



The Buzz

The Monthly Newsletter of the Gilroy Beekeepers Association

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In This Issue

"Getting to Know Each Other"

Guest Column

Presidents Message

April in the Beeyard

Drippings from the Extractor

Bee Plant of the Month

Calendar of Events

Getting to Know Each Other!

by Vicki Basham

This month, Cathy Carlson is in the spotlight for our "Getting to Know Each Other" column. Cathy currently has three hives that she keeps at her lavender farm located close to Elkhorn

Cathy loves lavender and she loves bees, and she has been able to put these two passions together in a small business she calls "Las Lomas Lavender and Honey". Along with honey, she sells several other products from the provence lavender that she grows.

Cathy's interest in bees began at an early age



Cathy Carlson, left working at her Las Lomas Lavender and Honey Booth

Slough. She actually has quite a few other plants on her two acres, including several specialty citrus trees that she's about to include in her orchard.

when she was in 4-H in Santa Clara. At the time, the county agriculture commissioner was offering incentives to get people involved in bees. Cathy's 4-H club went to UC Davis where she got to see the fledgling artificial

insemination program. The people at Davis also demonstrated the strength of queen pheromone by removing a queen from her colony, placing her in a box nearby and then letting the club watch how the bees followed their queen into the new box. It left a big impression on Cathy.

This early demonstration of how fascinating insects can be may have led Cathy to a later position she held as part of the UC Cooperative Extension's Integrated Pest Management System. Part of Cathy's job was to raise the beneficial insects as well as pest insects, and to study how they reacted to each other.

Cathy later went on to take her current position with the Community Alliance for Family Farmers, where she teaches farmers how to provide food safety "from farm to fork". She missed being able to study insects, though, which led her right back to bees. She's had bees off and on ever since, usually about 10 to 15 hives at a time. This past winter was particularly hard on her bees, however, which has brought her down to her current number of three hives. That will change soon; she has several packages on order and just participated in a two-day queen rearing class. There's no doubt she'll be increasing her apiary back to its usual numbers in no time!

Cathy's favorite way to learn more about bees has been to attend the Gilroy Association's meetings. "It's a great opportunity to have such a network available to us," she says. "Being able to talk about our hives at the beginning of the meeting is a golden opportunity!"

When asked if she had advice for beginners, she said, "Bees are amazing insects - have fun! And be prepared to get stung!"

Guest Column

by Heather Oliver

Simple Beekeeping. Beekeeping on a Budget. The Tao of Beekeeping. Whatever you want to call it, beekeeping doesn't need to be a complicated affair. Turn to many beekeeping books, websites and catalogs and you'll see a

plethora of items for purchase. While some of these items are necessary, others offer promises of making your beekeeping experience less complicated. Truth is, so many products might actually hinder your relationship with the very creatures you're trying to nurture. Not to mention the fact these extra items clutter up your bee yard.

Below is a list of items you might not necessarily need, plus suggestions for alternatives;

- Bee brush. The bee brush is actually a bee-killer in that its pokey, nylon bristles are rough against the bee's bodies. As well, the bristles eventually get stiff with honey and can scrape against the comb. Instead; use natural products, such as a handful of grass, sprigs of lavender or rosemary to gently brush bees off frames.
- Entrance reducer. Unless you are plagued by mice, there is no need for a store-bought, metal entrance reducer. Instead; use natural materials such as handfuls of leaves, as a temporary reducer. For a semi-permanent reducer, cut one end of a cork at a slight angle and add and remove them as the season progresses.
- Foundation, feed and Fumidil. Bees are perfectly capable of making their own foundation, so why not let them try? No need to force them to color within the lines. Pollen found in nature is far superior to the manufactured supplement that often contains no actual pollen. Make every effort to encourage your bees to harvest and store natural pollen by locating them in yards full of flowering plants and leaving their pollen stores alone. Fumidil and other chemicals are a drain on the environment. They are a drain on your time. They are a drain on your pocketbook.

There are many more products and practices that are unnecessary in order to have success with beekeeping. Bush Farms has an entire webpage devoted to eliminating all but the essential equipment. For more information, go to www.bushfarms.com/beeslazy.htm, which is

where I found this parting quote; “Perfection in beekeeping is not found in a multiplicity of appliances, but in simplicity and the elimination of everything not absolutely essential” – Brother Adam

Presidents Message

by Wayne Pitts

Continuing our 2014 focus on bee problems this month we will look at the Varroa mite and suggestions for minimizing damage to our bees by this pest. Varroa Destructor is the official name of



Used by permission of Facebook's Girl Next Door Honey

this pest. It has been in the USA since the mid 80's, and within a short time had wiped out almost all the feral colonies and put a big dent in most of the managed hives. It was the late 90's before it was accurately identified.

Various treatments were tried, usually based upon mite treatments used for livestock. One of the first ones out of the gate was Apistan, a fluvalinate impregnated plastic strip, which you simply hung in the brood chamber for 45 days. This worked for a few years and then lost its efficacy. This was quickly followed by Check Mite, or coumaphos. In a few years this silver bullet was found to be only silver plated also.

