



The Buzzzzz

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In this issue

Getting To Know Each Other

Message From The President

July In The Beeyard

Guest Column

Drippings From The Extractor

Calendar of Events

Getting to Know Each Other!

by Buck Johnson (column editor)

This month, we'll get to know Vicki Basham, the regular author of this article.

Vicki and her bees live in Prunetuscany on 2.5 acres of oak and eucalyptus. She has been keeping bees since June of 2011 when she bought her first hive from a fellow Gilroy guild member, KC Mullaney. Sadly, that hive didn't survive, but as upsetting as that was, she persevered. Last year, she purchased two nucs



of local bees and a Russian package from

Honeybee Genetics. And later that year, a swarm happened to land in a tree in her front yard and then made a home for itself the next day in one of the bait hives she had set up nearby. The three purchased colonies didn't survive, but the swarm hive is now seven medium boxes tall and going gangbusters!

As a collector of rescued and abandoned animals, beekeeping is a natural activity for Vicki. She doesn't recall the exact reason why she began beekeeping, but thinks that watching bee activity in her yard may have sparked her intellectual curiosity. As it turns out, she recently realized that she has a Drone Congregation Area above her property. On warm afternoons, she can hear the air come alive with the deep buzzing of the drones waiting for their opportunity to mate with a queen. Of course, her addiction to honey may also have been a contributing factor to her interest in beekeeping.

Once Vicki got her first hive, she began to educate herself to see just what she had gotten into. Subscriptions to beekeeping magazines, memberships to beekeeping clubs, a plethora of books and countless hours surfing the internet were all methods she used to enhance her knowledge. In her second year of beekeeping, Vicki included classes and seminars. Says Vicki, "I can't believe how steep the learning

curve is for beekeeping! They are so much more complicated than I would have ever imagined.”

Vicki’s approach to beekeeping, especially as a beginner, is to get into the hives often to be aware of where they are in their yearly cycle. Also, she would like to stay “treatment free” in controlling mites and disease. She feels that bees that are chemically treated have no better success than those not chemically treated.

Her most memorable moment in beekeeping? “Early on I was afraid to get into the hive. One day I decided it was time to open the hive and solicited the assistance of an elderly acquaintance who used to keep bees. He grabbed a clump of dried up foxtails and fed the smoker. A spark escaped and the next thing I knew, my property was on fire! We were able to put out the fire, but sirens were already filling the air. In moments, firefighters were dousing the big charred area right next to my hive. Luckily, the bees were fine. I was thrilled to finally get into the hive for the first time and see that it was doing well.”

Vicki has a word of advice for people just getting into beekeeping; avoid settling on the first answer they hear as gospel, as there are lots of opinions out there. She thinks new backyard beekeepers should seek out people who do beekeeping for a hobby, as there is a night-and-day difference in management between hobbyists and large scale beekeepers.

One of Vicki’s goals in beekeeping is to get to the point where she could sell nucs. She would also like to learn queen-rearing and be a source for treatment-free bees in the local area. She plans to expand her colonies by capturing swarms or splitting successful hives.

Guest Column

by Vicki Basham

To Treat or Not to Treat?

To treat or not to treat for Varroa mites - that is the question. I remember asking myself this about two years ago, when I got my first colony and it began showing a big increase in Varroa mite population. When I posed the question to those with more experience, the overwhelming answer was "Yes, you must treat for Varroa mites or you will lose your bees." I didn't treat for mites - mostly because, as a new beekeeper, I

was too overwhelmed with all the treatments available and couldn't choose - and I did lose the bees. The hive I bought in June of 2011 was lost in October of that same year. I lost three more colonies the next year. Did the mites cause the demise of these bees? I'll never know for sure, but I suspect they did.

But I do know that those who apply miticides to their colonies don't have much better luck than I did. When the question of colony survival was asked at the Gilroy and Santa Cruz bee guilds this spring, at least 50% of members' colonies did not survive.

It seems that while mite treatments may keep some colonies alive, they also create weak, non-resistant bees while developing strong mites. The miticides also pollute the wax in the hive and create health problems for the queen. Their affects on the beekeeper can be nasty as well. I remember someone at a recent bee meeting saying, "Don't forget to wear gloves when you apply your treatment - it can burn your skin!" Many beekeepers claim that organic treatments are the answer, but the same problems exist with this alternative; it still creates weak bees and strong mites.

So is it possible for a beekeeper to choose not to treat their bees for mites and still have a surviving colony? Or are treatment-free bees doomed to a certain death from the viruses carried by Varroa mites?

In the past year, I've read of people across the country who claim to have surviving hives and they don't treat for mites, not even with powdered sugar. Michael Bush has about 200 hives in Nebraska and hasn't treated his hives at all for over 10 years. Les Crowder in New York also has about 200 hives and does not treat his colonies for mites. Closer to home is Serge Labesque; he has about 60 untreated hives in Sonoma County.

