swarms later that year. Her husband Steve helped with the equipment by building the supers and constructing the hive stands. Julie

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Guest Column

For The Love of Bees

by Heather Oliver

There may be many reasons you've decided to keep bees. Perhaps you want a local source of honey for yourself and/or to sell. Maybe you've heard about the problems facing honey bee populations, and you want to help their numbers by providing homes in the way of hives. The doomsday headlines about rising food costs, caused in part by shortages of commercial bees, might even be a reason you chose to start keeping honeybees. Could be, you just like to watch them buzz around your yard. Whatever your reason, it is obvious you like bees.

If you like honey bees, you probably also enjoy seeing their native cousins when they happen across your path. Most of us have seen or heard a big, fuzzy bumblebee as it pilots from flower to flower. Many of us have noticed Mason bees as they hover nearby, observing us with their compound eyes. Did you know these native bees are also at risk, due to environmental factors, such as habitat loss? As confirmed stewards of bees, mightn't we also lend a hand to their native cousins?

There are so many reasons to be concerned about the health of bees in our environment. Up to two thirds of our food crops require pollination by insects. Bees are by far the most important pollinators in most ecosystems. There are approximately one thousand species of bees native to California who could all use your help. There are two easy ways you can help these bees; provide them with food and shelter.

Two common summer bees are the California Bumblebee and the Yellow-Faced Bumblebee. Both are gentle giants who favor tomato flowers along with natives such as lupine and Manzanita. These fuzzy-wuzzies often nest in the ground, with abandoned gopher holes being a favorite abode. The overuse of commercial mulch will discourage ground nesters such as these, but a natural layer of fallen leaves is ideal. Two more common natives are Mason Bees and Leaf Cutter Bees. Both use natural materials, such as mud and leaves, respectively, to make their nests cozy and safe. Both lay eggs in

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Bee Informed

(Editors note: The following was received from Dr. Eric Mussen. The website he talks about provides an excellent opportunity to receive and comment on all things related to bees. Please check it out and let us know if it is a useful site for you)

"Hi, Folks,

I do not usually use this list of subscribers for non-newsletter purposes. But, I believe that many U.S. beekeepers are ignoring an opportunity to contribute to a data set that will be extremely useful to them. It will become ever more useful as it continues to accumulate more data.

Please excuse the "folksy" format, but reporting on this in a formal, scientific manner thus far has not stimulated the interest it should have.

Fill 'er Up, Please!

To glean information on better beekeeping management and techniques, do you tend to sidestep formal conference presentations in favor of informal meetings at a local coffee shop? That's what national surveys indicate. Not to worry. We now have the country's largest beekeeping coffee shop that can bring the experiences of thousands of beekeepers to you. And it's free. You don't have to buy the coffee or wait for a refill or tip the waiters.

It's the online "Bee Informed Partnership." You can go to <http://beeinformed.org/> and see up-to-date summaries of all the data *that* the nation's beekeepers – more than 5,000 so far – have submitted to the site. Thus, you can access information on what worked and what didn't from thousands of beekeepers in the national coffee shop, not just your handful of friends in the local area.

The Bee Informed Partnership is well into its third year. There is just about enough data to begin to break down the survey responses into specific sub-segments such as: regions of the country, size of operation, participants in crop pollination, etc. However, in order to make the findings valuable for commercial operators, more commercial beekeepers need to submit data.

Participation in the program is free and totally anonymous (covered by federal and state laws).

When you decide to participate, you will be

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Message from the President

Lightning Bees of California

I am astonished that there are so many educated people that never knew that honey bees would mate with lightning bugs. But I tell you it was common practice among bees and lightening bugs in the forests of California where I once lived and worked as a prospector. Off in the region near a place called Vinegar Pond, where Pickled Cucumbers grew on vines and upon which we fattened and pickled pork on the hoof, and where the giant California trees grew, it was no uncommon thing for the us to discover in the hollow of some of these gigantic trees immense swarms of bees that worked a night force who were provided with illuminating wings. In fact, it was necessary for such an economy among bees in that region in order to fill the hollows of these gigantic trees. It was in this great forest, where I witnessed a remarkable conflict between California honeybees and yellow jackets.

