



# The Buzzzz

The Monthly Newsletter of the Gilroy Beekeepers Association

Volume IX

September 2013

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## Getting to Know Each Other!

by Vicki Basham

This month, we're featuring someone who many of you may already know - Dave Stocks. Not only is he the creator and fearless editor of our newsletter, he's also one of the founding members of our club, the Gilroy Beekeepers Association.



Dave lives near Gavilan College in the southern part of Gilroy. He has two hives in his back yard - a single deep containing a swarm

caught earlier in the year, and a top bar hive that he just recently constructed. He is a partner with Maiden Flight Apiaries, a small business that he shares with fellow Gilroy club members Julie Yetso and Heather Oliver. Dave jokes that the company should probably be called "Badly Scattered Apiaries," because their twenty hives are located in several places around the Morgan Hill and Gilroy areas. The partners enjoy their main event of the year at Aver Family Vineyards. They set up a booth and may talk to over a hundred people about beekeeping. Needless to say, they sell a decent amount of honey at the event as well.

Dave has had as many as 30 hives at one time, but rather than have a lot hives, he'd "rather have a number that I can take good care of." He's been keeping bees for almost 20 years. Dave's favorite way to learn about bees is through hands-on experience. He also attends beekeeping seminars regularly, and in fact, he and his wife just returned from a treatment-free beekeeping seminar in Oregon. One of the highlights was a lecture by Dr. Tom Seeley, a well known professor at Cornell University and the author of *Honeybee Democracy*.

For books, Dave likes *Idiot's Guide to Beekeeping* and Les Crowder's book, *Top-Bar Beekeeping*. He also says that *The ABC and XYZ of Bee Culture* and Roy Grout's *The Hive*

*and the Honeybee* have been good references over the years.

In dealing with Varroa mites, Dave has decided to take the treatment-free approach. "I've gone back and forth so many times," he says, "but it seems that by treating for mites, all we are doing is breeding super-mites and weak bees." In 2012, he followed the traditional rules of applying a miticide in both the spring and fall, and still had a 50% loss in colonies. "After that, I finally took the time to listen to new ideas regarding treatment-free beekeeping, and it has changed my entire direction." He said he learned a lot at the treatment-free seminar and has decided that he's "going to let the bees work it out. I'd like to go as natural as I can." He considers this an entirely new philosophy for himself and his hives.

Dave recalls learning from the seminar that bees bred for hygiene may be a very important step in treatment-free beekeeping. He said that one of the speakers at the Oregon treatment free conference stated that it takes a year and a half for Varroa mites to wipe out a non-hygienic hive. So when you buy bees, you want them from a treatment-free hive that is at least two years old.

When asked of the most memorable moment Dave had as a beekeeper, he recalls sitting in his back yard with his wife, admiring one of his hives, when all of a sudden the colony decided to swarm right in front of him. "I had just started beekeeping," he said, "and it was heartbreaking to see those bees leave. I thought my life as a beekeeper was over!"

As luck would have it, Dave noticed that the bees landed in his next door neighbor's yard. At the time, Dave was a bit concerned about the neighbors knowing that he was keeping bees, but he still wanted a chance at getting those bees back. So Dave went next door and said, "Hey, I noticed that a big swarm of bees has landed in your yard. I'd be happy to get them out of your yard if you like?" Dave ended up getting his bees back!

Dave also remembers how wonderful it was to see his first frame of good solid brood. He even remembers how pleasant it smelled. Dave also remembers that as a firefighter, he could come home from a really bad day of work and

watch his hive for just five minutes, and after that, everything seemed much better.

And it appears that Dave's enthusiasm for bees is becoming a family affair - his wife Laura just purchased her first hive. It's a Warré hive, and she's hoping to put a colony in it next spring.