All three of these beekeepers lost a lot of their hives when the Varroa mite first came on the scene. A few of them did what a lot of other beekeepers did - they tried using miticides to eliminate the problem. But they soon saw that the miticides were leading them into a downward spiral, so they decided to try a different approach. Rather than try to eliminate the mites, they chose to strengthen their bees. They believe in survival of the fittest, creating

splits only from the colonies that have shown the ability to deal with mites on their own, season after season. They raise their own queens. They do not prop up weak colonies. They rarely feed their bees, but if they must, they feed them their own honey. They believe that the bees' own honey has the nutrients they need to help fight off the viruses introduced by the mites. They use foundationless frames to keep the wax free from any contaminants.

As you can probably tell from reading this article, I decided to try the treatment-free approach. The treatment-free beekeepers suggest that if you're going to use this approach, you start out with locally raised, untreated colonies or a local feral swarm. Since neither of these sources may be available, the next best choice would be a colony with a Varroa Sensitive Hygiene (VSH) queen.

In the spring of 2012 I could find local nucs, but they were from treated stock. I knew of the hygienic Russian packages but they were also treated and were not local. But since that's all that was available, I bought two of the local nucs and a Russian package.

About a month later, as luck would have it, a small swarm moved into a bait hive that I had placed in a nearby oak tree. This brought my total hive count to four. As October approached, the mite count in each hive grew until it was quite high - over 50 on the monitoring boards in a 24-hour period. I stubbornly refused to treat the hives. I lost the three purchased colonies by the end of the year. But the swarm colony? It has been going gangbusters ever since I captured it. These bees had the same high mite count as the other three. But by the end winter this year, the mite count had dropped to zero. The hive continues to be robust, and is now seven medium boxes tall.

Do I think the treatment-free approach will work for me? I don't yet have enough experience to make that call, and my surviving colony from the swarm is still too young to use as proof. But I do think its success so far is encouraging. My swarm colony is the first one I've had that made it through a winter. If it survives the next winter, I will make as many splits with it as possible next spring. Hopefully, it will provide mite-resistant genetics for many more successful colonies in the future.

Message From The President Pesticides and Nosema

Last week two articles in the news caught my attention:

*Pesticide Causes Largest Mass Bumble Bee Death on Record

*Watsonville strawberry grower sanctioned for illegal pesticide use

Both of these cases involved not reading the label on the pesticide. Fines have been assessed or will be soon. The shortcut is turning into the long way home with quite a few bumps in the road.

If you are trying out potions for mite suppression that have not been approved by the EPA please be aware they take a very dim view of your experimentation. Please use approved miticides per the label for the miticide.

While catching up on my reading, I found an article in the American Bee Journal that describes a very simple method to destroy nosema spores. Two hours of exposure to sunlight. Easy to do for equipment, but how would you do it for comb to keep it from melting/deforming? That is this month's test question. Any ideas?

Drippings From The Extractor **(Notes from the Editor)**

Three days ago I didn't know how I was going to pull off this news letter. The garden is overrun with weeds, the bees need supers and I was fishing in the Sierra's!! Step up Vicki Basham. Vicki and her significant other, Buck Johnson, contributed two great articles. That's what makes the GBA the great organization it is. Thanks Vicki!

In his "Message From The President", Wayne mentioned a large bumble bee kill due to the misuse of chemicals. I received the following e-mail from a friend at the California Rare Fruit Growers. The original message originated from Dr. David Epstein, an Entomologist with the USDA Office of Pest Management Policy. It gives a little more information on the incident and the actions taken.

Please if you must use pesticides around your house or use a pesticides company, use with caution.

The EPA notified OPMP this morning regarding a large bumble bee kill in Oregon involving a landscaper using a pesticide to control aphids in linden trees at a Target parking lot. EPA has been notified that as of last night (8pm ET), the State of Oregon has issued a 180 day “don’t use” moratorium on the product. The investigation is ongoing. This event indicates a need to remind users of pesticides about the absolute importance of reading and following the label – and to pay particular attention to WARNINGS. While this was not a result of an agricultural application and was an urban use, the EPA has asked if OPMP can work thru the land grant system to get the word out through extension and education offices to reinforce this very important message to the agricultural community. EPA is contacting their stakeholders.

With agricultural production in full swing all across the country, OPMP requests your assistance through outreach and education to remind all users of pesticides of the importance of following the label. This helps to ensure good pest management while protecting wildlife, their habitat, and the environment. It is especially important that urban gardeners and homeowners, who may not be as familiar with the content of the label, have access to this important information. We are requesting your assistance in communicating this information to your communities. Information could include the following:

Use of any pesticide in any way that is not consistent with label directions and precautions is illegal. It may also be ineffective and dangerous. The basic steps in reducing pesticide risks are:

1. Choose the form of pesticide best suited to your target site and the pest you want to control:
 - First, identify the problem correctly and then, choose the least-toxic pesticide that will achieve the results you want **and** be the least toxic to you and the environment.
 - When the words “broad-spectrum” appear on the label, this means the product is effective against a broad range of pests. If the label says

“selective,” the product is effective against one or a few pests.

