

THE MARIN BEEK NEWS

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March 2018

What's the Buzz?

Our next meeting will be on Thursday March 1, 2018 at the American Legion Log Cabin, 20 Veterans Place, San Anselmo, CA; starting at 7:30 pm. The meeting will feature Leo Sharashkin, PhD. Dr. Sharashkin is contributor to *American Bee Journal*, *The Beekeepers Quarterly* (UK), and *Acres USA*, and speaks internationally on sustainable beekeeping, organic growing, and Earth-friendly living. He holds a PhD in Forestry from the University of Missouri and a Master's in Natural Resources from Indiana University. He will be discussing concepts for natural beekeeping.

Upcoming Meetings:

April 5, 2018

Samuel Ramsey, Doctoral Student, University of Maryland, "Varroa Research".

May 3, 2018

Elina Nino, Extension Apiculturist, UC Davis, "Effects of Supplemental Forage on Bees".

June 7, 2018

Marin Beekeepers, "Gadgets and Gizmos".

July

No meeting: Marin County Fair, June 30 – July 5.

August

No meeting: Marin Beekeepers Annual Potluck.

What You Missed

Our last meeting featured a talk by Mace Vaughn. Mace Vaughn is the Pollinator Program co-director of the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. He is also the co-author of the Xerces Society Guide, "Attracting Native Pollinators, Protecting North America's Bees and Butterflies"

Mace's talk was titled "Pollinator Conservation Policy: Past Successes and Hopeful Future".

The Xerces Society was established in 1971. It is named after the extinct Xerces blue butterfly and works to protect wildlife through the conservation of invertebrates and their habitat.

We are moving into a period where, hypothetically, in Washington D.C. there is support for environmental protection. Mace is not a federal employee but works in partnership with government employees to incorporate the needs of pollinators and other invertebrates into national conservation programs.

Major Programs

Pollinator conservation and agricultural biodiversity
Conservation planning, restoration, education,
research and advocacy for protection of habitat

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Xerces Pollinator and Agricultural Biodiversity Team - 22 staff in offices across the country

Their focus is on:

- Farming
- Restoration ecology
- Beekeeping
- Conservation education
 - Outreach to 60k farms and agency professionals
- Training events in all 50 states, Europe, Asia, and Latin America.
- Habitat restoration
- Develop materials geared towards different audiences to assist them in doing this work.
- Actionable intelligence

A primary focus of their efforts to influence national conservation programs is through the Federal Farm Bill, which gets updated approximately every five years.

History of pollinator conservation in the Farm Bill:

Pollinators provide food for wildlife through production of seeds and being eaten themselves
35% of crops require insect pollination, which is important for human nutrition.

Honey Bees : Experiencing high annual loss rates

- Pre-Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) 1995 – 2005 average colony losses were 15% to 20 % per year.
- Post-CCD hive losses greater than 25%

Native bees are also in decline with 25% of the species at some risk for extinction.

Monarch butterflies are in decline – They have experienced a 90% population decline in the last two decades. Are the Monarchs an indicator of all butterfly species? Scientists are not sure.

Pollination and Crop Security

Farm Bill – now contains pollinator provisions

- Health/Nutrition
- Research
- Jobs
- Infrastructure
- Conservation
- Innovation
- Safety Net

Pollinator Provisions:

2008 Farm Bill had the first provisions for pollinators. Conservation organizations worked with Senators and Congressmen to develop the Farm Bill with language targeting pollinators. Early effort by Pollinator Partnerships focused on honey bees. Xerces then worked with Senator Barbara Boxer and Congressman Earl Blumenauer to authorize funding for native pollinators as well as honey bees.

A bill was enacted to make other agencies working on land management to consider pollinators and conservation in their practices. The bill encouraged the inclusion of pollinator habitat in all USDA conservation programs.

2014 Farm Bill:

Maintain provisions for pollinators from 2008
Additional provisions on the creation of habitat to support honey bees
Extended crop insurance to beekeepers

Conservation Reserve Program was reduced from 33 million acres to 24 million acres (mostly in Dakotas and Eastern Montana, where many commercial beekeepers over-winter their bees.