Meanwhile intense research was taking place in the life cycle of the Varroa mite, in hopes of discovering a solution to our problem. One item discovered was the reproduction

process. Just before the bees cap the pupae's cell, a female mite will crawl into the cell hiding beneath the pupae. When the cell is capped, she bites a hole in the pupae, feeding on the body fluids. She lays an egg, male, and shortly after that lays 2-3 female eggs, and dies before the bee emerges. The brother will mate with the sisters in a few days, producing fertile females ready to repeat the cycle. This is the crux of our problem. If one female mite survives the treatment method used, all of her offspring will have inherited this trait, rendering the treatment ineffective in a few generations. The take home message is: whatever treatment or method you use, rotate annually with another, to prevent treatment resistant mites. When to treat? The current standard is now at 3 mites per 100 bees. This is called the economic threshold.

Treatments:

None:

Sometimes called the Bond Method, based on the film Live and Let Die. The theory is that the bees most tolerant of the mites will survive and spread their genes via drones around the area, increasing the chances of building a mite resistance apiary as new queens mate with them. Be prepared to lose lots of hives before finding the magic combination that allows the bees to live with the mites.

Soft:

Powdered sugar dusting. Application: 1 cup of powdered sugar per box per hive. Scatter the sugar over a window screen on the top bars of the top box and brush it through the screen openings. This technique has not been proven when subjected to controlled studies, but your apiary may be different. The technique is based on the theory that the powdered sugar will cause mites to lose their grip on the bees and fall through the **screened** bottom board. Only about 33% of the mites are outside of a cell and riding around on a bee at any given time, so this procedure must be repeated every 3-5 days for 45 days to achieve effective control.

Drone comb removal: Using a frame that contains 1/3 normal foundation and 2/3 empty or a “drone” foundation frame will usually

cause the bees to build drone comb. Due to the longer time for a drone to emerge, the mites tend to prefer drone cells. This frame should be removed as soon as the cells are capped and frozen (0 or lower) for 24 hours to kill the mites. Cut out the portion that contains drones and feed to your chickens or seal in plastic and dispose.

Break the brood cycle: Since the mite requires larva to reproduce, if there is no brood there are no mites. This requires removal or isolation of the queen for 24 days. I am not quite sure how to achieve this. Send me your ideas.

Organic acids: Except for HopGuard, these acids are already present in honey and beehives but not in the strength needed to eradicate the mites. Formic, thymol, and oxalic acids can be used to control mites. Reference the appropriate web sites below for more information.

Formic Acid: <http://www.miteaway.com/>
Use at ½ the recommended dose to minimize queen damage

Thymol: Apilife Var -
<http://www.apiculture.com/chemical-laif/index.htm>

ApiGuard - <http://www.vita-europe.com/products/apiguard/>

Oxalic acid:
<http://scientificbeekeeping.com/oxalic-acid-questions-answers-and-more-questions-part-1-of-2-parts/>

HopGuard:
<http://www.betatechopproducts.com/products/varroa-mite-control.php> HopGuard may be used 3 times in a year, best results are obtained if it is used once per week for 3 weeks in a row.

Hard Treatments:

These are not recommended due to their toxicity and buildup in the wax. They include Apistan, Apivar, and CheckMite.



April in 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.



Photo by Randy Fox

Drippings From the Extractor

by Dave Stocks

My apologies to Randy Fox. He sent the wonderful photo above to be used as our Bee Photo of the Month. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to use it as a demonstration of what might be happening in the hive on the left.

Let's set the scenario. You come home at five in the afternoon and see your three hives. The temperature is 80°. All three hives have been strong all spring. Now you find bees hanging on the outside of one. What could it possibly mean. I would consider three possibilities. First, the temperature in the hive is higher than the bees air conditioning system can handle. These bees are hanging on the outside to reduce body heat inside. This is a possibility on an 80° day. The bees are handling the situation. Moderate your concern. The second possibility is that the hive is overcrowded. This is a real concern as the hive will soon begin swarm preparations if they haven't already. Add another box on top, or think about splitting as soon as possible. The third possibility is one that I've only begun to realize. The field workers are returning faster than the house bees can put away the nectar and pollen. The solution is fairly simple. Add a box to the bottom, where the field workers can hang out until it's their turn to off load.

After our last meeting, President Wayne sent out an e-mail requesting input on whether or not the Gilroy Beekeepers Association should change its meeting night to the first Tuesday of the month. In part his e-mail read "Would you like to change the meeting date to the first Tuesday of the month? That would put Monterey Bay, Santa Clara, us, Santa Cruz, and San Mateo having our meetings within a total of 6 days most months. This would allow us to share expenses with the others, perhaps allowing us to get more speakers" His request to the query has been under-whelming! My initial concern about the proposal was that folks that attend more than one meeting would be gone several evenings in the same week. Two of the folks that responded, maybe the only two, attend more than one meeting. They didn't think consecutive nights was an issue. If you have strong opinions either way, please plan on attending the next meeting.

