

# The Buzzzz

The Monthly Newsletter of the Gilroy Beekeepers Association

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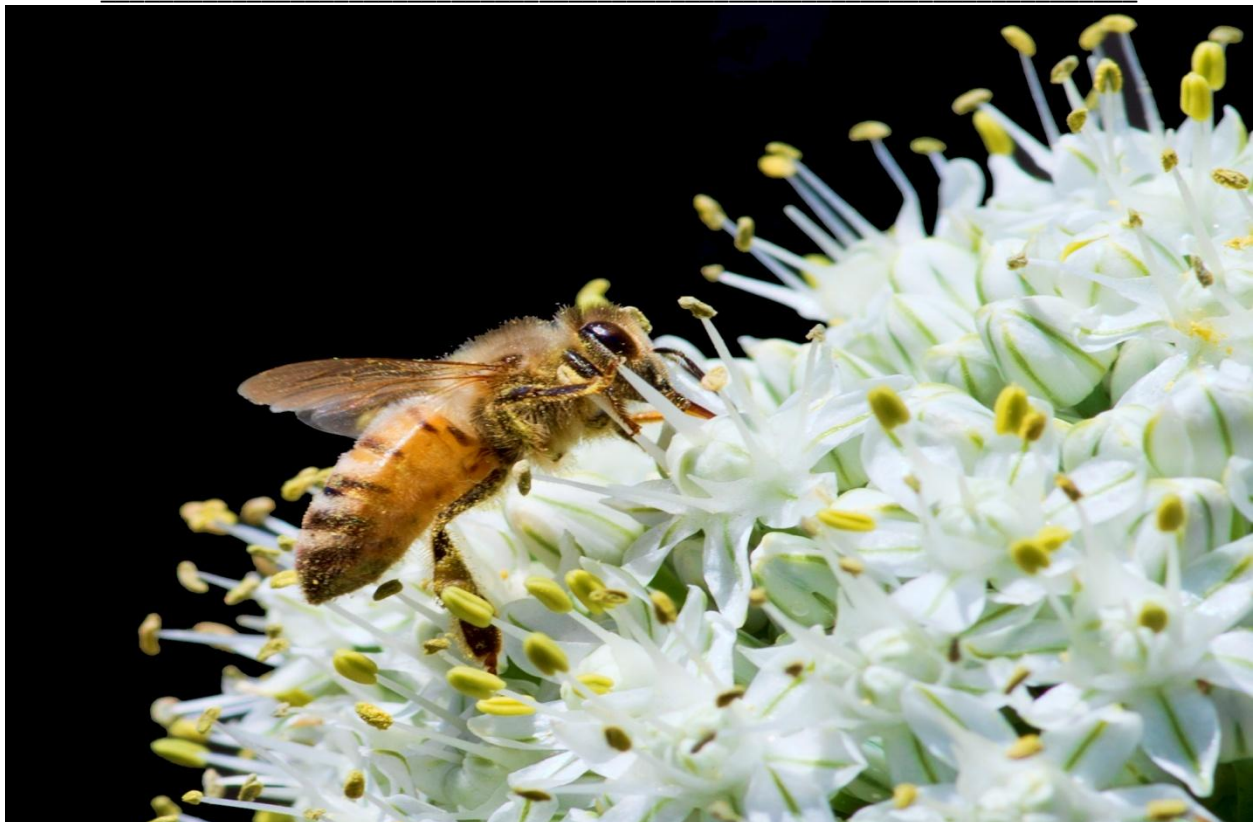


Photo courtesy of Randy Fox

Each month "*The Buzzzz*" would like to feature a photo by one of our local beekeepers. Please send your photo's to [dave.stocks@yahoo.com](mailto:dave.stocks@yahoo.com)

## Getting to Know Each Other!

by Vicki Basham

This month, Kathy Niven is in the spotlight for our "Getting to Know Each Other" column. Besides being an avid beekeeper, Kathy is an instructor in the Culinary Arts department at Cabrillo College. She even keeps a few hives there at the college's Horticulture Center.