The recent Farm Bill Implementation - Just getting started

National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS):

Washington DC

Develop national priorities and targeted efforts

Local Offices

Develop programs based on DC for local environments.

Farm Bill Programs for Pollinators:

- Addresses specific natural resource concerns on agricultural land.
 - 5% to be used for development of pollinator habitat
- Funding for:
 - Hedgerow planting
 - Cover crops
 - Conservation cover – permanent wildflower meadow
 - Integrated Pest Management
- Conservation Reserve Program
 - Administered by USDA
 - Pays rent on property taken out of farm production and put in to conservation practices

- Pays part of the establishment cost
- Requires that the landowner sign a contract to maintain the practice for 10 to 15 yrs.

Get extra money if:

- 10% of enrolled acreage in pollinator friendly shrubs, and legumes
- Must be at least 20 ft. wide.
- Has at least 9 species of flowers.
- At least 3 species flowering per each bloom period.
- Should be primarily native plants.
- No more than 25% grass.

Conservation technical assistance – available to any farmer (USDA field offices). Field offices are where everything really happens

Unfortunately they are challenged by:

- Over committed staff.
- Significant number of vacancies (25% in CA).
- Staff required to be knowledgeable about all national resource concerns.
- Lack of knowledge or confidence regarding pollinator conservation practices.

Part of Mace's job at Xerces is to help the staff pay attention to pollinator habitat

Another way they have gotten projects done is through targeted initiatives:

- California Pollinator project - CA set aside \$300k for pollinator habitat.
- Now looking at monarch butterfly habitat projects.
- Honey bee habitat projects – particularly in the Midwest where many commercial beekeepers rest their bees.

2018 farm bill:

- Pollinator conservation goals may be evolving from specific habitat acre goals.
- Congressionally mandated federal agency coordination.
- Increased financial aid for reduced risk pesticide practices.
- Increase wildlife habitat target to 10% (from 5%).
- Also need to protect wins for pollinator conservation.
- Raise the cap on CRP acres from 24.2 million to 36 million.

Restore and add conservation capacity with USDA's

NRCS.

- Field office vacancies are a major challenge for implementation
- Carrier pollinator conservation lead is needed.
- The unintended consequences of ethanol subsidies:
 - Drove corn prices up facilitating drop in CRP acres.
 - Current demand driving corn-corn-corn rotations.
 - Corn isn't really food for bees.

On the whole, Mace is encouraged by the number of farmers enrolling in the habitat restoration programs.

Hive Tips

By Bonnie Morse, [Bonnie Bee & Company](#)

* Temps have cooled off again in the last couple of weeks, but that doesn't mean our bees aren't still building up. Much of our comb building for the year happens between February – May, so if it's been a few weeks since you last checked your hives, plan to take a peak on the next warm day to be sure they have enough space.

* Given the build-up we've observed in some areas recently (southern Marin, San Rafael, Bolinas, Pt Reyes), it wouldn't be surprising if strong, untended colonies start taking flight in the not distant future. Prevent swarming by planning to check your bees every 2-3 weeks and add space as needed to prevent congestion. Have a backup plan in case you find your bees making preparations to swarm when you go in.

* Got a very small colony? Probably OK to leave them be. Not much you can do at this time of year and it will be very difficult for them to get temperature around brood (which is likely there) back up to 90+ degrees if you open them up. But don't leave them alone too long and plan to check in mid-March.

* Lots of adult drones out there! Keep an eye on the weather. It may be time to start splitting soon.

* Time to get those bait hives out! If you've got bees, you should have at least one bait hive out. Despite our best attempts to minimize swarming (which aren't always popular with the general public in urban areas – particularly if they move into the walls of someone's home), it can happen. Bait hives can provide a home to a nearby swarm, plus are just plain fun to monitor

See Hive Tips on Page 4

Volunteers Needed for Farm Day

Thursday, March 22, 2018
9:00 am to 12 noon
Marin County Fair Exhibit Hall



The annual Marin County Farm Day is approaching!