While prospecting, we happened upon a gigantic bee tree, the hollow of which was so large that you could easily have placed the Gilroy Las Animas school building within it, were it of a more oval shape. I tell you, it's the solemn truth, if ever I spoke it in my life! This hollow was filled with thousands of tons of the most delicious honey you ever tasted. There was a large stream of honey that flowed from a crack in this tree to a depression in the ground about an eighth of a mile distant, forming a lake of pure honey that was several yards across.

This lake was surrounded by California bears that fattened on this honey. They would toil about 'Honey Lake', as we called it, through the day, only leaving it long enough to visit 'Vinegar Pond', a mile distant, to quench their inordinate thirst created by continually lapping honey from this lake. We were constantly supplied with the juiciest and most delicately flavored bear steaks from the bears we would shoot while on their way from Honey Lake to Vinegar Pond.

These bears were very docile, as they were never hungry, and believe me when I tell you; it was a common thing for members of our

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Drippings from the Extractor

(Notes from the editor)

In honor of April Fool's Days, some of our articles have taken a light hearted approach. Thanks to all the contributors. As always, guest articles are always welcome. Please contribute, don't make me grovel!! Please send your articles to dave.stocks@yahoo.com

2013 has started out as one of the driest, if not the driest years on record. To date, Gilroy has received 1.43 inches of rain. This compares to 2011 and 2012 which received 9.85 and 6.74 inches respectively. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, issued by the National Drought Mitigation Center in Lincoln Nebraska, "abnormal dryness continues to expand across northern California and southern Oregon. Below median precipitation is favored during AMJ (April, May, June) across these same areas. Therefore, persistence and development (of drought conditions) is forecast for this region. Precipitation typically decreases rapidly later in the spring with little to no prospects for improvement beyond April." Their confidence for this forecast is high.

So what does this mean to us as beekeepers? This year, probably not much. For those of us that keep bees in undeveloped areas, there was enough early rain so that native vegetation has put on new growth and some species are beginning to bloom. Currently, Buck Brush (*Ceanothus cuneatus* and Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos sp.*) are blooming, Black sage (*Salvia mellifera*) is in the bud stage and there's enough new growth on the Toyon (*Photinia arbutifolia*) that it looks like there might be a promising nectar flow. Things are similar in the valley. There were sufficient early rains, so that some of the plants, like mustard, that we depend on for early season nectar sources are blooming. So far, our aquifers are full and we should experience no water rationing in late summer and fall.

The real problem lies in what will happen next year and the following years if a drought continues. Well there be sufficient rainfall to support blooming in the native species, recharge our aquifers and keep our garden plants alive? Is it too early to cry wolf? Of course. Is it too

early to start planning ahead? Of course not. Stay tuned!

How much should you pay for a jar of honey? Perhaps more importantly, how much should you charge for that glorious bottle of amber delight? I think we all want to sell our honey for a fair price, but what is that price? As an open question to the members of the Gilroy Beekeepers Association, do you think that we as an association should agree on a price range, or should we leave it to the individual to set his own price? Let me know what you think at dave.stocks@yahoo.com. I'll publish the results in the next newsletter. Your response can be anonymous and is non-binding!

GBA member Frank Holt is trying to get the "bee department" established at Sam's Downtown Feed and Supply in San Jose, but he needs your input. He wants to meet your needs but understandably can't stock everything. He would like to know your needs. If his prices are competitive, it would be great to have a local source for equipment. Please let Frank know at frank@primeonly27.com. Talk to him about some great deals he is now offering.

News from the Beeyard

As April begins, your hives should be at their strongest point and rapidly making honey. The biggest challenge to the bee keeper is trying to stay ahead. Honey bound brood boxes or supers can lead to swarming. The bees have done a lot of work to get to this point, Don't let their efforts go to waste by not providing the space they need. If a check of your brood boxes indicates little room for brood rearing, you will need to manipulate the frames to give the queen the room she needs. Remember, she likes to work up. Make sure she has a place to go. Likewise with supers. Once you have about five or six frames of honey, it's time to add another box.