She also has hives in her beautiful backyard in Corralitos. One of those is a modified Langstroth hive, adapted to work similarly to a top bar hive. The idea came from a popular beekeeping website run by Michael Bush. She also adopted his idea of having the entrance at the top of the hive, and says that it seems to be working really well. Kathy also has a regular top bar hive as well as a standard Langstroth.

Kathy started beekeeping ten years ago when she and her husband watched a ten-part television series on beginning beekeeping. After seeing the series, she was so enthralled with beekeeping that she read every book she

get her hands on, visited numerous beekeeping websites and on-line forums, and contacted several of the local clubs. She got a lot of help from Wayne Pitts, and it was Wayne who gave Kathy her first hive. He had just captured a very large swarm and brought it to her in the trunk of his car!

Kathy strongly advises that newcomers to beekeeping do as she did - learn as much as they can about bees. She thinks it's a mistake for any beekeeper to assume that he or she can simply put a colony in a backyard and leave it alone. "You must be willing to manage your bees if you expect them to survive," she says.

Kathy finds the idea of treatment-free beekeeping very appealing, but has not had much luck at all with that approach. One year, she did a comparison where she treated a few colonies with Apiguard and other colonies with powdered sugar. The hives treated with the powdered sugar did not survive, whereas the hives treated with Apiguard are doing well.

Although Kathy's hives are not a major source of income for her, she has made a few dollars through beekeeping. She has taught beekeeping courses at Cabrillo College and at Love Apple Farms, and sells honey to her friends. Kathy also makes a wonderful lip balm out of the beeswax and honey from her hives.

Kathy's most memorable moment in beekeeping occurred when she was doing a hive inspection. When she tried to lift a deep box, Kathy realized that it was much heavier than she expected. She had to put it down immediately, and because of its weight, she wasn't able to place it back directly on top of the box below. Her husband tried to help, and wearing only a veil and gloves, the two of them tried to manipulate the box into its proper position. The next thing they knew, the bees "turned Africanized" on them! "They swarmed all over us and stung us numerous times! We

were even hosing each other down, trying to get the bees off!" They knew that in order to continue, they would have to stop and borrow a neighbor's full bee suits and return to the hive with some better protection. The neighbor was out of town so it took a while for Kathy to reach him. When she finally did, they had to hunt for the hidden key, get into the neighbor's house and find the suits. Thirty minutes or so had passed before Kathy and her husband could finally return to the hive, fully protected and ready for anything the bees might try. But apparently, the bees had decided to give them a break, because when Kathy and her husband returned, the bees were remarkably calm, and not the least bit agitated!

### Guest Column

#### The Buzz About Living With The Drought

by Heather Oliver

On January 17, 2014, Governor Brown declared a drought emergency for the State of California. How does this affect our bees and what can we do about it?

The drought is sure to negatively affect all aspects of farming, from fruit and vegetable production to beekeeping. Our crops will not receive their allotment of rain and must instead depend on irrigation. The livestock that roams our hills will not have grass on which to forage. They, too, will rely on farmers to supplement their diets. Our bees will find less nectar and pollen on which to feed their extended family.

There are several things we can do to safeguard our bees. Bees need a reliable water source to carry out housekeeping functions such as cooling the hive. It is imperative both country and city hives have access to water at all times. If your bees are in rural areas, their usual creeks and springs may be dried up, necessitating a back-up water source. In this case, the beekeeper might bring a water trough

to the hive site and set up a schedule to keep it filled. A trough should have landing pads (such as corks) for the bees, and an escape ladder (such as a stick) for lizards and other thirsty critters that might accidentally fall in. News of this watering-hole will spread quickly among parched raccoons and the like, so be sure to refresh this trough often.

City bees also need a reliable water source. A strategically placed birdbath can serve the needs of your bees, while also providing the beekeeper a pretty focal point in his or her garden. The birds will appreciate this little oasis as well. Remember to add landing pads or you might find your birdbath afloat with drowned bees. Without a stable, near-by water source provided by you, your bees might need to burden themselves further with the stress of traveling to and fro on hot, dry days. Or, they might decide to crash your neighbor's pool party.

