

THE MARIN BEEK NEWS

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What You Missed

Our last meeting featured a talk by Kirk Webster. Kirk is a beekeeper in Vermont who has raised bees and bred queens for many years without treatment of any kind, using methods developed from organic farming. His presentation was about getting rid of treatments.

Kirk started by stating that you have to work with your bees in your environment to develop a program of non-treatment. The methods he used in Vermont would probably need some adjustments to adapt to a California environment.

Organic methods are very successful in growing field crops, forage crops, livestock and dairy. You can utilize the power of nature to improve the yield of any crop. Can these principles apply to honey bees? Yes, even with a parasite (varroa mites) that is so out of balance with the host.

see What You Missed on page 2

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What's the Buzz

Our next meeting will be on Thursday, April 4, 2013 at the American Legion Log Cabin, 20 Veterans Place, San Anselmo, CA starting at 7:30 pm.

Our guest speaker will be Heather Mattila. Heather is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Wellesley College in Wellesley, MA. She received her B.Sc. and Ph.D. from the University of Guelph (Ontario, Canada). Dr. Mattila's research focuses on the role that intracolony (within-colony) genetic diversity plays in the organization of communication and division of labor in honey bee colonies.

Upcoming Meetings:

May 2, 2013

Eric C. Mussen, Ph.D., Extension Apiculturist
University of California Davis
Dr. Mussen will speak on the current state of beekeeping.

June 6, 2013

Wyatt A. Mangum (Ph.D.) internationally-known, top-bar hive beekeeper and monthly columnist for the *American Bee Journal* on Honey Bee Biology, Dr. Mangum will speak about top-bar hive beekeeping. Dr. Mangum will also have copies of his new book, "Top-Bar Hive Beekeeping: Wisdom & Pleasure Combined", for sale during the meeting.

July 3 to 7, 2013

The Marin County Fair
Watch the Beek News and the Buzz for more information about how you can participate.

THERE IS NO REGULAR CLUB MEETING IN JULY.

Insect pest and diseases should be seen as allies. They indicate an imbalance in the system. Varroa has only been in *apis mellifera* for a relatively short period, so the symbiosis is not yet worked out. To overcome mite problems you need to use management and breeding.

Kirk was experimenting with queen rearing using a 10 frame box with a separation board that allowed him to install two nucs in one box. He discovered that the bees can over-winter in these nucs. Kirk raises queens in midsummer. The queens are then left to over-winter in the nucs. The nucs that survive the winter are then introduced into his honey operation. Hives that perform well in the honey operation are then candidates for queen rearing for the next year.

Kirk credits a lot of his success to his access to Russian bee stock. When varroa was discovered in the United States, the USDA searched for strains of bees that had lived together with the mites. They found that bees from an area in Russia had been exposed to varroa mites for a period of time and appeared to have developed a certain amount of resistance to the parasite. They imported a large gene pool of Russian stock into the U.S. Eventually this stock was turned over to a group of beekeepers who established the Russian Bee Breeders Association. Their goal is to keep the stock as pure as possible so that the mite resistant traits are not diluted.

Kirk practices open mating in his apiaries but also has established a remote breeding yard in his area. In this way, he has greater control over the contribution of the drones to the mating process. He practices what he calls horizontal breeding methods. This is a primitive method for selection that focuses on overall performance of the bees, not on certain traits. He looks for an element of wildness, allowing all the attributes of health whether we know what they are or not. As an example, Kirk stated that he does not monitor for mites. He is not concerned about the mite population as long as the bees are able to coexist with the mites. By looking at overall performance, the bees are able to develop more than one method to ensure their survival.

Kirk summed up his philosophy of beekeeping without treatment this way:

1. Raise queens rapidly to propagate new colonies and replace losses.
2. Learn to use queen cells in an optimal way.
 - a. Raised queens in midsummer.
 - b. Overwintered them in nucs on only four frames.
3. Find some stock to work with.

4. If possible, find an isolated mating yard to control the male side of the equation.

In closing Kirk pointed out that you have to be open to what nature is trying to teach you.

Celebration of the Bees: Gardening for Pollinators

Saturday, May 4, 2013: 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Location: Hillside Gardens in Mill Valley

Cost: \$35; children are \$1 (2 per adult maximum)



Join us for an afternoon sponsored by Savory Thymes and SuperOrganism to celebrate the wonder of native and honey bees, both of which are suffering declines due to pressures in their ecosystems.

This day will bring exhibits and a honey tasting presented by the Marin County Beekeepers Association, skep weaving demonstration by Charlie Kennard, native bee walks lead by Gordon Frankie of UC Berkeley, honey bee talk by Mea McNeil, Master Beekeeper, gardening for pollinators talk by Kathy Ziccardi, Master Gardener, along with delicious foods, meads, and Celtic music. This is a kid-friendly event so please bring your children.