## **Backseat Driver, Theory and Practice**

By Laura Stocks

So, as many of you know, I have been casually observing my husband, Dave, go about his beekeeping hobby for many years. I have listened a little bit – enough to know that there are problems with Varroa mite, colony collapse disorder, pesticide poisoning, and the like. I have been aware that through the years he has counted mites, tried different Varroa mite treatments, spent a lot of money buying sugar to feed bees sugar water, bought paddies, checked bees to see if they might be getting too crowded and ready to swarm, etc. All along I kept thinking that nature works itself out – if you give it enough time, won't the strong eventually survive? I would wonder about what would happen if the bees were just basically left alone. Wouldn't the bees with the most resistance to the environmental problems finally evolve?

In July, Dave and I attended the Treatment Free Beekeepers Conference in Forest Grove, Oregon, and much to my satisfaction, I was gratified to learn that there is a whole army of beekeepers out there who are experimenting with this same philosophy: treatment free and natural. I felt vindicated. I learned that there are "treatment free beekeepers," "natural beekeepers," and of course those still trying to manage every treatment they can to combat colony collapse disorder in order to continue to harvest a reasonable amount of honey for their efforts.

The conference was held at Pacific University, attendees stayed in the dorms, and I truly felt like I was back in school. Dave and I split up the workshops. While Dave predominantly attended the hands on "practical" sessions (including top bar), I had the good fortune of attending two lectures (theory) given by Dr. Thomas Seeley, who is a professor in the Department of Neurobiology and Behavior at

Cornell University. He has been studying honeybees since the 1970's and is best known for his book *Honeybee Democracy*. However, his current research is what caught my attention, and I loved hearing him share his preliminary findings. Chapter 3 in his book, *Honeybee Democracy*, really plants the seed for the research that he describes. Basically, Dr. Seely found that honeybees in the wild have been able to survive without pesticides for controlling the mite, and he has been conducting research to study why this is happening in order to help beekeepers develop sustainable, pesticide-free approaches to beekeeping. During this conference, Dr. Seely addressed four aspects of his current research: hive spacing, site, size, and structure.

With regard to hive spacing, Dr. Seely's research has revealed that the closely spaced colonies had high levels of Varroa mites. All of the swarms from the closely spaced hives died over the winter, but all of the swarms from the dispersed hives have survived the winter.

Nest site research has to do with the height of the hive. In nature, bees choose to place their hives about 29.2 feet high. People, including Dr. Seely, are experimenting with this variable. Other participants at the conference shared some of their work with this variable also.

Dr. Seely also reported out information garnered from his ongoing research regarding hive size. Remember, I have no practical experience working bees, so I don't know all of the terminology, but Dr. Seely compared hives with four large "deeps" where two out of twelve hives swarmed, compared to hives with only one deep, where ten out of twelve hives swarmed. By June, the mites were increasingly rapidly in the large hives in comparison to the small hives, and the preliminary conclusion is that "swarming may be a good thing." Dr. Seely's research is done on a 4,200 acre research forest owned by Cornell University. (I didn't ask, but it seemed apparent that Dr. Seely and his students recapture the hives because they continue research with the same bees.)

With regards to structure, Dr. Seely reported that the comb area is smaller on average in a feral hive versus a commercial hive and that bees build their own comb downward.

Basically, I had fun listening to the research and thought it would be great to be a serious student again. I attended the hands on, practical, workshop regarding the Warre hive, and this started a thought process. "If I just have one hive, I can space it; the Warre hive is small, and the bees build their own comb in a downward fashion. I just have to figure out how to get it up off the ground a bit." My goal is to eventually produce survivor stock and offspring. I don't plan to sell any honey. If I am lucky enough to produce enough honey for myself, I will be happy, but at this point in time producing bees that survive will be reward enough for me. I bought a great book **called *Natural Beekeeping with the Warre Hive, A Manual*** by David Heaf, and next spring I hope to venture out with my own little hive as a "relatively natural beekeeper" – with Dave's practical help, of course!

Link to Dr. Seely's description on the Cornell University site:

<http://www.nbb.cornell.edu/seeley.shtml>

## President's Message

by Wayne Pitts

Small hive beetles have been discovered in Morgan Hill. Please check your hives and use the beetle traps found in the suppliers catalog. You don't want your honey supers slimed. It is not a pretty sight.