If your bees have not built up to your satisfaction, you need to try to determine why. Perhaps you have a mite situation or a nosema problem. Treat as necessary. Also, this is the time of year when queens become available. Consider re-queening

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competition to be held the end of April. This competition is for the counties of San Benito, Santa Cruz and Monterey. If she receives a gold medal here, she will advance to the state competition. Good luck, Julaine!

Startling Discovery Continued from Page 1

bee food supplement to that of an ordinary product found in almost every household; Pepsi Cola. With the exception of the caffeine content, the two liquids were remarkably similar. Being one that is always working outside of the proverbial box, I purchased several two-liter bottles of the soda and began a new feeding regimen. My first lesson was in the power of the carbon dioxide contained in the soda. Not only did it tend to irritate the bees, but it also caused the steady humming from the hive to be replaced with a non-stop lower toned hum that sounded amazingly like small burps. Once the carbon dioxide wore off and the liquid went "flat", the steady buzzing returned to the hive. Although the initial consumption of Pepsi was slow at first, once the bees seemed to get used to it, I almost could not keep the feeders full.

An interesting side note to using this new liquid for feeding was that the bees no longer slowed down at sunset. It was almost an opposite reaction where as night fell, the activity increased. The bees would work much longer into the night and I was able to see a marked increase in both wax production and capped honey as the bees went from a 12 hour day to working nearly around the clock. Interestingly, those bees that did slow down late into the evening tended to wake up much later and get a much later start on their day. As an amateur that only keeps about 45 hives I was also very interested in the effect of this new food on the longevity of the colonies. I had lost so many hives over the past several seasons that I was willing to do anything to stop my losses of good working hives. Since switching to Pepsi as a feeding liquid, not only have I stopped losing hives, but I am steadily gaining new swarms that take to my empty hives and splitting colonies twice a year to a point that I now have more individual hives than I have space for. As a final shocking discovery, after switching all of my hives from the traditional sugar water to

Pepsi, I have eliminated all signs of mites within my entire yard. After always fighting an infestation in one hive or another, after all my years in the hobby, this is the first time that I have been completely mite free. My theory is that the sugar charged caffeinated bees are so active that the mites never have a chance to establish themselves.

Finally, in an effort to complete my testing and prepare my results for publication, I prepared a double blind case study where I replaced the Pepsi with one bottle mixed with Rum and Coke. The results were a complete slowing of the colony, who then promptly left the hive and got lost. Once I am able to return them to their home, I will continue my research with my latest solid food supplement, Lays Potato Chips. **April Fools! (Contributed by Jim Acker)**

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runs all her supers as 9-frame deeps.

When mite counts became high during the first two years, she applied formic acid and had good luck with survival rates. But the past fall, her schedule was so busy that she didn't have time to treat for mites, and she ended up losing all but one colony. She finds it interesting that the one surviving colony was from a swarm of dark bees that she caught last year.

When asked about her opinion on the best way to increase survival rates, she says, "I've had different kinds of queens, specific races of bees, and tried different management ideas, but basically, I still think it's a crapshoot as to which hive survives and which doesn't. You can have the same hive, side by side, and have one survive and one not."

Ideally, she would like to have six hives at most. If those six were to do well, she would enjoy selling splits as nucs.

Julie strongly advises beginners to thoroughly research beekeeping before actually buying bees. "Ask a lot of questions, look at the internet forums, and do your research before diving in head first," she says. "There is so much available that is already written. And join

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Getting to Know *continued*

a bee group!" She also feels that "Beekeeping for Dummies" is a great book to have

One of Julie's most memorable moments in beekeeping was when she was performing an inspection. She decided to practice looking for eggs and was holding a frame up close to get a good view. Suddenly, a very irritated bee decided that Julie was just a little TOO close and the bee flew straight to her face and stung her near the eye, right through the veil. The movie "Avatar" had just come out and Julie remarked how her face looked just like the avatar characters in the film.