There are other things you can do to help your bees through this trying season. You can encourage your bees to take advantage of the nectar and pollen sources that are available now. You might subtly maneuver the hive so the morning sun shines on the hive entrance, shaking the ladies from their cluster and prompting them to forage. If you are currently feeding your bees, you might consider removing the syrup, at least during the warmest and brightest of days, to reduce dependence of ancillary feeding. As well, you should continue to water your flowering plants...with grey water. That pot of water for boiling pasta the night before can be used to water a life-giving lavender plant.

### Presidents Message

#### Becoming a Better Beekeeper

Continuing our theme of identifying bee diseases, this month we are focusing on Chalkbrood.

Chalkbrood is caused by a fungus, *Ascophaera apis*, It primarily appears in the spring and is thought to be accelerated by

humidity. This implies that *Ascospaera apis*, is present in the hive year around but when the wet warm temperatures of spring occur, the chances of a perfect storm appearing are enhanced. This should not be a problem this year given our lack of rain.

Chalkbrood is characterized by brood mummies at the entrance that appear to be bits of white to black chalk. If found in the brood area the brood cap is missing, and the brood appears to be a solid white mass. The house bees will remove the corpse over the next 2 or 3 days, dropping it on the landing board or the ground in front. Normally as the wet spring turns into a drier summer the problem goes away.

What we can do to make our hives less susceptible to Chalkbrood?

- Ventilation – this lowers the humidity in the hive
- Replace brood combs every three years.
  - Try to keep brood frames in the same box, no mixing with other hives
- Prevent stress as much as possible- easy to say hard to do
  - Be sure that the bees have adequate stores, both of pollen and honey
  - Feed if necessary
- Since some hives appear to be unaffected, pointing to queen genetics, requeen a chalkbrood hive.
- Don't chill the brood.



[fitzbrown12.wikis.birmingham.k12.mi.us/Chalkbrood+\(Ascospaerosis\)](http://fitzbrown12.wikis.birmingham.k12.mi.us/Chalkbrood+(Ascospaerosis))



Beeinformed.org

### Packages

I met with the package supplier last week and everything is on schedule for delivery in the latter part of April. If you have not yet ordered, we are getting 3 pounds of bees with a marked queen. Each package will be \$80 if you are a member, \$85 if you are a non-member, and \$100 if ordered after our meeting on 11 march.

### President's Random Thoughts

Have you ever been asked, 'Why are the bees dying or disappearing'? No one knows the definite answer to this question, but every indication is Varroa mites. The mite by itself is not destroying the bees, but it is a vector for viruses. Once the bee is weakened other opportunist parasites move in and shortly thereafter the hive is no longer productive and destined for a downfall. What can we do to lower the mite count, since it is impossible to eradicate them? I do not like to treat my hives but will when I find a mite load of 3 mites per 300 bees. Treatment varies from Hop Guard or MiteAway Quick Strips at ½ dose. Hop Guard needs to be applied every 7 days for 3 weeks. Hop Guard is also a Section 18 pesticide. Which means you need an applicators license issued by the County Ag Commissioner to buy or administer. MiteAway Quick Strips are hard on queens. In this case, the cure may be worse than the disease. I lost 2 of 15 hives I treated last year within 4 weeks of treatment. It is imperative that if you treat, treat all hives in your apiary since mites can be transferred from hive to hive via drifting.

This year I will be using a different mite suppression method, known as an artificial swarm. I tried it last year on 2 hives and had a 50% success rate. The reason I lost one of the two last year was that I injured the queen when shaking the bees. In a nutshell, find and capture the queen, shake all the bees in one hive into a 'new' hive with 1 drawn comb and either new foundation, comb, or both. Place the 'new' hive in the same position as the old hive. Treat using the powdered sugar method, 1 cup of powdered sugar per box. Reintroduce the queen. Move the left over brood to yet another hive, preferably one that needs boosting. This hive should be treated immediately and again in 21 days. The theory of the artificial swarm is that by removing all the brood, the life cycle of the mite has been interrupted, and will require a few months to rebuild. Check the new hive in 7 days to ensure that the queen was able to start laying again. If not, acquire a new queen as soon as possible.

