

The Buzzzz

The Monthly Newsletter of the Gilroy Beekeepers Association

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Getting to Know Each Other!

by Vicki Basham

This month, we're featuring Mike Wallis for our "Getting to Know Each Other" column. Mike keeps his two hives in his back yard in Corralitos.



Mike actually started beekeeping about thirty years ago. But he stopped after four years when he decided that his hives were taking too much of his time and money. He ended up donating all his equipment to a local boy scout troop.

Mike never did lose his interest in bees, though. Three years ago, he picked up the

hobby once again. He'd ideally like to increase his hives from two to twelve and plans to do so primarily by dividing surviving colonies and catching swarms. Mike favors a treatment-free approach to beekeeping and believes that swarms may have a better chance at tolerating Varroa mites.

When asked if Mike had any advice for newcomers, he said that if beginning beekeepers start with packages, they should realize that they will have to treat those bees for Varroa mites or those colonies will not survive. If a beginner wants to use the treatment free approach, he suggests staying away from buying packaged bees and instead, team up with someone who can teach how to catch swarms.

Mike rents out a room in his home to college students, and says that they inevitably want to see his hives. Mike enjoys pulling out a couple of frames and letting students get a close up view of the inner workings of a colony.

Mike has recently added a new tool to his hive management equipment - a digital microscope that allows him to project extreme close-up images of the comb cells onto his computer. "I was already familiar with these

microscopes; they are a part of my job, but I'm now really curious about how they can help me to diagnose any issues that might be occurring in the hive."



Mike Wallis, using his digital microscope to view close-ups of comb cells

"I really like bees," Mike says. "They get up at the crack of dawn and work till the sun goes down. They're very productive and don't bother anyone."

When You Lose a Hive

by Heather Oliver

As beekeepers, we are unfortunately used to losing hives. Sometimes the decline of a hive is gradual, and their eventual death is predictable. Other times, the sudden demise of a seemingly healthy hive leaves us scratching our heads. In either case, there are steps every beekeeper should take following the loss of a hive. By following this protocol each and every time you experience a hive fatality, you may just save future hives from a similar ending.

The first step a beekeeper should take following the decline of a hive is to conduct a thorough investigation. If the cause of death is obvious, such as invasion from a critter, the first step is easy. When the cause of death is unknown, a complete examination of the hive might be necessary. In this scenario, the beekeeper should inspect the outside of the

hive for evidence of foul play or disease, such as dysentery. The beekeeper should then open the hive and inspect every frame, looking for queen cells, remaining larvae, the state of the comb, and so forth. Much evidence can be found by sifting through the debris on the bottom board. One might find an over abundance of bee body parts or wax shavings – both suggestive of robbing. Mummified bee bodies, mites and the like might also be found among the debris.

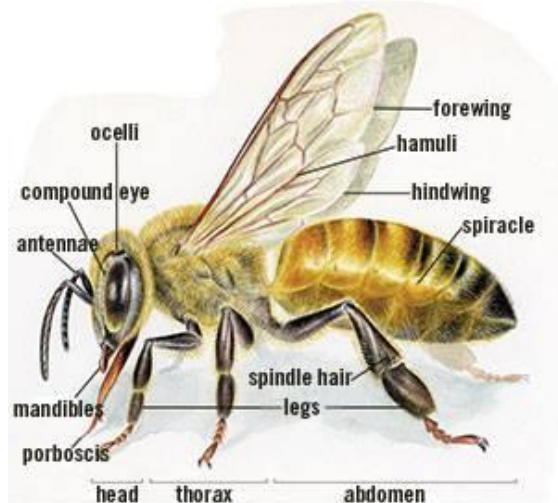
After a complete analysis of the downed hive, the next step should be prevention of further casualties. If the hive's demise was obvious, such as robbing, measures need to be put in place to halt the destructive behavior. If the cause is unknown (this seems to account for most hive losses), hygienic measures should be taken. Specifically, the hive in question needs to be separated from the other hives (in use or vacant) and thoroughly cleaned. A thorough cleaning should consist of removing and discarding the wax and hive debris, followed by a procedure strong enough to kill possible disease, yet gentle enough to cause no harm. A blowtorch is just the tool to singe wooden pieces, thus killing most invisible disease. In the case of foul-brood, however, more extreme measures should be taken. Finally, equipment used on the hive, such as the hive tool, should be sterilized to prevent the spread of possible disease.

The final step involves book-keeping and communication. It is advisable for all beekeepers to take notes during their investigation of a deceased hive, as doing so may provide immediate or future insight into recurring problems. If, for example, a beekeeper's notes reveal hives losses in the same locale at the same time each year, that beekeeper might begin to form a hypothesis as to why and what to do about it. Along with maintaining hive notes, the beekeeper should be keen to share his or her experiences with fellow apiarists. The transfer of information regarding hive losses just might be the key to solving some mysteries surrounding the sudden decline of our hives.