Love, *continued from page 2*

hollowed out areas of trees (such as those left by woodpeckers), fill the holes with food for the young, and then cocoon them in with the natural materials.



A nature made Mason Bee house

Providing such bees with a purchased or natural home, a source of mud, leaves and flowers will be akin to laying out a welcome mat.



A man made Mason bee hive

If tending your own bees has you too busy to attend to the needs of native bees, don't worry. You can give yourself permission to do nothing about it! If your definition of doing nothing means letting your once-manicured lawn get overtaken by flowering dandelions, you are helping the native bees by presenting them a food source. By doing nothing about the fallen leaves in your yard, you are providing sanctuary to nest-seeking bumblebees. If your conscience or significant other accuses you of "doing nothing" about the wild places in your yard, quiet them by saying you are "doing something" for the native bees.

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presented with two electronic survey forms to complete. One is on "winter" losses (but this covers the entire year) and the other is on management practices and how effective you found them to be. The expectation is that the surveys will be submitted quarterly. The good news is that each new survey form arrives pre-loaded with your last data. You change only what is different from the last time and submit it. The new survey season begins March 29 and remains open until April 15. By then, participants will know a lot about their wintering success or lack thereof. I strongly suggest that you take the time to become involved in this program. Besides data summaries, there are graphics of the data (which I prefer to tables any day). Additionally, some of us are allowed to

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Bee Informed *continued*

comment when we think that the results could be a bit misleading, based on small sample sizes or specific biases in the respondent group.

The national coffee shop is open. Your fellow beekeepers await your presence and your experiences and views. Please "bee" there at <http://beeinformed.org/>.

Thanks, Eric Mussen, Extension Apiculturist"

President's Message *continued from Page 3*

prospecting party to mingle with the bears at the lake side. They never offered to resent any intrusion from us; they were in fact less savage than so many fattening hogs.

This particular variety of California bee is much larger than our bees. They average about the size of sparrows. The queen is as large as a robin. Not far from this particular bee tree was located an immense nest of yellow jackets, about the size of humming birds. This nest was suspended between two of the largest of the giant trees and was three or four times the size of the dome of the Capital at Washington, D.C. It was these yellow jackets that had created the crack in the bee tree, through which the honey flowed that created Honey lake. The yellow jackets drilled the crack with their stingers and thieved upon the honey that ran out until one day, the bees organized a night attack on the yellow jackets nest.

While in camp one night telling stories over our supper of broiled bear steak and delicious honey, with natural grown pickled cucumbers and pickled pigs feet fresh from the pen, we were startled by a terrific roaring that resembled the sound of a distant waterfall. We strengthened the fastenings of our tent and got inside, expecting a terrible storm to burst upon us momentarily.

After several minutes of suspense we ventured outside, and beheld in the distance the strangest sight imaginable. The night force of bees were all out and flying in regular line of battle, some fifty lines deep, I should judge. The constant flashes from their illuminated wings lighted the surrounding country for a half mile.

You could see to read as plainly as under an electric light.

The roaring sound created by their wings was what we had believed to be the warning of a great storm. We followed the direction the bees were taking and some came near the immense nest of yellow jackets suspended between the trees. The bees surrounded the yellow jacket citadel by the million and soon covered the entire outside until the dome like shape of the yellow jacket nest glowed with the constant flashing of the wings of the bees, making it resemble an immense ball of fire.

The yellow jackets inside the nest were at the mercy of the bees, who tore large holes in the nest and stung to death the yellow jackets as fast as they were reached, and who were evidently bewildered by the flashing lights from the illuminated wings of the bees. The roaring sound created by the bees was augmented by that of the doomed yellow jackets.

The fight lasted approximately three hours and the next morning the ground was covered eight or ten feet deep with the dead bodies of the yellow jackets and bees for rods. The great dome like nest of the yellow jackets looked as though a cyclone had struck it. The bees had simply annihilated the yellow jackets, however, and had lost thousands of their own number as well.

The second day after the battle the stench that arose from the scene of conflict was so great that we were obliged to move our camp two miles away. I have never cared for honey flavored bear steak, pickled cucumbers or pickled pigs feet since that time. I tell you, it's the solemn truth, if ever I spoke it in my life!

