

THE MARIN BEEK NEWS

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What You Missed

Our last meeting featured Randy Oliver. In addition to his commercial beekeeping operation, Randy researches worldwide scientific literature and beekeeping practices, applying this knowledge to practical beekeeping. Randy is also a frequent contributor to the American Bee Journal.

Randy began with an overview of pesticides. The largest volume of pesticides is in urban areas, where homeowners tend to overuse them. Rural areas are moving towards newer pesticides, neonicotinoids; which are applied to seed instead of being sprayed topically. Treated seeds ideally minimize environmental exposure. Farmers tend to use pesticides as a risk management tool instead of to manage an infestation. Randy stated that studies in Europe do not link neonicotinoids to bee kills.

Randy spoke about some common misconceptions about bees:

1. Nature is nice to bees. This is not necessarily true. Many nectars and pollens are toxic to bees, a local example is the California Buckeye.
2. Most Colonies will survive in nature. If this were the case then the feral population of bees would be growing tremendously. The fact is that, in a stable feral population, over 50% of the colonies die off every year. Most colonies in the U.S. die from starvation.

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What's the Buzz

Our next meeting will be on Thursday, June 2, 2011 at the American Legion Log Cabin, 20 Veterans Place, San Anselmo, CA, starting at 7:30pm.

Special Guest Speaker

Our guest speaker will be Jeremy Rose, author of Beekeeping in Coastal California. He is co-founder of the California Bee Company, which promotes the health and well-being of honey bees by using natural management methods, and breeding queens with mite-resistant behaviors. He will have his book available to buy at the meeting

Upcoming Meetings:

June 30th to July 4th: The Marin County Fair. See inside for information about fair entries and sign up staff the bee exhibit.

August 6th: Marin Beekeepers Annual Potluck Dinner, Draper Farms starting at 5:00 pm. Look for more information in next month's Beek News and on the Buzz.

Celebration of the Bees

Attend the upcoming Celebration of the Bees on June 18th at Hilltop Gardens in Mill Valley. Funds collected with help support the Marin Survivor Stock Project and the 2012 Marin Pollen Project.

Information and links to purchase tickets at:

http://www.savorythymesevents.org/invites/bee/bee_invite_2011

3. Bees don't like chemicals. Bees use some chemicals to their advantage. Propolis is one of the most toxic natural chemicals and bees use it in their hives all the time.
4. That there is any "best way" to keep bees.
5. That "natural" beekeeping is new.
6. That "treatment free" is good husbandry.

Randy discussed how to keep bees healthy. He spoke of the four horsemen of the bee apocalypse. They are famine, cold, pestilence (varroa, noseama, etc.), and poisons (man made pesticides).

Randy identified varroa mites as the number one cause of bee problems. Mite wounds suppress the bees' immune systems, cause stress and vector viruses. The arrival of the varroa mite completely changed bee/virus dynamics allowing viruses to gain stronger access to the bees. Because of this, it is important to practice good varroa management. Randy told us that you should know your mite level on August 15th. This is just before the bees begin preparing for winter. The most effective way to determine mite load is to use an alcohol wash.

1. Pull brood frames from the hive.
2. Shake the bees into a Rubbermaid tub, wait for any foragers to fly away/
3. Scoop up ½ cup of bees, about 300.
4. Put the scoop of bees into an alcohol was apparatus. This can be made from two peanut butter jars. Cut a large circle out of the lids, glue the lids together with a piece of hardware cloth between them.
5. Pour in alcohol, screw the two jars together.
6. Shake the apparatus vigorously for a count of twenty.
7. Count the number of mites in the bottom of the jar.

A mite count of less than 2%, 5 mites or less, is ok. If the mite count is higher than that then Randy suggests treating your hive. Randy is a proponent for treating with natural chemicals, such as thymol, formic acid (mite away), and oxalic acid (wood bleach). Male mites are susceptible to acids since they have soft shells. For more information on mite monitoring and control

visit Randy's website scientificbeekeeping.com

Other things can be done to combat mites:

1. Use mite resistant bees.
2. Start new colonies regularly by making splits. This interrupts the bee brood cycle and creates a period where the mites have no safe place to hide.
3. Keep bees in full sun if possible.

The final topic of the night was nutrition. Bees need a high protein level to fight off viruses. Bees are primarily made of protein. In the summer the population of a hive turns over about every five weeks, so good sources of protein is essential for good hive health. When natural pollen is not available Randy suggest feeding a pollen supplement to your bees. Feeding protein helps mitigate stress.

What do bees do with pollen supplements? Studies have found that bees do not store pollen supplement in the comb or feed it directly to larvae. They found that it is primarily digested by nurse bees and converted into royal jelly, which is then fed to the young larvae.

As time ran out on the evening Randy reminded everyone that "You probably got into beekeeping for the joy of it and should try not to take it too seriously."

Marin Bee Census Survey

The result of the 20011 Marin Bee Census Survey are in. The results were posted on the Buzz on May 26th. A big thank you to Bonnie Bollengier for conducting the survey and tabulating the results.

Fair News

The 2011 Marin County Fair is fast approaching. The dates for the fair are June 30th to July 4th. Once again, the club will staff the bee booth inside the exhibit hall during the Fair. This is our club's opportunity to do outreach and get the word out about our little "trusts" and hopefully dispel some misinformation. We get to talk about bees, show off the observation hive, look for the queen and enjoy the various reactions. Even as a "newbie" you have more knowledge than most of the public. The club also receives a donation from the Fair for our participation.

We staff the bee booth with 2 people during each 3- to 4-hour time slot. In exchange, each staffer receives a pass to get into the Fair and each time slot will have one car pass to the exhibitors' parking lot in back of the exhibit hall. The rest of the day you can enjoy the other parts of the Fair. Check out the website, <http://www.marinfair.org>, for entertainment (all included with entry), special events and attractions, especially the fireworks display each night at 9:30 p.m.

The sign-up schedule will be circulated during the next two meetings. Please sign up and join in the fun!

Here is your chance to engage in a little good-hearted competition with other beekeepers on all types of hive products: honey, beeswax, and candles. Cash prizes are associated with the first 5 places. There are two big prizes, the Best of Show and the Barney Salvisberg Award. All the exhibits are on prominent display at the bee booth during the fair (ribbons included) for your friends and neighbors to see, and we can showcase the many different hive products produced locally in Marin. The entry deadline for exhibiting at the fair has passed, but late entries will be accepted. Contact Dan Stralka at stralka.daniel@epa.gov or talk to him at the Thursday meeting.