The 3 hour event is attended by about 1300 school children and 800 teachers and parents, so it is a busy, fun time. The Marin Beekeepers exhibit is always a favorite. It will feature Dave Peterson's observation hive, beekeepers' tools, educational posters, flashcards on honeybee vs. yellow jacket identification and extraction equipment.

It is a great opportunity to connect with kids, their parents and teachers and share some of our knowledge about honey bees. The kids always bring a lot of enthusiasm and questions. Even if you are a new beekeeper, it is a good opportunity to get involved and help out.

Six to eight volunteers are needed. If you are interested, please contact Steve Lamb at stlamb1@gmail.com or [415-412-6125](tel:415-412-6125).

If you are not familiar with Farm Day, it is a free event, open to the public, sponsored by the University of California Ag Extension. It features over 30 exhibitors. It is a little bit like the county fair, but without the traffic and parking congestion.

For more information about Farm Day go to: http://cemarin.ucanr.edu/Program/4-H_Program/Farm_Day_98/

and observe during the season.

Not sure how to do it?

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? We've had success with the following set up:

1. Deep hive box (10 frames is approximate size that Seeley's research indicated bees prefer, though here in Marin 5 frame deep boxes seem rather attractive to them as well)
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. Do NOT include food frames in a bait hive. Food attracts ants and robber bees, and can serve as a deterrent for a swarm looking for a home.
4. Entrance reducer set to medium
5. Box above the ground 2-3' (higher if you are able)
6. 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.
7. Wait to observe scouts! And if you're lucky, get a move in.



Watching a Swarm Moving In

Beekeeping Classes

Upcoming Classes

Intermediate Beekeeping class series (9 hours, \$99)

You've got your colony through winter (or not) – now what? Class sessions will include how to clean up your equipment, expanding hive size for spring, swarm prevention- and if that fails, swarm capture, setting up bait hives for swarms, identification of common pest and diseases and management options for them. Topics will also include dealing with special situations: aggressive hives, queen failures, and laying workers. Field day will include information on how to split a colony, pest and disease ID, and swarm prevention. Classroom sessions: Wednesdays, February 21, 28 & March 7, 6:30pm – 8:30pm, 3 classes, drop in fee = \$30/class

[San Rafael Community Center](#), 618 B St., San Rafael. Registration through the San Rafael Community Center opens November 1. Field Day: Sat., March 17, 1:30pm – 4:30pm, location TBD.

Backyard Beekeeping

Sat., March 31, 9:00am – 12:00pm, \$50. The abridged version of the Beginner Beekeeping class series. Location: The Fairfax Backyard Farmer, 135 Bolinas Rd. Register through [The Fairfax Backyard Farmer](#).

Intermediate Beekeeping

Saturday, March 24, 9:00am – 12:00pm, \$50. The abridged version of the Intermediate Beekeeping class series. Location: The Fairfax Backyard Farmer, 135 Bolinas Rd. Register through [The Fairfax Backyard Farmer](#).

County Fair Time!



With the early expansion of our colonies and a hopeful honey flow, it is time to start thinking about the County Fair. Entry forms and the exhibit guide are not yet out but should be soon. If you entered last year, you should receive an entry package. If not, or if you are entering for the first time, you can view the 10 category descriptions for the Adult Honey Department on the Fair website, under Competitive Exhibits: <https://www.marinafair.org/~media/files/fair/2017/exhibit-pdfs/honey.pdf?la=en> I'll send a notice on the Buzz when the new guide is posted.

Important Dates

Entries received **June 8 and 9 at the Exhibit Hall**
Friday, June 8 – 3 pm to 7 pm
Saturday, June 9 – 10 am to 5 pm
Judging will be the following day on Sunday, June 10.

Actual Fair dates: **Saturday, June 30 to Wednesday, July 4**

Dan Stralka will be posting a fair schedule/sign-up sheet on the Buzz when available. As in the past, we'll need 2 volunteers per time period to educate and answer questions. This is a great opportunity for us to do some PR for bees, for the club to get some exposure with the public and for you to have fun talking about bees. All the exhibits entered will be on display as well as an observation hive for you to practice finding the queen. You'll get a free admission to the fair and can spend the rest of the day enjoying everything else the fair has to offer.

Please note the dates and plan on participating in the fun.