And lastly: I stayed up all night to see where the sun went, then it dawned on me.

### **February in the Beeyard**

One good thing about being late with the newsletter is that we have seen and been able to report a fairly significant change in weather patterns. The drought is a long ways from being over but at least we've taken a baby step in the right direction. What we are seeing is fairly typical of February as it relates to temperature changes.

Although we probably still have cold damp weather ahead, the bees are recognizing the upcoming season transition and things are changing in the hive. It would not be uncommon to see a hive double in population during the month. We need to be vigilant in monitoring their growth. It's not too early, especially if the weather stays warm, for hives to swarm. Be prepared to add a second brood box or supers.

On the other hand, a prolonged cool or rainy spell well force the bees back to consuming their honey stores. It may be

necessary to continue supplementing with sugar syrup, if you think their honey stores are low.

In addition, to honey stores, some additional things should be looked for if you do a hive inspection. As we mentioned, the hive population should be rapidly increasing. If it's not, an attempt should be made to determine the cause. If supersedure cells are present in combination with spotty brood patterns, or there is an inordinate number of drone cells, it could be an indication that the queen is old or failing. Spotty brood can also be the residual effect of a virus, protein deficiency or Varroa. Finally, having a good pollen source readily available will help with any protein deficiencies that develop.

### **Drippings From The Extractor**

I apologize for the lateness of this newsletter. Leave it to a beekeeper to get his Medicare card and try to max it out in the first two weeks!!

According to the weather forecast it appears that a small portion of relief may be in sight. But let's not take the false belief that we are out of the woods. It's going to take a lot of rain to saturate the soil to the point where we begin to get run off. If you have already begin drought preparations, please continue. If you haven't started, please keep it in mind.

The first west coast treatment free bee conference last summer was a huge success. So much so that it will be held again this year in Medford, Oregon. The tentative dates are August 2nd and 3rd. Registration is not yet open.

In last month's edition, I reported the passing of Ray Hicks. I erroneously reported his cause of death as being heart related issues. In fact, Ray passed away after a battle with cancer. I apologize for the mistake.

## Plant(s) of the Month

This month we want to talk about two plants. We plant both in our gardens, but for very different reasons. The first is rosemary, one of my favorite early season blooming plants. Rosemary (*Rosmarinus*) is a member of the mint family. It would hard to find a more versatile plant.



Not only is it an early season, long lasting nectar source, it's also used in cooking, for fragrances, cosmetics and traditional medicines. There are many cultivars of rosemary with plant habits ranging from prostrate to upright. This brings up my second favorite thing about the plant. A hedge planted around my home hives completely shelters them from suspicious eyes!

The second plant was planted with no intentions of being a pollen and nectar source. However, on a given day it may be the most popular plant in the yard. My wife and I both love broccoli and we try to plant for a continuous supply. This year, due to the unseasonable warmth, it seems most of it matured and flowered within a couple of weeks. Bad for our vegetable consumption but great for the bees.



Broccoli is a member of the Mustard family. In the absence of our native mustards this year, it is supplying a good alternative.

## Meetings

### **February 1,2014**

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

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

### **February 3,2014**

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

<http://beeguild.org/>

Topics:

Swarms-Catching and Preventing

### **February 5,2014**

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

<http://santacruzbees.com>

### **January 9, 2014**

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

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

### **January 11,2014**

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

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

Speaker: Art Hall

### **February 11,2014**

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

<http://site.alamedabees.org>

### **February 13, 2014**

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

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

## Classes

Date: **March 15-16, 2014**

Topic: Top Bar Beekeeping

Instructor: Les Crowder

Location: TBD

Spaces in the class are available. Please contact  
Dave Stocks at [dave.stocks@yahoo.com](mailto:dave.stocks@yahoo.com) if  
you're interested

Date: **March 22-23, 2014**

Topic: In Her Majesty's Chamber's: Introduction  
to Queen Breeding and Rearing

Instructors: Melanie Kirby and Mark Spitzig

Location: TBD Spaces in the class are available.

Please contact Dave Stocks at

[dave.stocks@yahoo.com](mailto:dave.stocks@yahoo.com) if you're interested