Classifieds

For Sale:

Older model, manual extractor with stand, \$150.
Contact Matt @ Mattmurphy653@gmail.com

Wanted:

Bulk Honey 5 gallon minimum
Contact: maidenflightapiaries@yahoo.com

Calendar of Events

Meetings

April 1, 2013

Santa Clara Valley Beekeepers Guild
1292 Minnesota Ave San Jose, CA 95125

Topic:

Honey Extraction

April 3, 2013

Santa Cruz Beekeepers Guild - 6:30 pm
El Rio Mobile Home Park
N. Pacific Ave
Santa Cruz

<http://santacruzbees.com>

Topic:

Hiving your packages
Introduction of guild mentors

April 4, 2013

Beekeepers Guild of San Mateo County - 7pm
751 Alameda de Pulgas
Belmont, Ca

<http://www.sanmateobeeguild.org/>

Topics:

Hive inspection and spring management

April 6, 2013

Monterey Bay Beekeepers - 8am
Black Bear Diner
2450 N. Fremont St.
Monterey, CA 93940

<http://www.montereybaybeekeepers.org/>

April 9, 2013

Gilroy Beekeepers Association - 7pm
Grange Hall
8191 Swanston Lane
Gilroy

<http://uvasgold.com/>

Topics: TBD

April 9, 2013

Alameda County Beekeepers Association
7:30 pm
Rotary Native Center
600 Bellevue Ave.
Oakland, Ca 94610

Classes

San Mateo County

Low Intermediate Beekeeping Class

May 4, 2013

Serge Labesque will lead this day-long class.
Check back soon for more details and online registration!

Advanced Beekeeping Class

June 22, 2013

Randy Oliver will lead this day-long class.
Check back soon for more details and online registration!

Gilroy

Beginning Beekeeping

TBD in April

Queen Rearing

TBD in June

On Line Courses

Penn State Beekeeping 101 is a beekeeping training course for potential beekeepers, beginning beekeepers, or for experienced beekeepers who wish to update their knowledge and techniques. This (up to 12 months) course allows participants to learn from nationally recognized experts; take the course sessions anytime, anywhere, and at your own pace; and trade questions, successes and stories with other program participants. The instructors are Tom Butzler, Penn State Extension horticulture expert, who has been teaching beekeeping to youth and adults for 15 years and Maryann Tomasko Frazier, Penn State Entomology expert, senior extension associate, who teaches courses in beekeeping, general entomology and teacher education. The cost of the course is \$189. For more information, or to register, please go to <http://beekeeping101.psu.edu/>.

Apiology and Apiculture (ENWC 214) is the name of an online bee biology and beekeeping course that can be taken for university credit or for personal enjoyment. All that is required is a computer and the ability to connect with the Internet (however the textbook, "Honey Bee Biology and Bee-keeping" is suggested reading).
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This is an introductory-level, college course covering basic bee biology with an emphasis on bee colony management. This scientific approach to studying the life of honey bees includes bee biology, anatomy, physiology, behavior, bee botany, and communication. In addition, it offers an introduction to beekeeping, including techniques for practical bee care, bee culturing, and managing honey bees for honey production and crop pollinations services. The course is overseen by retired professor of apiculture, Dr. Dewey Caron. To view the course syllabus and sign up for the \$295 non-credit approach, please go to: - <http://www2.pcs.udel.edu/udonline/search/> and look for ENWC214, or call Melanie Rehberg at 1-800-597-1444 (press 5 and ask for Melanie). For course credits: <http://www.pcs.udel.edu/info/tuition.html>

Meetings

PACIFIC NORTHWEST TREATMENT-FREE BEEKEEPING CONFERENCE
Portland ,Oregon
July 26-28, 2013

Western Apicultural Society (WAS)
WAS 2013 Annual Conference
Santa Fe, New Mexico
October16-19, 2013

California State Beekeepers Association
2013 CSBA Annual Convention
Harrah's, South Lake Tahoe, CA
November 18-22, 2013