

Local Buzz



August 2007

Fair Booth Cleanup Sunday August 5th

Join us for a fair booth cleanup party on Sunday August 5th at 10:00AM at the Bee Booth in the Nevada County Fairgrounds. Each year we remove the dust, spiders, and pollen that accumulate in the booth over the year and renew the exhibits to make it fresh for our hundreds of visitors. Bring cleaning supplies and a picnic lunch to share for afterwards. It's always fun!

August 6th Program

Our August program, 7 PM at the Grass Valley Veteran's Hall, will be an update on mite control methods, including formic acid pads and thymol by Randy Oliver.

Bee Bits

By Randy Oliver

I will very soon be starting some sugar dusting experiments, and could use volunteers to help. If you're interested, please email me randyoliver@infs.net and let me know days of the week you're free.

I've been writing articles on formic acid and thymol products. Some excerpts:

ApiLife Var®

This product of Italy has been around for over 15 years. It comes in a foil wrapper containing a plastic bag with two soft vermiculite wafers consisting of 74% thymol, 16% eucalyptol, and 3.7% each of menthol and camphor. The eucalyptol makes it eye-watering "aromatic" (gotta be good medicine if it smells strong), but the thymol is apparently the agent responsible for actually killing mites. It is impossible to talk about ApiLife without mentioning that it has a strong smell! In yet another example of silly safety labeling, the label reads: "Applicators...must wear...chemical resistant footwear and socks [and] waterproof gloves." Does this

mean chemical-resistant hosiery? And why waterproof gloves for a product whose active ingredients are nearly insoluble in water? Who writes this stuff anyway? I'd sure wear nitrile gloves! When I handled a wafer barehanded, I soon felt a tingly burning on my skin, like an amped up muscle rub. My eyes watered if I got my smelly fingers anywhere near them. ApiLife will quickly break you of any habit of casually touching any part of your face while you work!

The instructions on the package are in Italian, with a sticker in English. Directions are minimal—here's how to use it. Open the foil and plastic wrappers carefully (the wafers are very fragile), and remove the two wafers (wearing gloves). Then break each wafer into four "equal" pieces (I have no idea why they don't do it for us), and place four pieces in a circle (square?) on the top bars of each hive, under the lid. ApiLife needs to be applied three times at 7-10 day intervals. One package treats two colonies once—you'd need three packages to treat two colonies for the full course of treatment (a little pricey).

ApiLife's website makes a helpful suggestion: "In case of high temperatures, above 30°C [86°F], accustom the bees to the scent of the tablets by placing a small piece of it in the hive the day before." This suggestion may give you a clue to the fact that bees sure don't like the smell! You can hear a colony roaring from several feet away as it attempts to fan out the fumes.

I didn't note any significant brood kill in my limited trials—eggs, larvae, and pupae continued to chug along largely unfazed. Overall, my favorite response to my questions about ApiLife was from a commercial beekeeper whose crews applied thousands of strips a few years ago: "Overall; it kills mitessorta....and it stinks."

Apiguard®

This newer product, manufactured by a British company, consists of 25% thymol dissolved in a cross-linked polyacrylic acid gel. The gel serves two purposes: it regulates the release of the thymol at varying temperatures, and it serves as a carrier that causes the

bees to “track” thymol throughout the hive as they remove it. The product is sold either in either cute little single-use aluminum trays, or as bulk gel in a bucket. The bulk gel needs to be stirred before use, since the components may separate during storage.

A 50g dose of Apiguard contains 12.5g of thymol. The instructions call for it to be placed on a nonabsorbent pad on top of the upper brood frames, with at least 1/4” space above. One of the published trials neglected to allow bees this access space, and no gel was removed by bees. Not surprisingly, mite control suffered.

Apiguard is applied twice; the second dose two weeks after the first. The instructions suggest that “The effect of Apiguard is maximized if the product is used in late summer after the honey harvest (when the amount of brood is diminishing).” However, their website states: “Apiguard can be used in springtime, if necessary, provided the daily temperature is high enough. However, it is not the best time to apply the product. Thymol, which is the active ingredient in Apiguard, can sometimes make the queen stop egg laying for a short period and that is not what is needed in early spring - the colony needs to be growing. If the mite infestation is high in spring then it is safer to use Apiguard rather than let the mites reproduce further but treatment is otherwise best left until the summer.” Their website also states that: “Apiguard® has no harmful effect on the honeybee colony, neither on brood nor on adults.” The caveats are that weak colonies should be combined before treatment, and that the product not be used when maximum daily temperature is above 105°F.

OK, I’ve told you what the manufacturer claims. Now, what is the field experience of beekeepers who have used it? At first, the adult bees are somewhat repelled by the smell, and keep their distance from the gel. The colony may fan loudly and beard up in front during application on warm days. After Apiguard has outgassed some, the bees then gnaw away at it and remove it. By the second dose, the bees are somewhat accustomed to the odor, and may not remove the gel as quickly. After the gel is gone, the bees may either propolize the cardboard pad, or chew it up and remove it completely.

The manufacturer claims that Apiguard is safe for the brood. However, in my limited trials, the brood initially gets hit hard. My article has two photos showing the type of brood damage that occurs in short order. These colonies were treated in the late afternoon with 25g (a half dose) of Apiguard on the top bars of strong double deeps. I used a 1-1/2” spacer rim to allow ventilation space below the hive cover. I took the photos the next day at noon, when the temperature had reached 76°F. The photo shows a typical brood frame, pulled from the

center of the upper brood chamber, below the Apiguard gel. The bees had removed most of the larvae, and in were in the process of removing pupae. The other photo is of a stickyboard placed below a screened bottom. The pile of debris is typical—consisting largely of pupal legs that appear to have been sucked dry. Note the large number of pupae initially killed relative to the number of dead mites!

