

# THE MARIN BEEK NEWS

Volume 2, Issue 1

January 2010

## What You Missed

We convened at our new meeting location, The American Legion Log Cabin, for our December 3rd meeting. The room was spacious enough for the 60-plus attendees to all see the presentation by Serge LaBesque. Serge kindly filled in for our scheduled speaker, Kate Frey, who was unable to make it due to illness.

Serge is a local beekeeper from Sonoma County with many years of beekeeping experience. He has been keeping bees without chemical treatment for over ten years. He has found that, once you adopt a no-treatment policy for bees, it becomes much easier to manage your colonies.

Serge says "By nature we want to protect our hives and do the work for them. When we treat bees it propagates genetics that would otherwise not survive."

Serge believes that bees raised from local stock will have the best chance for survival in our area. He

*see Missed on page 2*

## New Meeting Location

Our club is expanding and, sadly, has outgrown the barn at Draper Farms. Our new meeting location is the American Legion Log Cabin, 20 Veterans Place, San Anselmo, CA.

It is located just down the street from Draper Farms. Turn on to San Francisco, just like you would if going to the farm. After turning on San Francisco, take the second right onto Veterans Place. There is plenty of parking adjacent to the Log Cabin.

## What's the Buzz

Our next meeting will be on Thursday, January 7, 2010 at the American Legion Log Cabin, 20 Veterans Place, San Anselmo, CA, starting at 7:30pm.

### **We're All In This Together**

An Evening on Why Bees Have Declined and What We Can Do About It

There are many aspects to keeping bees healthy. One very important aspect is genetics. The DNA of your colony comes from the queen bee. But where does she come from? A random swarm, a commercial queen breeder, a special queen bred with hygienic and varroa sensitive qualities?

There is strong evidence that queens from the local environs who have survived on their own without chemicals are the best bet. Chemical treatment for mites has the negative side effect of producing super mites and weak queens.

A group of Marin County Beekeepers has started a project to raise queens from bees that have survived on their own without treatment. The ultimate goal is to produce enough locally reared queens to be able to provide club members with these queens.

*see Buzz on page 2*

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pointed out that there are only a few queen breeders in the U.S. and that they don't necessarily promote genetic diversity.

Under Serge's method of beekeeping, bees that do not have the characteristics to combat parasites and diseases in our area will die out. The genetics of bees that are able to cope with parasites and diseases are nurtured by creating splits of those hives or rearing replacement queens.

Serge states that "Given enough time, the bees will learn how to deal with diseases and parasites."

Serge discussed the signs of swarming that should be looked for. When the hive decides to swarm, they will prepare the queen by discouraging her from laying eggs. In effect, they harass her to get her to lose weight so that she can fly. This will change the proportion of open to sealed brood in the nest. As they discourage the queen from laying, the ratio of open to sealed brood will go down; typically, the ratio would be approximately 50-50. This is an indication that the hive intends to swarm. This is the time to divide the hive, placing the queen and about three to four pounds of bees into a new hive without drawn comb. In effect, you are creating an artificial swarm. Feed this hive for three to four days until they get established. Requeen the old hive or allow them to produce their own new queen.

Serge talked about the use of a single-sized hive body throughout to allow for more flexibility and how to ventilate the hive to discourage unwanted condensation.

For those who missed this informative talk, Serge is scheduled to return to speak about springtime and summer in the hive at our meeting in April

We will hear about this "Survivor Stock Queen Breeding Project" from some of those involved.

Upcoming Meetings:

FEBRUARY 4<sup>th</sup>

February will feature Dr. Marla Spivak. Marla Spivak is Professor and Extension Specialist in Apiculture, University of MN. Dr Spivak, along with Gary Reuter, developed the line of Minnesota Hygienic bees in an effort to reduce or eliminate the need for chemical treatment of bees for parasites as well as many common bee diseases.