Tickets can be purchased online at:

<http://www.superorg.org/> (click on Buy Tickets in Celebration of the Bees section). For more information contact Jerry Draper at 415 457-3431 or email at celebees@superorg.org

Beekeeping Classes

This list of classes was collected from various sources for the benefit of our members, because education is a key ingredient in beekeeping.

NewBees 101 Class

Saturday, April 27, 2013
Rain Date: May 4, 2013
10:00 AM to 3:00 PM
307 Upper Toyon, Ross

Association member Dave Peterson will be holding a beginning beekeeping class, "NewBees 101" on April 27, 2013. The class will be at his house in Ross. The class is intended for Marin Beekeeper Members who have bees but are new to beekeeping, or plan to start with bees in the spring.

There will be a discussion touching on all aspects of beekeeping necessary for a beginner to get started with their own hive(s). We will spend a couple hours in discussion and then go into the apiary. NewBees 101 is intended to provide basic knowledge about bees and beekeeping but also to provide some practical experience working with the bees so as not to be intimidated when working in your own hives. Everyone will handle frames of bees. We will learn to spot the queen, identify each caste of bees, learn to recognize eggs and larva as well as capped brood cells and capped honey cells.

Fees: A donation of \$40 to Marin Beekeepers is required.

To Register: Reserve a spot by sending an e-mail to dpeterson307@aol.com.

Beekeeping Basics with Bonnie Morse

Saturday, May 18th
9:30 am – 12:30 pm
Location TBA

You have your bees, now what?? Learn tips and techniques for using smoker, bee brush and hive tool. We will look into how to work your frames and what to be looking for to determine health of your queen and the colony as a whole. As urban beekeepers, it is important to prevent swarming (to the best of our ability), so you'll learn what causes swarming, how to prevent, and how to recognize early warnings that a colony is making preparations to swarm.

To Register: email Bonnie:
bonnie@bonniebeecompany.com

Make Your Own Mead! with Robert MacKimmie of City Bees

Sunday June 9th
3:30 pm – 6:00 pm
Sticky Art Lab, 1682 University Ave (at McGee), Berkeley

Learn the secrets to making mead--and take home your own gallon to ferment at home--at this hands-on class taught by apiarist, Robert MacKimmie of City Bees. Speculated to be mankind's first fermented beverage, mead is easy to make at home, yet fine enough to serve at special occasions (read: no better way to impress guests at your next party). Participants will mix their gallon of mead under Robert's ever-watchful eye, ensuring delicious results. The class will also discuss and review more advanced recipes for Cyser (apple and honey wine) and Melomel (fruit and honey). Best of all, plenty of tasty samples will be provided. Each participant goes home with a gallon jug of mead and recipes, ready to ferment!

Fees: \$60 (all ingredients & equipment provided for a gallon jug of mead)

To Register: Register online at:
<http://biofueloasis.com/workshops/>

Fall Hive Management & Harvesting Honey with Bonnie Morse

Saturday, July 20th
9:30 am – 12:30 pm
Location TBA

Late summer can bring a variety of problems including increasing mite counts, yellow jacket problems, and lack of forage. Learn to recognize the signs and symptoms and how you can assist the colony during difficult times. Your bees will have already begun winter hive preparation. You should be thinking ahead, too: how much to reduce the hive, timing for doing so, simple things you can do to help bees during winter, signs you should recognize that your colony is in trouble. Fall is also the time of year to determine how much excess honey you can extract. We will review this as well as methods of removing frames, extracting honey, bottling honey and cleaning the wet frames.

To Register: email Bonnie:
bonnie@bonniebeecompany.com

Club Bee Order - Update



Installing queen cells into the nucs at Bonnie Bee & Co.

Last week, grafted queens from local Marin stock went into nucs in mating yards in west Marin. Queens are already emerging. If weather reports are accurate, it looks like the queens will have good conditions for mating flights coming up and tentatively nucs will be ready for distribution the first Saturday in May, or potentially the last weekend in April.

A limited number of nucs from our first round in 2013 are still available. If you are interested, contact bonnie@bonniebeecompany.com. Additionally, another round of nucs will be available in late June/early July.

Many thanks to all the beekeepers who shared their

bees, larvae and time to contribute to the effort to select and breed local survivor stock, as well as those who have purchased nucs from us. We couldn't do this without you.

-Bonnie & Gary

Five deep* frame nuc (nucleus) colonies are \$150
*Some medium frame nucs will be available. Request when ordering.