- Read the label **before buying** the pesticide, read the label **before mixing or using** the pesticide **each time**, and read the label before storing or disposing of the pesticide.
2. Determining the right amount to purchase and use: **do not assume that using more pesticide than the label recommends will do a better job.** It won’t.
3. Find the signal word—either **Danger**, **Warning**, or **Caution** on the pesticide label. The signal word tells you how poisonous the product is to humans.
4. Choose the form of pesticide (aerosol, dust, bait, or other) best suited to your target site and the pest you want to control. Certain formulations work better for some pests and/or some target areas than others
5. Using the product safely and correctly:
 - Never apply pesticides outdoors on a windy day (winds higher than 10 mph)
 - Wear protective clothing, don’t smoke or eat
 - Mix and apply only the amount you need
 - Watch for negative effects on wildlife (birds, butterflies, and bees) in and near treated areas. If you see any unusual behavior, stop using that pesticide, and contact EPA’s Pesticide Incident Response Officer
6. Store and dispose of pesticides properly.
 - Follow all storage instructions on the pesticide label.
 - Always store pesticides in their original containers, complete with labels that list ingredients, directions for use, and first aid steps in case of accidental poisoning.

State and local laws regarding pesticide disposal may be stricter than the federal requirements on the label. Be sure to check with your state or local solid waste agency before disposing of your pesticide containers.

Regards,
David Epstein, Ph.D.
Entomologist, USDA Office of Pest Management Policy
email: david.epstein@ars.usda.gov

I think I might have misidentified a Bumble Bee as a Carpenter Bee in last month’s issue. Not wishing to make the same mistake, I have

included pictures of both, to help me, and anyone else who might be having trouble telling them apart. I think I have seen more Bumble Bees this year than ever before. Despite articles like the above, maybe people are starting to get the message about pesticides

Bumble Bee



A **bumblebee** is any member of the [bee genus *Bombus*](#), in the family [Apidae](#). There are over 250 known species,

Carpenter Bee



Carpenter bees (the genus *Xylocopa* in the subfamily [Xylocopinae](#)) are large bees distributed worldwide. There are some 500 species of carpenter bee

July in the Beeyard

By the start of July, your hives should be at their strongest. If your management style dictates so, you should have two full brood boxes. If you are expecting a summer nectar flow from plants such as star thistle or toyon, you will need to be adding supers. If you don't have a summer nectar flow and have extracted, make sure the bees have enough to eat. This is especially important with any divides you did late in the spring. A related problem to bees being short of food is robbing. Stronger hives will readily steal from weaker hives. Consider reducing the entrance on weaker hives to give those bees a better chance of protecting their stores. This will also help with yellow jackets.

Varroa levels will begin to increase rapidly. However you treat for mites, now is the time to stay vigilant. Pesticide free choices include drone frames and powdered sugar shakes.

With the very hot weather we're having, you are likely to see large amounts of bees hanging on the outside of the hive. This is totally natural. When there are too many bees inside, they can't keep the hive cool. What you see is the equivalent of the girls hanging out on the patio on a summer eve.

Calendar of Events

June 1, 2013

Monterey Bay Beekeepers - 8 am
2450 N. Fremont St.
Monterey, Ca

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

July 1, 2013

Santa Clara Valley Beekeepers Guild - 6:15 pm
1292 Minnesota Ave.
San Jose, Ca

<http://beeguild.org/>

Topics:

Marketing your honey and beeswax

July 3, 2013

Santa Cruz Beekeepers Guild - 6:30 pm
El Rio Mobile Home Park
N. Pacific Ave
Santa Cruz, Ca
<http://santacruzbees.com>

Topic:

Food and forage for bees
The dreaded dearth

July 6, 2013

Monterey Bay Beekeepers - 8 am
2450 N. Fremont St.
Monterey, Ca
<http://www.montereybaybeekeepers.org/>

July 9, 2013

Gilroy Beekeepers Association - 7 pm
8191 Swanston Ln.
Gilroy , Ca
<http://www.uvasgold.com/gba/>

July 9, 2013

Alameda County Beekeepers Association - 7:30
600 Bellevue Ave.
Oakland, Ca
<http://site.alamedabees.org>

July 11, 2013

Beekeepers Guild of San Mateo County- 7 pm
1106 Alameda de Pulgas
Belmont, Ca
<http://www.sanmateobeeguild.org/>

Topic:

Top Bar Beekeeping

Classes

Santa Clara Valley Bee Guild

<http://beeguild.org/>

Beekeeping Workshop

July 6, 2013

All day workshop with Randy Oliver
Check on line to register

Meetings

**Pacific Northwest Treatment-free
Beekeeping Conference**

Portland, Oregon

July 26-28,2013

Information on-line at

<http://www.blisshoneybees.org/Events.html>

Western Apiculture Society (WAS)

WAS 2013 Annual Conference

http://ucanr.edu/sites/was2/Conference_Information/

Santa Fe, New Mexico

October 16-19, 2013

California State Beekeepers Association

2013 CSBA Annual Convention

Harrah's, South Lake Tahoe, CA

November 18-22, 2013