



The Monthly Extractor

Newsletter of the Sonoma County Beekeepers' Association

To increase interest in and knowledge of bees and beekeeping for the hobby and commercial beekeeper, and to educate the general public in the value of bees.

March 13th meeting will be in our new location, New College 6th and Wilson Street in Santa Rosa near Old Rail Road Square.

Calendar

Mar. 13- Monthly meeting-
Talk on swarming. Hear three different views from three experienced beekeepers. Speakers will be Larry Mead, Rob Berkemeir and Benjamin Schmid.

March 21st & 22nd – Ag Day at Santa Rosa Fair Grounds
8 am-1 pm- We will have a display there with the 4-H Beekeepers helping us. If interested in helping, please call Ettamarie Peterson at 765-4582 or e-mail her.

Community College Class for Beekeepers-Instructed by Serge Labesque:
Intermediate Beekeeping for Spring and Summer
Two Wednesday evenings, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
March 22 and March 29, 2006
1288 Barnett Hall, Santa Rosa Junior College Campus
Course Fee: \$45
For registration: SRJC Community Education REGISTRATION
Telephone: (707) 527-4372
Fax: (707) 527-4870
On line: www.santarosa.edu/communityed

🐝🐝🐝🐝🐝 **FREE**
Bring a prize for the raffle
receive one free raffle ticket
For Free

Save a Tree!

The postage rates are higher now. You can save the association money on that and printing costs by viewing the newsletter on line. Send an e-mail to Ettamarie at peterston@svn.net and request to be an on-line viewer only.

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(707) 545-072
Larry and Lou Bertolini Owners, and Sponsors of our Day Under the Oaks display

From Your President

Hello Spring Beeks!

This has really been a short month filled with loads of bee stuff. Some good, some bad. I'll tell you about mine, since this is my one way conversation with all of you. I will tell you the continuing saga of my brush with commercial beekeeping..... The last of the Australian bees were all unpackaged and it was time to go to the almonds. It was an early season by two weeks. We "palletized" my girls, four colonies to a pallet. After dark one night Scott Nelson shows up with the truck and forklift and clamped down on those babies, three pallets deep and loaded them in the truck! That was really bittersweet. We did splits and combinations to equalize the hives and my bee families are all mixed up now. I name all my hives. Some are boring numbers, but most still have fun names. Mix, Piggy, Howard, Liberty, BC, G-Man, etc. When they return, I'll not know any of them. They will all receive queens from my Queen Mother hives. All will truly be equal then.

Jumping in and out of the truck, flying through Scott's many apiaries, I had forgotten about a queen and some attendants that were extra. She got tucked away in my purse and was not needed at the next yard and I forgot about her for 3 days. I finally released her and her attendants one night, when I discovered the forgotten golden beauty. She is in my observation hive right behind me in my office. I have given her some extra bees and she has laid up a storm. They are filling the comb with pollen and nectar and trying to patch up the medium above them. I don't think there is a cell left empty. I'm sure as these next few wet days come along, I will see a big decrease in their stores. So, don't forget to move your bees' stores right next to the cluster. In cold, wet weather, they will not be able to break the cluster to go get the food a frame away!

The queen raising with my new system was a failure twice so far. The first failure was with the "swarm box." In one system I was testing, you place the grafts in a nuc (swarm box) for 24 hours. You are supposed to prime this box with 3 to 4 pound of bees and a frame of nectar and pollen and a frame of honey and "close up the box." Twenty-four hours go by and it is time to move the cell frame to the finishing colony. When I opened the top of the swarm box, there were only a small cluster of bees left and they covered 4 cells. I put them in the finisher and went back to re-read and find out where I had messed up. When I had read to "close up the box," I had not realized that meant the opening for the bees needed to be closed up, too. DUH!?!