March 4<sup>th</sup>

March will feature Dr. Eric Mussen. Dr. Eric Mussen is the UC Cooperative Extension Apiculturist.

April 1<sup>st</sup>

April will feature Serge LaBesque. Serge will return to speak about spring and summer in the hive.

## Equipment Order

Bonnie Bollingier is organizing a club equipment order from Mann Lake. Equipment cost will be the same as shown in the catalog. However, since we will be picking the equipment up from Mann Lake's store directly, you will save on the shipping cost. Information was sent out through The MarinBuzz earlier in November.

If you have any questions email Bonnie at: [orders@marincountybeekeepers.org](mailto:orders@marincountybeekeepers.org) or, talk to her at the meeting.

## OTHER EVENTS

Dan Stralka will teach how to process your beeswax and how to make your own hand dipped candles.

Date: Saturday January 16 10 AM-4pm

Location: Draper Farms Barn

Limit: 15 people and must be club member

Cost: \$20.00—Includes wax, equipment, wicks and 2 candles you have made yourself

Deadline to sign up January 10 or when it fills up!

To reserve your space: Send your name, phone number and email address and a check for \$20.00 made out to Marin Beekeepers Association to:

Cynthia Perry  
79 Claire Way  
Tiburon, Ca 94920

Deadline to sign up January 10 or when it fills up!

PS: We need one electric hot plate if you can lend one for the workshop.

## Bee Quiz

With the candle making workshop coming up soon, let's test your beeswax smarts:

True or False?

- 1) Bees consume about 8.4 pounds of honey to produce 1 pound of wax.
- 2) World demand for beeswax far exceeds the supply.
- 3) Most wax is produced by house bees that are two weeks of age.
- 4) A "No Pest Strip" is a good way to protect comb from wax moths.
- 5) The dusty appearance that forms on the beeswax is a form of mold that is easily wiped off.
- 6) The melting point of beeswax is approximately 125 degrees F.

## ASK ERIC

Dr. Eric Mussen is the UC Cooperative Extension Apiculturist.

**Q:** We have noticed that the bees from two swarms we picked up from the same general area in San Rafael seem quite small. We are wondering if Asian honey bees (*Apis cerana*) are in our area or if they could possibly be a species of European honey bees (*A. mellifera*) with which we are not familiar?

**A:** It is much more likely that you found swarms that are more similar to their parental stocks, first brought here from Europe during the period from the 1600's to the early 1900's. After honey bees were introduced over here, most beekeepers have been selecting for the "biggest" queens. Over the centuries we have increased the average size of the bees, substantially, from their ancestral size.

Also, it is possible that the bees in the swarms weren't fed so well. This can make them quite a bit smaller than what we call "normal."

Although it is always possible that *A. cerana* somehow got here, it is extremely unlikely. If you have been opening your hives and looking at the new bees, and they haven't flown away (absconded), they probably aren't *A. cerana*. *A. cerana* does not tolerate disturbances well at all.

*Bee Quiz continued*

- 7) Bees produce beeswax from a pair of wax glands on the ventral side of their abdomen.
- 8) The color of beeswax is white when secreted by the bees. The yellow color comes from the contact with pollen.
- 9) The advantage of beeswax candles is that they burn slowly without smoke, drip less, have a bright light, and have a mild, sweet scent.

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## Dues are Due

A reminder that annual dues for 2010 are now due. Dues are still just \$20 per year. You can pay in person to David Peterson at the monthly meeting or mail you check made payable to Marin Beekeepers to:

Marin Beekeepers  
c/o Mary Nordquist  
2072 Hatch Road  
Novato, CA 94947

New members and members with new contact info please make sure to include your address, phone number and e-mail.

Membership includes free admission to all meetings, access to the Club's honey extracting equipment, and subscription to the Club's "MarinBuzz" listserv which serves as an online discussion forum and a way to notify Club member of local bee swarm information.