For more information visit
www.bonniebeecompany.com

2013 Marin Bee Census Survey

It's survey time again! Over the past four years, we have been able to collect a lot of data on what is happening with our local bee population, and what methods/equipment/etc. local beekeepers are employing to get these results. Whether you have one colony or twenty, your input is important. Even if you don't keep bees, but observe a feral colony in a tree or the walls of the house, we want to know what's happening with the bees.

Past surveys have indicated that some of the fewest losses occur with local splits, however, few beekeepers have split colonies before last year. Did you do splits or receive splits last year? How did it work out? How about Bonnie Bee & Company nucs? Colonies from the Split Squad? We want to know how!

Survey will be available online soon. Watch for the link on the Buzz – and share with your beekeeping friends who may not be association members.

From The Librarian's Desk

Thanks to Richard & Karen Hyde we have a number of new books to lend and old issues of the ABJ to pass along. Drop by the library table on Thursday and see what you could "bee" reading!

Our lucky draw continues for everyone who returns a borrowed item.

Fair Exhibit Prep Workshop

County Fair Exhibit Preparations: April 20TH, 10:30am – 2:30pm, Novato (location TBD), \$30. Register on the association website: <http://marinbees.org/wp/workshops-2/>.

Have you ever wanted to enter you hive products in the fair but didn't know how to prepare your entries?

Join previous fair award members of the Marin Beekeepers Association to learn how to prepare your hive products for entry in the fair. Three different time slots so you can pick the workshops in which you are most interested. Choices include: preparing your honey to be award winning, processing your wax, tapered wax candle making, molded wax, how to build a simple stand for your frame honey, and more!

Half fees from this workshop will go to the Marin Beekeeper's Association.



Checking the Grafting Frame for Queen Cells



A Fat Queen Gearing Up for Spring

Pacific Northwest Treatment-Free Beekeeping Conference

July 26 to 28, 2013

Pacific University, Forest Grove, Oregon (30 mins. drive from downtown Portland).

For more information of to register online: <http://www.blisshoneybees.org/Events.html>

Kirk Webster Workshop



Hive Tips

- **Prevent your bees from swarming: make sure there is adequate space in the brood chamber.**
 - Strong hives build up quickly. If your bees are starting to get crowded, add more space. Most importantly – be sure there is contiguous space in the brood chamber. If you add additional space, but there is only honey between it and brood area, you will not prevent brood area congestion – which is the cause of swarming.
 - Adding a new hive body above the brood with new frames? Help entice bees to move up by adding a frame with built out comb in new box. Are you a new beekeeper who doesn't have any frames with built out comb? Help entice the bees to move up by pulling a frame with young brood (young larvae & eggs) up into the new hive body from area below. Nurse bees will stay with these bees and their presence above will entice building in the new hive body. If you do this:
 - Be sure frame you pull up is kept directly above other brood frame(s) for easy access by nurse bees.
 - Replace frame you pulled in lower box. At this time of year (warmer temps so bees can break cluster to access food in different parts of the hive), you can place the replaced frame in the brood cluster area, OR between outermost brood frame & food frame, OR outside last frame in the box.
 - Bees not quite ready for more space above? But you are concerned about swarm prevention? Add space BELOW. A super below your other hive bodies will give queen potential space to expand into and also give space to returning foragers.
- **Cleaning out a winter dead out in preparation for the arrival of new bees?**
 - Check frames closely for the presence of American Foulbrood. While chances are more likely that your bees perished for another reason, this highly contagious disease continues to be found in colonies in Marin. Do yourself – and your neighboring bees – a favor

and educate yourself on the signs. Unsure? Ask for help on the Buzz.

- **Considering splitting?**
 - Keep in mind that research shows that well mated queens do better in the long term (we'll hear more about that from Heather Mattila at the April meeting). That means plenty of drones out flying during queen mating flights. It takes 24 days for drones to go from an egg to cell emergence. It takes an additional 14 days to reach full maturity.
 - Drones are flying now and it is more than likely that a queen could mate, the question is whether the time is optimal for her to do so.
- **Time to set up your bait hives!**
 - First swarm of the season was reported on February 22nd. If you plan to set out bait hives this year, now is a good time to do so.
 - Review Tom Seeley's book, **Honeybee Democracy**, for complete details on what his research has shown that swarms prefer in a nesting cavity.
 - No time to read? Local beekeepers report success with the following set up:
 1. Deep hive box.
 2. A couple of frames with empty built out combs (if you have them) in the center surrounded by empty frames with starter strips (or just empty space – but you'll need to add frames soon after they move in or else they will start building from the top of the box).
 3. Entrance reducer set to medium
 4. Box above the ground 2-3' (higher if you are able).
 5. Optional: Spray lemon grass tea (boil lemon grass until you make a dark tea) or other substances mimicking queen pheromones on the top of the frames and entrance of the hive.
 6. Wait to observe scouts!
 - Have a bait hive tip? Post it to the Buzz!