Failure number 2 came after the second bunch of grafts came out of the swarm box. Man, they looked great. Out of 50 cells, nearly all had new wax filling out the edges of the plastic queen cups. I really enjoy grafting. I work in my candle house in 90-degree heat, with massive humidity from boiling crock-pots. I use a Chinese grafting tool, which is the cheapest there is. (Except for Serge's, he uses a toothpick that he forms to his liking!) I felt like a proud parent seeing those queen cells starting to form. My hopes were dashed when several days later I opened up to peek and noticed that there were not enough bees on my queens and looking further, I saw that they had not been drawn out much more than the last time I saw them. When I dug in to look and see why, I found that I had missed a couple of cells, when I was checking the day I installed the queen cells and the bees had made themselves a supercedure queen. She was a day a head of my queens and so mine were abandoned for the 6 cells they had already decided to make into queens. I saw that queen in the finishing hive today! I don't think she has mated yet, because I saw no eggs and the weather has been very wet for mating flights.

I have waited a full week now for the next graft to be placed in a finishing hive. No more surprise queens can be made now. Tomorrow is G Day. I graft again....stay tuned! 8-)

The other things that are going on in the apiary are reversing and splitting. Now that your bees have come through the winter, they may have moved from the bottom brood box to the top one. Peek on top of the bottom box. Are there lots of bees in rows peeking up at you? Probably still has lots of brood there and you NEVER split the brood, so don't reverse. But, if you see very few bees and no brood, put the second brood box on the hive bottom and put the almost empty box on top. You may do this several times in the spring.

What if you find you have 2 brood boxes boiling over with bees? You better split!!! Read past "Extractors" for Serge's instructions, or dig into your library and read up, get ready. In any case, you should have extra equipment on hand to catch swarms, make up splits and set up trap hives. Do your shopping. In Sebastopol, there is beekind and in Santa Rosa there is Western Farms. Install your foundation in frames, paint the woodenware. Ready, set, go! Watch the first warm, dry days for swarms to issue.

Minutes of General Meeting Feb.13, 2006

By Sean Straw, Sec. Held at the offices of Harmony Productions in Sebastopol.

Kathy Cox discussed scheduling of future meetings at the new location. Date for the new meeting was to conflict for the 13th of March (second Monday) schedule, but the prior and following Mondays would be available.

Katia announced that we'd have Dr. Eric Mussen from UC Davis to speak on 08 MAY.

Questions for Dr. Mussen included: small hive beetle impact, tracheal mites, update on the distribution of Africanized bees within California, natural methods of hive pest control, importing of bees, perspective on changes in California with regards to imported bees, and effect of genetically modified crops on bees.

Initial attendance was counted at 61 people, with an additional 16 arriving after the start of the meeting, for a total of 77 people. Approx 20 people identified as attending their first SCBA meeting on this night.

The new meeting space was crowded for several reasons - it wasn't as large as the prior meeting location, a lot more people showed up at this meeting, and the space wasn't optimally arranged for seating.

Ettamarie spoke briefly on the HappyKeeper bottom board, which was added to the raffle for the evening. This is a bottom board with a series of plastic tubes across the bottom, with beespace in between. Invented in France, they eliminate cleaning problems on the bottom board, as debris falls through [the literature specifies that the gap is 3.5 mm, and that bees cannot pass through]. Screened bottom board has a tendency to plug up with debris over time - this design avoids that. [Subsequent to the meeting, Ettamarie noted that the bees don't seem to lose pollen on these as they do with screened bottom boards]. The tubes are spaced so that they are directly under each frame in a ten-frame hive. They cost approx \$20, plus \$10 for shipping (cited from memory). Does not have a built-in slot for a monitoring board. Can use year-round. <<http://www.apiculture.com/happykeeper/>>

Hector Alvarez presented briefly on almond pollination services. When asked, "How many bees do you have", his response is that there are too many to count. Has 620 colonies. Took to late blooming almonds. Pollination customer only inspects perhaps 50% of the hives to count frames. Doesn't use honey supers - just brood boxes ~ 14 frames of bees. In 2 weeks, he can collect 50% of his bees from pollination. Beekeepers for almond pollination come from all over - hive beetles can be a problem for some, though Hector doesn't have problems with them. It was suggested that because he's had the contract for a long time, many of his hives may remain clustered together and not exposed to hives from other areas. Fred Nelson stated that small hive beetles are attracted to a weak hive. As has previously been indicated, Fred freezes frames with hive beetles. Fred had not seen any beetles in their Apiary until Scott brought bees in from Nebraska.