### Answers to the bee quiz:

- 1) True
- 2) True
- 3) True
- 4) False - Wax will absorb chemicals, such as pesticides, and should not be stored near them. If you want to store your comb using a moth repellent, use moth crystals which contain paradichlorobenzene -- not moth balls which contain chemicals that are toxic to bees and end up in the wax.
- 5) False - The dusty appearance is called "bloom" and is easily wiped off. It is the waxes of a lower melting point migrating to the surface. Bloom melts at 102 degrees F.
- 6) False - Beeswax melts at approximately 145 -- actually 147.9 + or - 1 degree F.
- 7) False - There are four pair of wax glands.
- 8) True - New wax is actually almost clear. It is the uneven surface that gives the appearance of being white.
- 9) True

Paraphrased from "THE CLASSROOM", a book by Jerry Hayes, made from a collection of the Q & A's that have appeared in his monthly articles of the same name in the American Bee Journal

## Recipes

### . WAS Skep Cakes from Mea McNeil

Components for about two dozen cakes:

- 1 recipe Eastern European Honey Cake
- 1 recipe Honey Meringue Frosting
- 1 swarm marzipan bees

#### *Eastern European Honey Cake (Lekach)*

Preheat oven to 350°

Oil muffin tins: use tins to make about two dozen *each* regular (on the smaller side) and miniature (circles of parchment paper, which can be reused for subsequent batches, insure that they come out easily).

Combine in Pyrex or pan:

- 1 cup coffee
- 1 ½ cups honey
- ¾ cup canola oil
- 2 tsp vanilla

Heat just to blending (do not cook further) in microwave or on stove. Stir and cool (in refrigerator if you are moving right along).

Combine dry ingredients:

- 3 ¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 ½ tsp baking soda
- 2 tsp ginger
- 2 tsp cinnamon

(Traditional recipes add raisins and chopped walnuts here, about ¾ cup each, which are not in WAS cakes.)

Beat until thick, four minutes or so:

- ¾ cup sugar
- 3 large eggs; added one at a time

When the honey mixture is about room temperature (not warm), beat it into the egg mixture. Add dry ingredients and blend well.

Scoop batter into an *even* number of miniature and larger muffin wells – filling no more than ¾ full. Bake about 30 minutes, checking to see that a toothpick comes out clean. Bear in mind that the miniature muffin tins will bake faster.

Cool cakes. Prepare to stack them in skep shape in

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this way:

Warm gently in *two separate* pans or pyrexes (on stove or in microwave):

1 cup raspberry preserves (or another favorite) ¾ cup honey

Cut off the rounded tops of the cakes with a serrated knife (making them flat when inverted).

Use scissors to cut around any remaining rim sticking out around the edges of cakes.

Put the bigger cakes upside down on a big oven tray

Spread warmed filling on inverted bottom of cakes (just to edge, not oozing over).

Place inverted mini-size cake on top.

Spoon warmed honey over the two-layer cakes

### *Honey Meringue Frosting*

This frosting uses meringue powder for the food safety of cakes that had to remain unrefrigerated. Otherwise, raw egg whites can be substituted.\*

Ingredients for 8 cups frosting:

5 Tbs + 1 tsp meringue powder  
1 cup warm water  
2 pinches salt  
1 cup or less honey (to taste; much less sweet frosting is nicer with the honey-soaked cake.)

Beat meringue powder, water and salt to soft peaks. Add honey in a fine stream while beating to stiff peaks.

\* If using raw eggs, use 8 egg whites and omit water. Keep frosting and cakes refrigerated.

To frost the skep cakes:

Plate the cakes individually before frosting.

Spoon some frosting into pastry bag with ¼" tip (#4) or so.

Starting at the bottom, pipe the frosting around the cake in a spiral strip, allowing the cake to show between the frosting spirals. When you get to the flat top, continue in circles to make a rounded top to the skep.