How Do Bees Breathe?

by Wayne Pitts

The other day I tripped over the question of how bees breathe. First thought was. 'Through their nose'. Then it hit me, I have never seen a bee's nose. Check out the picture below, no nose. Then how do they breathe?



Spiracles is how. Notice in each segment of the abdomen there is a hole of which only one is labeled spiracle. Spiracles are breathing holes located along the sides of insects. The spiracles are connected to the air tubes, or trachea, and allow the insect to exchange gases. The insect can open or close the spiracles by contracting muscles along its side.

Gas exchange, or what we think of as breathing, is accomplished mostly by simple diffusion through the cell walls. Air enters the spiracles and moves through the tracheal system. Each tracheal tube ends in a moist tracheole, a specialized cell for exchanging gases with another cell in the body.

Drippings From The Extractor (Notes from the Editor)

This is the twelfth and final issue of *THE BUZZZ* for 2013. As with all things, it seems like the year has flown by. I can't say that being the editor of this newsletter has been without headaches, but in retrospect it has been a great

experience. That has only been made possible with the help of several people, without whose assistance it would never have happened. First, thanks to President Wayne for the foresight and encouragement to resurrect the newsletter and for all his excellent input. Also, to all those who contributed articles, thank you. My only hope is that your outstanding articles will serve as an inspiration to others to contribute. Finally, I would like to recognize two people, without whose help and assistance, *The Buzzz* would still be an idea hidden somewhere in the depths of my computer. First, I want to thank Vicki Basham. Every month Vicki has our "Getting To Know Each Other" column. It seems that often times we come to a GBA meeting and only talk to the folks we know. Vicki has certainly expanded that group! On Vicki's behalf, I would like to thank her "significant other", Buck, who I know has been a big help. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Laura, aka "The Copy Editor." It's one thing to put a bunch of words on a piece of paper. It's completely different to make them coherent. My only regret is that I made the same silly mistakes over and over!

Our annual Holiday Dinner will be held on December 10th at the Grange Hall. It will start at 7pm. Anyone paying their dues at the meeting will receive one free meal. Otherwise, it's \$5 per person with a maximum of \$15 per family. I hope to see you all there.

For any of you that are making a New Year's resolution to contribute to *The Buzzz*, please send your articles to dave.stocks@yahoo.com

Thank you every one, I hope your Holiday Season is fantastic.

December in the Beeyard by Dave Stocks

As the cold weather of winter sets in, the bees should be settling in to their winter cluster. As we know, this is their way of keeping the hive warm. As beekeepers, one of the most important things we can do is not disturb them. Resist the temptation to enter the hive any more than necessary. Doing so will only require

them to expend more energy to re-heat the hive. The only exception to this would be for feeding, either sugar syrup or pollen patties. If your last inspection of the fall indicated that the hive already had sufficient natural stores of both pollen and honey, you have no need to disturb the bees. The common question is what is considered enough? Equally important is how much of that honey is accessible to the bees when they are clustered? Some say that the bees will not cross more than two frames of either honey or open comb. Honey frames outside this zone may actually act as a heat sink. Hopefully as you entered winter, you had a good idea of the weight of the hive. This was accomplished by slightly lifting the back of the hives. A "heavy" hive generally has sufficient stores. If a December check indicates that the hive has lost sufficient weight, you will need to begin feeding. This can be done with 2:1 sugar syrup or surplus honey. If using honey, make sure it is from a known source. There is some theory that bees should not be overfed as they enter the last months of winter. The beekeeper wants the bees to use available stores to fatten themselves rather than initiating pre-mature brood raising.

Bees that were struggling going into winter probably won't survive December. As hard as it is to lose colonies, consider this a good a thing. Colonies that come out of winter strong are survivors. These are the bees that will be the foundation of next season's splits.

Finally, December is the time to sit back with a warm beverage and evaluate the past year. What went right? What went wrong? What do I want to do differently next? The answers hopefully will make for a great beekeeping year.

Calendar of Events

December 2, 2013

Santa Clara Valley Beekeepers Guild - 6:15 pm

1292 Minnesota Ave.

San Jose, Ca

<http://beeguild.org/>

Topics:

Guild Holiday Party and Board Elections

December 4, 2013

Santa Cruz Beekeepers Guild - 6:30 pm

El Rio Mobile Home Park

N. Pacific Ave

Santa Cruz, Ca

<http://santacruzbees.com>

December 5, 2013

Beekeepers Guild of San Mateo County- 7 pm

1106 Alameda de Pulgas

Belmont, Ca

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

Topic:

Annual Guild Holiday Party

December 7, 2013

Monterey Bay Beekeepers - 8 am

2450 N. Fremont St.

Monterey, Ca

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

December 10, 2013

Gilroy Beekeepers Association - 7 pm

8191 Swanston Ln.

Gilroy , Ca

<http://www.uvasgold.com/gba/>

Topics:

Annual Holiday Party

December 12, 2013

Alameda County Beekeepers Association - 7:30

600 Bellevue Ave.

Oakland, Ca

<http://site.alamedabees.org>