I’ve spoken with other beekeepers, and they hadn’t noted the extensive brood kill that I have. However, comments included treatment causing supersedure or loss of older queens, and in fall, of older bees. Some Northern California beekeepers were not happy with treatment during our very hot fall weather last year. The queens stopped laying during treatment, resulting in fewer young bees going into the winter cluster. One commercial beekeeper felt that Apiguard worked better when applied in the space between the brood chambers. He also felt that a springtime treatment in the almonds worked well. Some report good results when applied at 7-day intervals. Another suggestion was to make sure that you use a nonabsorbent pad--sometimes the gel dries too quickly in hot, dry weather. Dr. Frank Eischen, of USDA ARS, recommends using only “25g of Apiguard 3x at about weekly intervals anytime the mid-day temperatures reach the low to mid 80s. If 50g are used, the beekeeper will likely see pulled brood.”

Please read the articles in full in ABJ or on my website. The photos are impressive! I’ve also got three articles on feeding bees being published--I’ll talk about it at the meeting.

Nevada County Fair

Help!!! We still have several slots open for working the bee booth for the Nevada County Fair August 8th thru the 12th. Wednesday, we need one person for the 2-6 shift, Friday we need one person for the 2-6 shift, Saturday we need one person for the 2-6PM shift and Sunday we need one person for the 2-6PM shift and **WE DON'T HAVE ANYONE FOR THE 6-10 PM SHIFT.** We will need three people for that shift. If you can work any of those days PLEASE give Karla a call at 265-3756 or e-mail her at karlahanson@saber.net. Volunteers will receive a free entry ticket (altho they must pay for their own parking) Tickets will be distributed at the August 6th meeting, so if you won’t be there, please contact Karla to make other arrangements.

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The Women Beekeepers of Canada

By Pam and Dan Hart

Recently we traveled to Alberta, Canada to visit friends. One of our goals was to also visit beekeepers in the area. We can honestly say that beekeepers are the friendliest folks and are willing to share knowledge and woes. We were invited into the homes and fields of these beekeepers without more than a day's notice and a random phone call.

The area north of Edmonton, Alberta is a province of vast fields – mainly alfalfa, potatoes, canola and clover. The bees love it here. They routinely put on 150 to 300 lbs of honey per hive during the summer months. We finally figured out how this was possible – the days are longer – light till about 11 pm and again by 4 AM, herefore the bees have a lot longer productive period. We met with “Lola Canola” – a beekeeper with 50 hives from Bon Accord. Her real name is Patty Milligan and she has been beekeeping for 8 years since working for a large commercial operation as a summer job for college. She led us to her recent splits. We observed the queens (from Hawaii) that had just been introduced. We did not come prepared with veils, but these bees were so calm we had no problem handling them. We asked ‘Lola’ what she did for mite control and she indicated that she did very little. Her honey co-op regularly suggests treatments and so she sticks with that advice. She has tried oxalic acid, but does not know a good application method and is still experimenting. The main treatments

are formic acid (at 6 week intervals) and menthol. She was very interested in the powdered sugar method. ‘Lola’ gave us some of her alfalfa honey that we will bring to the fair for tasting.

The beekeepers of Canada are still getting used to over-wintering their bees. Previous to varroa they gassed their bees in the fall and started afresh in the spring with packages from the U.S. Now they are experimenting with bringing the bees inside during the long, freezing winter. ‘Lola’ used black plastic “pillows” filled with quilting batting on top of the frames. This seems to be good insulation and the propolis does not stick to the black plastic as it does the wood of the telescoping lids. She still experiences a 15-20% loss over the winter. The next beekeeper we visited was Pat Flinn. She has been keeping bees for 33 years and has about 200 hives. She also has a day job! Pat also expects to get over 300 lbs of honey per hive. She treats varroa with a mineral oil/thymol fog applied via a propane insect fogger (“Burgess Bug Killer”). She uses food grade mineral oil and thymol that she gets from Bee Source. It seems to be working pretty well. She, too, was interested in the powdered sugar approach. We also visited her honey extracting operation and were rewarded with some of her honey. Pat feeds her bees Bee Pro pollen patties using the “free feeding” approach. She uses wooden top feeders for sugar water. Her over-wintering method is to wrap hives with black plastic and insulation.

We had a great trip and look forward to visiting more ‘beekeeping friends’ wherever we go.

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RECEIVE QUICK SERVICE

The Nevada County Beekeepers Association is dedicated to apiculture education and promotion of the art and science of beekeeping among beekeepers, agriculturists, and the general public. This is a "not for profit" organization.

Meetings are held the first Monday of each month at 7 PM at the Grass Valley Veteran's Memorial Building at 255 South Auburn Street in Grass Valley. All visitors are welcome. The newsletter is published monthly as a service to the membership. Articles, recipes, commentary, and news items are welcomed and encouraged. Submission by email is encouraged. Please submit to Leslie Gault at lesliegault@yahoo.com. The deadline for the September 2007 edition is August 24th. A limited amount of advertising space (business card size 3" by 2") is accepted and need not be bee-related. Rates are \$1 per issue or \$7 per year for NCBA members and \$16 per year for non-members. All revenue from advertising goes to the Association treasury and helps offset the cost of producing and distributing this newsletter. To receive the *Local Buzz* via email: please email your request to lesliegault@yahoo.com

Nevada County Beekeepers Association

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lawdawg911@earthlink.net
Vice President: Rob Slay 268-8656
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Newsletter Mailing: Gary Wood..... 477-9202
Newsletter: Leslie Gault..... 346-7092
lesliegault@yahoo.com
Honey Extractors: Karla Hanson.... 265-3756

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c/o Gary Wood
10396 Mountain Lion Lane
Grass Valley, CA 95949
First Class Mail
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