### *Marzipan Bees*

Ingredients:

1 package marzipan  
1 small pkg slivered almonds with skins  
1 small vial yellow or yellow-orange food coloring (gel is best)  
1 small vial brown or black food coloring

To make the bees:

Sort out whole almond slivers relatively the same size. Mix a few drops of yellow food coloring on flat plate with less than a drop of brown or black. Best to leave colors separate and add dark little by little to desired brownish color for stripes.

Knead well two drops of yellow food coloring into less than a ping pong ball sized piece of marzipan. Add more if you like it brighter, but it does not take much.

Knead the remainder of the marzipan into colored portion.

Roll colored marzipan into a log no more than 1" in diameter.

With a dry knife, slice log the long way, cleaning off blade between strokes.

Place the half logs flat side down. With same technique, slice the half logs parallel to the ends to make bee shapes about ¼" wide.

Roll each bee a little to shape it as you like

With a toothpick laid close to parallel to the plate, pick up a little brownish color. Lay down stripes across bee, pressing the body just a little to flatten and indent. Pick up color with toothpick tip and poke in eyes. Allow to dry.

Press the more pointed side of almond wings into the marzipan on either side, angling the wings variously at your whim.

Lay the bees on the skep cakes before serving.

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**Vanilla Honey Caramels**  
from Catherine Jasen

Yield: 7 dozen 1-inch caramels

Canola Oil	
2 cups	heavy cream
2	vanilla beans, split lengthwise
1 cup	honey
2 cups	sugar
4 Tbs	unsalted butter, room temperature
1 tsp	fine sea salt

Line the bottom and sides of a 9-inch x 9-inch baking pan with aluminum foil. Grease the foil with oil.

Pour the cream into a small sauce pan, scrape the seeds of the vanilla bean into the cream and add the pod, as well. Bring to a boil, then remove from the heat and cover to keep hot.

Combine the honey, sugar, butter, and salt in a heavy 5-quart saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the mixture starts to simmer. Increase the heat and cook, stirring constantly, until you reach the hard crack stage – 302 degrees F on a candy thermometer. Remove the pan from the heat.

Remove the pods from the cream mixture. Slowly stir the hot cream into the caramel a little at a time. Its addition will create massive amounts of hot steam and vigorous bubbles. Place the pan back on the heat and, stirring constantly, bring the caramel up to firm ball stage – 250 degrees F. Remove the pan from the heat.

Pour the caramel into the lined pan. Let it set until firm – at least 6 hours or overnight.

Lift the foil from the lined pan and invert the caramel onto a piece of parchment or waxed paper. Use a lightly oiled knife to cut the caramel into your desired shape. Wrap each caramel in wax paper. Store in an airtight container in a cool place.

**The Arrival of the Bee Box**  
by Sylvia Plath

I ordered this, clean wood box  
Square as a chair and almost too heavy to lift.  
I would say it was the coffin of a midget  
Or a square baby  
Were there not such a din in it.

The box is locked, it is dangerous.  
I have to live with it overnight  
And I can't keep away from it.  
There are no windows, so I can't see what is in there.  
There is only a little grid, no exit.

I put my eye to the grid.  
It is dark, dark,  
With the swarmy feeling of African hands  
Minute and shrunk for export,  
Black on black, angrily clambering.

How can I let them out?  
It is the noise that appalls me most of all,  
The unintelligible syllables.  
It is like a Roman mob,  
Small, taken one by one, but my god, together!

I lay my ear to furious Latin.  
I am not a Caesar.  
I have simply ordered a box of maniacs.  
They can be sent back.  
They can die, I need feed them nothing, I am the owner.

I wonder how hungry they are.  
I wonder if they would forget me  
If I just undid the locks and stood back and turned into a tree.  
There is the laburnum, its blond colonnades, And the petticoats of the cherry.

They might ignore me immediately  
In my moon suit and funeral veil.  
I am no source of honey  
So why should they turn on me?  
Tomorrow I will be sweet God, I will set them free.

The box is only temporary.