Doug Vincent reported that nobody showed up at the Farm Bureau (our old meeting location), so the word on the new location seems to have gotten around.

Harvey provided pictures of bees which had died off - no

Katia Vincent spoke on pollen traps, showing one which she carries at BeeKind. Collect the pollen each day, before humidity sets in. The traps take about 50% of the pollen from the bees. Holes are "ergonomically designed so as to not harm the bees". "Standard" brand? carried by Brushy Mountain and Mann Lake (and sold locally at Beekind).

Hans cited issues with plastic in pollen traps - provides a surface for humidity to condense on.

Doug Vincent demonstrated the "Sundance Pollen Trap" hive-bottom type pollen trap, which is installed above the bottom board. Has a tray which slides out behind the beehive, and an ON/OFF toggle on front (which drops a bypass board on the front. Takes a LOT of pollen from the bees, so use sparingly.

FREEZE YOUR POLLEN. Kills larvae (such as wax moth), etc.

Hector uses a pollen trap similar to the Sundance model.

There was a question on pollen in honey. The consensus is that if it is suspended in the honey, it should be reasonably preserved.

The Napa County Beekeepers are having a frame wiring demo and a meeting on top bar hives on 18 FEB in Napa. Contact jwheel@interx.net - 707/252-8675

A suggestion was offered to NOT feed captured swarms - the bees will consume their honey stores and thus will not be as prone to leave the hive.

Katia also reminded attendees that you must be a current paid member in order to participate in the swarm list. Publication is nearing. Some members raised questions on accuracy of data. Sean Straw volunteered to call the swarm participants to confirm their participation details before the swarm list is published this year.

The website is nearing public release, which hopefully will occur after the swarm list data is ready and the board has accepted the presentation on the site.

The scheduled speaker for this meeting is Serge Labesque, speaking on Hive Maintenance.

Serge is anti-swarms - a LARGE colony is better.

Unmanaged hives are more apt to fail. 1 pint of honey = 3 million flower visits.

Reacting to problems isn't hive management. Serious beekeepers must have goals. Beekeeping by improvisation is chancy.

Preparation for winter is most important -- it leads to strong colonies in the spring. Cold weather: bees may be placing nectar in brood area, as if they are preparing for winter. This isn't good.

Brood nest management: make sure the queen has place to lay eggs.

Swarm results from brood nest congestion - a brood area filled with pollen and honey instead of brood.

Serge likes 2-deep brood hive configuration.

Make sure center are almost empty frames with more honey to sides.

As brood cluster moves upwards into the second level, reverse bodies. AFTER bees have moves sufficiently into the upper box -- otherwise, you'll separate the brood clusters. If open brood exceeds sealed brood, then the colony is growing. Continued on next page

