

Marin Beek News

Volume 2 Issue 10

December 2010

Marin County Beekeepers Meeting

Thursday, December 2, 7:30pm
American Legion Log Cabin
20 Veterans Place
San Anselmo

**Kathy Ziccardi and Marissa Ponder:
Gardening for Honey and Native Bees**



Marissa Ponder, above, is a U.C. Berkeley research assistant. She is pictured with her mentor Professor Gordon Frankie, a renowned native bee specialist. Ponder will share her experience with the UC pollinator garden and the Mill Valley garden to enhance our understanding of planting for bees.

Kathy Ziccardi, a Marin landscaping specialist for over 25 years, has created an extraordinary bee garden at a Mill Valley estate. Her depth of expertise and exuberance in sharing it make her a delightful resource for planting year-around forage for our bees.



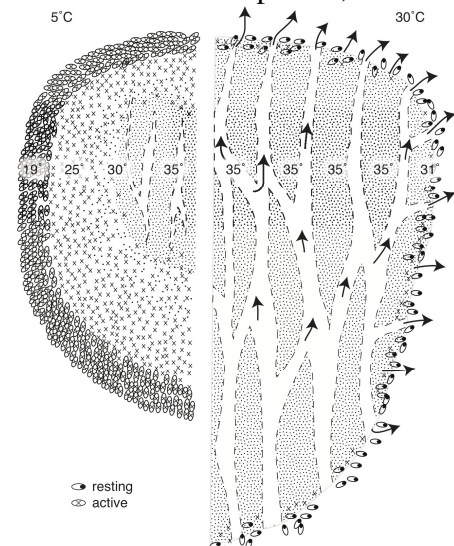
The meeting will begin promptly with a 20 minute question and answer period.

Winter in the Bees

Time for a glass of mead and a bee catalog, with the bees huddled up for the winter. Bees, famously, do not hibernate, so their biggest task over the cold months is keeping warm.

They do this with a remarkable precision. In this illustration, from Tom Seeley's *Honeybee Democracy*, the ambient temperature for the summer cluster on the right is 86°F. For the winter cluster on the left, the temperature is 41°F. In both cases the interior brood area is kept at a steady 95°F. In summer, the bees make passages to fan air. In winter, they cluster tightly to preserve the warmth that they are generating.

It's expensive heat. A house bee with the role of heater bee can vibrate her thoracic muscles for about half an hour before she needs to be replaced,



at the task, and to do it, she needs ample fuel. Metabolism is active throughout the winter cluster, shown with crosses. So the bees have little heat to expend on our curiosity.

Still, we can know a lot from a visit to the apiary. Catherine Jasan just gently tapped the side of her hive as she put her ear to it and heard a reassuring low buzz. We'll have days warm enough for the bees to fly, and then the traffic is telling.

Entrances can still be reduced, brush cleared, deadouts removed, lids weighted, monitoring trays checked – anything short of opening the hive. That being said, there may be days warm enough for a quick look.

This could be a good time to check beekeeping records for the past year to see if your system serves you well. Some beekeepers mark their hives, some signal with the position of a brick on the lid, others have notebooks.

Consider planting cover crops in your garden to fix nitrogen and feed your bees in spring, such as red clover, below. *Mea McNeil Draper*



Photo by Kathy Keatley Garvey, UC Davis



Ask Eric

Eric Mussen, Extension Apiculturist at U.C.Davis, offers some winter advice.

The best thing you can do for your bees now is just leave them alone. Hefting your hives can give you a good idea if they are heavy with stores. They have to make it until February. It does depend on where you live -- early rain will bring mustard and wildflowers up.

A heavy hive could be bees instead of food. On some days you can take a quick look down between the frames. At 55° or under, the bees will cluster, and what matters is that the cluster is of a reasonable size.

If you do go in, do it when it's not windy, but don't monkey around until the temperature is at least 60° and don't take any frames out. We call it chilling the brood when it is exposed, but I think they become dehydrated.

If you do break the cluster, the literature shows that the bees get more nosema spores.

About the third week in December the size of the brood nest will begin to increase. I have recommended that they'd already have been fed, but if

you have to put on a feeder, use one above the brood because heat rises.

Boardman feeders (the jars placed at the hive entrance) encourage ants and robbing. I like bucket feeders placed over the frames. They need a tight recessed lid with about 60 holes that can be made with a fine drill or hot finishing nail. The hole can't be made by hitting a nail; it will leak. Testing with water doesn't work, they have to be tested with a little syrup. Use 2:1 syrup: you can't get it exactly to that density.

This is a good time to clean your beeswax by heating it over water. The honey will dissolve in the water and the propolis and other debris will fall to the bottom. If you make candles in molds, it's easier to release them if you put them in the freezer for it while.

Eric Mussen

2011 Dues Are Due

It's a deal: \$20 for a year of bee info in stimulating programs, online conversation, access to swarm notices and use of the extractor and other equipment. Either pay Dave Peterson at the meeting or mail your dues with your address, phone and e-mail to:

*Mary Nordquist
2072 Hatch Road,
Novato, CA, 94947*

Join the Team

We need a volunteer:

snack coordinator, to organize meeting snacks

newsletter editor, to put out the Beek News starting in January. Would you like to do a quarter or a single issue?

The Beek News has a guest editor. Rob Tysinger, who has created and carried on the News, is helping care for his son Andrew, who is recovering from a serious climbing accident in Colorado. Follow

Andrew's progress and post messages for the family at:

www.caringbridge.org/visit/andrewtysinger

*from the library of
THE MARIN COUNTY
BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION*



This book is a gift from

Beekeeping Library

Huzzah, we have a new librarian -- Marina Wright, a Marin Beeks member for many years. She is accepting donations of books related to beekeeping. A book plate with the donor's name will be placed in the book. Speak to her at the meeting if you would participate. An incomplete wish list:

The Beekeepers' Handbook, Sammataro
Honeybee Democracy, Seeley (donated)
Bees, Fisher
The Buzz about Bees; Biology of a Superorganism, Jurgen Tautz
The Hive and the Honey Bee, ed. Graham (out of print, a new edition is coming out)
Backyard Beekeeping, Flottum
Biology of the Honey Bee, Winston
Queen Rearing, Laidlaw and Page (out of print; we'd need a used book)