I receive countless inquiries about the health and status of bees along with the question, "How can I help save the bees?". I have put together a list of things we can tell people when they ask this question.

### Help Save the Bees

As you know there is a problem with our honey bee population. The major culprit is a tiny mite named Varroa Destructor, since it destroys bee hives. Add in monoculture style of modern agriculture and pesticides, and the bees are having a hard time.

## 10 Simple Things You Can Do!

### 1 - Create Habitat!

There is much you can do in your own gardens to help save the bees! Ensure you have flowers and plants in bloom for as long as

possible in the garden. Some bee species may come out early and will be looking for much needed pollen and nectar sources provided by spring bulbs such as daffodils and crocuses. Herbs such as rosemary are also useful. Remember, some bees will continue foraging late into the season too, so try to ensure you include late flowering blooms in your garden.

## **2 - Native plants are best!**

When selecting plants for your garden, always remember that simple, native varieties are better than highly cultivated ones. Herbs and heathers are generally great for bees, as well as traditional cottage style flowers (and whatever anyone says, they NEVER go out of fashion!)

## **3 - Plant Wildflowers in your garden!**

Plant wildflowers in your garden, or even create a small meadow. There are several ways you could do this:

- allow a patch of lawn to grow, only mowing twice during the year (early and at the end of the season). Wait and see what comes up.
- sow seeds, or buy potted wildflowers (some may be difficult to establish otherwise).
- many grassy areas will not convert easily to meadow, because of resilient grasses that prevent wildflowers establishing themselves.

Download the smart phone app BeeSmart for a list of Bee friendly plants.

## **4 – Think twice before using pesticides**

If you want to help save the bees, try natural methods of pest control - such as putting up bird boxes and blasting aphids with water. Even well-known garden pesticides containing neonicotinoids, are under suspicion. The same applies to lawn care products, many of which contain neonicotinoid pesticides.

Neonicotinoid pesticides can remain in the soil for years and continue to be taken up by the plant (and the bees). Neonicotinoids include imidacloprid, Acetamiprid, Clothianidin, Thiacloprid, Thiamethoxam, Dinotefuran and Nitenpyram.

## **5 - Create nest sites for bees.**

A bundle of hollow canes could make a home for solitary bees. Some bumblebee species will take up residence in bird boxes or an upturned plant pot (with holes) provisioned with bedding, and located in a secure, shady area. If you come across a bee nest or swarm, try not to disturb it. If it's a solitary or bumblebee nest, they only last a season – and be careful not to mistake solitary bees for wasps, as some look alike. Most bees rarely sting unless provoked. Meanwhile, if you are concerned about a swarm or honey bee nest, contact Wayne Pitts at 408-644-2382.

## **6 – Spread the word**

Spread the word about the need to help save the bees! This could range from sharing these tips to chatting with your neighbor or giving a talk about bees to your gardening groups.

## **7 – Buy local honey, Honey**

If you are going to buy honey, buy local honey from a beekeeper you trust who cares about their bees.

## **8 – Get involved; it is everyone's job.**

There are lots of 'Save the Bees' types of initiatives, from signing petitions to ban suspect pesticides and GMO crops, to asking governments for more funds for positive action into helping bees and pollinators. Participate where you can.

## **9 – Speak to your council**

Write to your local council or political representative. Tell them about the need to save our bees, and ask them to stop the use of pesticides in public spaces (from parklands to community planting schemes), to plant more bee-friendly plants, and to make space for wildflowers along verges etc.

## **10 – Eat Organic**

Neonicotinoid and systemic pesticides are used in agriculture on food crops - and these of course, end up on the shelves of supermarkets.

Perhaps now is the time to start growing your own pesticide-free fruit & veg? You'll be surprised just how many zucchini and green beans you can grow - even in a few pots outside! If you cannot grow your own, then try to select



as much organic produce as you can when you are buying your shopping.

**When you spend your cash, you cast a vote.**

If you buy at least some organic produce, your purchases, along with those of others, will send a signal to retailers, which will ultimately send a signal to farmers.