foulbrood. Black Cells were identified as pollen with mildew. Keep died out hives DRY.
 By mid-march, colony health should be easy to determine. Small colony with too much space leads to problems, because they cannot keep the space warm. Use follower boards to adjust space.
 Spring = Stress which can cause Nosema, chalkbrood, EFB, or dysentery.
 When population is growing, the hive has lots of work. 1 brood (deep) frame, when solid with honey = 5 lbs. In spring, colony needs 20# of honey for good survival. Provide empty foundation in spring to take advantage of nurse bees' wax production.
 Drone production is late by about 2 weeks this year. First fertile drones must be raised in warm temps. 24 days gestation, 12 days to maturity. The delay is pronounced in Glen Ellen, less so in Petaluma.
 Benefits of hive division are varroa mite control & young queens.
 Serge advises dividing hives as late as possible in spring, so you start with a really strong hive. Basically, when they are ready to raise their own queens for swarming. Cold weather is NOT a good time to split colonies.
 Grow strength of hives - don't impair them.
 Be quick about inspections - the longer the hive is open, the more heat they lose. Inspect the brood nest -- if nectar is coming in, don't need to decap honey. Otherwise, run hive tool flat to open some cells and expose honey for the bees. When there are 7 frames full in the hive, add a second level. Add 3 frames, 1 empty foundation in middle, 2 empties on sides.
 2 deeps w/ 5 frames each, with follower boards (plywood frame-sized boards) on sides to artificially bring in the sides of the hive body towards the bees.
 Feeding - if bees running low on stores. Hive top feeder is easy. Light syrup (1:1) is problematic, due to humidity. 2:1 (sugar:water) is better because it won't introduce as much water to the hive interior.
 When reversing the brood chambers, take freshly cleaned bottom board & clean.
 Kathy Cox mentioned a useful downloadable tool for PC's to monitor local weather conditions and forecasts from the weather channel.
 We have a discussion list called "sonomabees" hosted at yahogroups.com

Strong Suggestions for Swarm Catching

If you have volunteered to be on the swarm list, please follow these suggestions. By the way, they are ideas all swarm catchers should abide by.
 Let the caller know you charge if you do. Give the caller three other names if you do not want the job. Do not promise if you can't follow through. Do not go on the property without permission of the owner. Sometimes people will ask you to go a neighbor's property. This is not a good idea! Go back after the sun has gone down to get the last bees. Explain to the people that this is necessary as bees do not fly after dark. You might have to arrange to have a light left on or carry a flashlight. Coming back after dark without letting the people know can cause them to think you are a robber or something!

Make the whole process an education about bees. Answer questions and tell people why bees swarm. This is also a good time to promote the values of bees and encourage people to quit spraying everything with pesticides!

Before you go, determine how high the bees are and how many there might be. Ask the people to describe the swarm size compared to a basketball, etc. If the bees are way too high, don't risk your neck to get them! Explain the danger to the people. Really high bees are no danger to them and will eventually fly off.

You might consider carrying an extra suit and gloves in case the people want to help. It is amazing how many are secretly hoping to become beekeepers themselves. This is your call. Of course you should tell the people about sting allergies and importance of caution and being calm.

Some Plants to Consider for the Bees

If you are going to the nursery or ordering plants and seeds, the following are sources of nectar or pollen or both. Try any of these for a more bee friendly garden:
 Anise Hyssop, Borage, Buddleia (yellow), Crocus, Canterbury Bells, Catmint, Citrus trees, Cotoneaster, Echinops, Hollyhocks, Helenium, Holly, Ice Plant, Japonica, Lavender, Mock Orange, Marjoram, Michaelmas Daisy, Rosemary, Scilla, Snowdrop, Thyme, Wallflower, Willows.

From your Editor:

This newsletter may look a bit strange. If you are reading it on-line, the page numbering will be weird but I haven't the foggiest idea why. You all know computers have a mind of their own! I will fix them with white-out on the printed copies. (The younger generation probably doesn't know about white-out and ink pens) I apologize but I am using a new word processing program that is much different than what I have been using for years. I also apologize that it did not arrive sooner but I had to wait for some articles before I could finish it. Hopefully next month these problems will be behind us!

By the time you receive this our web site should be a reality. Look at www.sonomabees.org We owe a ton of thanks to Sean Straw for hours of hard work making this an outstanding web site we can all be proud of. We are very fortunate that he is not only a terrific computer guru but a dedicated beekeeper, too!