I think I say this every month, but it wouldn't be a newsletter without talking about the effects of the drought. Even with the nice spacing of recent rains, we are still seeing and

will continue to see the effects. I have especially noticed this in my two yards. The bees in my "flatland yard" are going crazy, bringing in loads of pollen and building up rapidly. On the other hand, the bees in my "mountain yard" still think it's winter. They are not active and not bringing in pollen. They are primarily dependent on native plants. Even though the buck bush (Ceanothus family) is blooming, the bees don't seem interested. Other expected blooms just haven't happened. In desperation, I'm back to feeding hives, not something I wanted to do in March. The moral here is check your bees. Make sure they have what they need.

Speaking of blooming plants, I heard an excellent comment from an experienced beekeeper. In addition to being beekeepers, we also need to be botanist. All of us, especially those in non-urban areas need to know what our bees are foraging on. If you are interested in learning more, check out the Xerces Society web site and the U.C. Berkeley Urban Bee Lab web site for list of bee friendly plants.

The weekends of March 15-16 and March 22-23, I was fortunate enough to host two bee classes. The first was a Top Bar Beekeeping class taught by Les Crowder. With the exception of me, the entire class was composed of brand new beekeepers, most awaiting their first package. It was really great to see the enthusiasm of these folks. The second class covered queen rearing and was taught by Melanie Kirby and Mark Spitzig of Zia Queen Bees in New Mexico. Both classes were outstanding! My only regret was that the attendance of GBA members wasn't higher. There were none for the Top Bar class and only two for the queen rearing classes. Classes like these offer an excellent opportunity to increase our knowledge. If there are classes you might like, let me know. We will try to get them arranged.

One thing that came out of both classes was peoples concern about the use of pesticides, including miticides. A lot of folks feel there has to be a better way. There is discussion about starting a treatment free working group. The

first task of this group would be to define what is treatment free. If this is of interest to you, please contact me at dave.stocks.com.

Bee Plant of the Month

by Randy Fox



Another month approaches and that provides me with the opportunity to write about another of my new favorite plants that serve a multi-purpose in my garden and provides **nectar to** our Bees as well as Butterflies and Hummingbirds.

The plant for this month is Bee Balm.

Overview:

Bee Balm is a striking flowering herb that serves multi-purposes. It is also known as Oswego tea. Like its name, this herb lends a tasty addition to your tea mix. Bee Balm provides a long-lasting display of pink, red, and crimson flowers in midsummer. They start flowering when they reach about 18 inches and continue to grow to 3 or 4 feet in height. Deadheading them encourages more growth, which can prolong their flowering period. Bee balm is susceptible to powdery mildew but the Panorama type does a good job of fending off this problem. As I mentioned earlier Bee Balm is a good source of nectar for bees as well as butterflies and hummingbirds. This family also includes horsemint (*M. punctata*), and lemon mint (*M. citriodora*). The fragrant leaves of most of these

plants are used in herbal teas. They are easily found in seed catalogs. Several varieties usually are available at local nurseries.

Harvest:

Leaves are harvested to use fresh in salads and summer drinks, while dried they make a delicious tea.

Site Requirements

Bee balms perform best in full sun. While plants tolerate partial shade, they won't flower as heavily and are more susceptible to powdery mildew. They also prefer moist, well-drained soils.

Watering

Bee balms like an even supply of moisture during the growing season. For best performance, water bee balms every 7 to 10 days during dry periods. When watering, soak the soil to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Applying a mulch around the plants will help to conserve soil moisture and reduce the frequency of watering.

Fertilizing

Bee balms don't require frequent or heavy fertilizer applications. Sprinkling a small amount of an all-purpose garden fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, around each plant in early spring is usually sufficient. Avoid over fertilization. Frequent or heavy applications of fertilizer will encourage rampant, succulent growth and may increase the severity of powdery mildew.

Deadheading

Prompt removal of the spent flower heads will prolong the bloom period.

Division

Bee balms spread rapidly via underground stems or stolons. In addition, the centers of the clumps often die out within a few years. To control their spread and rejuvenate the plants, it's usually necessary to dig and divide bee balms every 2 to 3 years. Early spring is the best time to dig and divide bee balms. Dig up the plants as soon as they emerge from the ground. Divide the clump into sections with a sharp knife. Each section should have at least 2 or 3 shoots

and a good root system. Replant immediately.

Calendar of Events

Meetings

April 2, 2014

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

<http://santacruzbees.com>

Topics:

Spring Hive Management
Swarm Prevention
Splitting Hives
Bait Hives

April 3, 2014

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

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

Topic:

Hive Inspections w/ Serge Labesque

April 5, 2014

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

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

April 7, 2014

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

<http://beeguild.org/>

Topic:

Honey Extraction Demonstration

April 8, 2014

Gilroy Beekeepers Association - 7 pm
Gilroy Old City Hall
7400 Monterey
Gilroy, CA

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

Topic:

Package Installation

April 8, 2014

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

<http://site.alamedabees.org>

Classes

April 12, 2014

Honey Bees and Beekeeping
Saratoga, CA

Details at <http://beeguild.org/>

August 2-3, 2014

2nd Annual Treatment Free workshop
Medford, Or

Details at www.blisshoneybees.org