## **Drippings From The Extractor**

By Dave Stocks

In this month's "President's Message", Wayne gives ten outstanding things we can do to help the bees. One of my favorites is planting bee friendly plants. For those of us that like to see the plants in person and observe their growth habits, a trip to a botanical garden offers an excellent opportunity. The gardens at UC Santa Cruz and Tilden Park in Berkeley are two fine examples. Another, perhaps my favorite, is the botanical garden at UC Berkeley. My wife and I visited there last week. Our focus was to see what plants the bees were working on a particular date. Repeated visits at different times of the year help in planning a landscape that continually offers blooming, bee friendly plants. Another pleasant surprise on this visit was UC Berkeley's permanent display about native bees. As we plan our gardens, it's nice to also keep them in mind.



This month's guest columnist, Laura, at the UC Berkeley Botanical Garden Native Bee Exhibit

It has often been said that if you ask twelve beekeepers their opinion, you will get thirteen answers. Applying this to the Gilroy Beekeepers Association, we have a diverse membership with diverse ideas on how bees should be kept. As editor of the newsletter, sometimes I feel that perhaps our articles are perhaps one sided. That is not my intent. It is my opinion that the Gilroy Beekeepers Association and this newsletter should present as many sides to beekeeping as possible. It's up to the members to glean what they want from these philosophies and build their own management style. I invite every member to contribute to *The Buzzz*. My only requirement is that you include the word "bee" somewhere in your article. Please send your contributions to [dave.stocks@yahoo.com](mailto:dave.stocks@yahoo.com)

The Gilroy Beekeepers Association will be having a booth at the Santa Cruz County Fair. The fair dates are September 10th through the 15th. Please contact Wayne if you would like to work in the booth. This is an excellent opportunity to get the word out about bees and their plights.

## **September in the Bee Yard**

By September the bees, especially those in the country, are beginning to prepare for winter. Most, if not all, high quality nectar sources have disappeared, and the bees are beginning to use their winter stores. City bees may be fairing a little better. It is important that the beekeeper evaluates the honey stores in each hive and begins feeding surplus honey or sugar syrup and pollen substitute if necessary. Current brood in the hive will be responsible for rearing the October brood, which in turn will overwinter. You need to make sure that the hive is now at maximum health. For those who chemically treat for Varroa, it is important to continue treatments that were begun in August. Remember to follow the label. The beekeeper may notice that the workers are beginning to evict the drones, aka: freeloaders. You may observe some epic struggles as they attempt to re-enter the hive. If you have hives that are struggling, now is a good time to combine them. However, never combine a weak hive with a

strong hive as this may lead to the spread of disease. It is best to combine hives of equal strength. Don't worry if both hives have queens. The bees will work it out. The dominant queen will survive

## **Calendar of Events**

### **September 4, 2013**

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

<http://santacruzbees.com>

#### **Topics:**

Fall Hive Management  
Right Sizing for Winter

### **September 5, 2013**

Beekeepers Guild of San Mateo County- 7 pm  
1106 Alameda de Pulgas  
Belmont, Ca

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

#### **Topic:**

Honey bee Behavior, Genetics, Evolution and  
Health w/ Brian Johnson, UC Davis

### **September 7, 2013**

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

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

### **September 11, 2013**

Gilroy Beekeepers Association - 7 pm  
8191 Swanston Ln.  
Gilroy, Ca

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

#### **Topics:**

**Annual Bar-B-Que**

### **September 11, 2013**

Alameda County Beekeepers Association - 7:30  
600 Bellevue Ave.  
Oakland, Ca

<http://site.alamedabees.org>

### **September 22, 2013**

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

<http://beeguild.org/>

#### **Topics:**

**Annual Bar-B-Que**

## **Classes**

(Tentative)

Treatment Free Beekeeping  
w/ Serge Lebesque  
October 12, 2013  
Aromas Grange

Contact Vicki at 831-601-4758 for information

## **Special Events**

**Santa Cruz County Fair  
September 10-15, 2013**

## **Meetings**

**Western Apiculture Society (WAS)  
WAS 2013 Annual Conference**

[http://ucanr.edu/sites/was2/Conference\\_Information/](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