

# Local Buzz



February 2009

(about a month early).

## President's Message

Here we are almost in February—now is the time to tell your president if you know anyone with approx. 20 acres of almonds that need bees, I'm looking for a pollination contract. Please check your colonies for food, both pollen and honey, as they should be starting egg laying, gearing up for 2009. Most of my colonies which were packages last spring look great. I have put on pollen substitute and light sugar syrup to give them a head start. It's been nice watching the bees fly in this patch of good weather. I hope your bees look good also.

Your President, Rob Slay

## February Program

Dr. Eric Mussen, State Extension Apiculturist, will be our speaker for February 2<sup>nd</sup>, giving his annual 'State of the Hive' address. Please join the NCBA Board in a no-host dinner at the Lin Q Buffet, in the JC Penney's/Raley's Mall in Grass Valley, Monday night Feb. 2 (groundhog day!) 5:30 PM sharp or earlier. Some people will be there a little earlier, around 5 PM to socialize. Please join us; it will be a great social time before our meeting.

## Goodie Sign Up

Let's all thank Ann Hiner and Carol Winter for offering to bring goodies to the February meeting.

## Bee Bits

### By Randy Oliver

It looks like we're in for a weather ride that is very different from last year. Instead of everything blooming late, this year it appears to be going early, due to the record-breaking warmth. Indeed, I saw an almond branch in bloom in the valley on January 21--more than three weeks early. Stephanie tells me that Manzanita is already in bloom in Alta Sierra

Lucky for our bees, there have been strong alder pollen flows already (and have you looked at the buds on the cedar trees?). Colonies are brooding up and looking good. Be aware that if we get a stretch of rain or cold, that strong colonies full of brood can blow through their pollen and nectar stores quickly.

I'm pretty burned out from the Bee Convention circuit, and just back from back to back national meetings. Following are excerpts from some of my observations:

### Almond Pollination

I've previously written that there were three big factors that could affect this year's almond pollination prices—water supplies in California, the strength of the dollar vs. the Euro, and whether CCD would take a bite out of the supply of strong colonies again.

Well, it's three strikes against the beekeepers. Growers are canceling contracts due to the price (or unavailability) of water, nutmeat prices are down due to the strong dollar, and beekeepers have either figured out how to keep their colonies alive with better management *or* CCD has (apparently at this writing in late January) gone away.

The end result is that California appears to be in danger of sinking into the Pacific under the weight of beehives. Lots of beekeepers successfully made increase, and have plenty of good-looking colonies. What occurs now is that when a grower cancels a contract, there are suddenly hives looking for a new "home." If they are out of state bees, the beekeeper is desperate to rent them for any amount in order to recoup the cost of hauling them out here. "Desperate" is a dangerous situation. As soon as the first beekeeper puts an ad in the paper that he has bees (never mind their condition nor how many hives are actually available at that price) that he will place at \$100, every almond grower in the state is

immediately aware of that low price, and want to use it as the new benchmark.

By the time you read this, the dust will have settled, but for now it's too early to tell how the game will play out in next three weeks. My guess is that market forces followed the laws of supply and demand, and the lure of \$170 demand gave beekeepers enough motivation to bring up the supply. The elusive \$200 colony may have been the high point before the almond pollination bubble popped, just as the California real estate bubble popped. This may bode for a shift in the bee industry back to honey production, and away from the frantic quest to try to nurse every single colony into almonds.

Another result of the coincidence of these economic factors will be their effect upon the acreage referred to as "pull" orchards. These are older "over the hill" orchards past their peak of production. As long as they were profitable, growers may keep them in production, since they don't want to replant, and miss two years' worth of crop, when the economics are good. Right now, the economics are not good, but will likely be better two years from now, if the world economy recovers a bit. So we may see a number of orchards pulled and replanted this year.

### ***Nosema ceranae***

Researchers from across the nation, and around the world, are generally not finding the "new" nosema to be that big a problem. Many beekeepers are wondering if they over reacted by blowing the budget on fumagillin. It is not yet clear why *N. ceranae* may be so devastating in some areas, but nutrition (see below) certainly appears to be a factor.

Perhaps the most trenchant announcement was by Dave Hackenberg that his bees have had *Nosema ceranae* since at least 1985. I spoke again with Dave this morning for details—he's been using fumagillin in the fall to some extent since then, but never noticed nosema (ostensibly *N. ceranae*) to be a problem.

On the other hand, I got a call later in the day from a Texas beekeeper whose bees returned from Colorado loaded to the gills with spores and struggling to stay alive. This

is still the number one *N. ceranae* question to me: Why does it cause problems in some yards and operations, but not in others?

At the California Bee Breeders meeting yesterday, Dr. Marla Spivak voiced a question that was also on my mind—perhaps our bees are already somewhere in the process of readjusting their immune system to deal with what appears to be a mostly a summertime parasite, that may quietly fade into the background, as tracheal mite has done in many areas.

Meanwhile, the race is on for manufacturers to bring new anti nosema treatments to market. HoneyBHealthy appears to have some limited effect, and some European botanical products show promise: Apiherb®, Vitafeed Gold®, and Nozevit®.

### **Bee Nutrition**

At the California state convention, a panel of successful beekeepers detailed to us how they managed their bees (that is to the extent that they really wanted to share their hard-earned trade secrets, plus factoring in that one is a queen producer and another sells pollen patties, and accounting for the "This is what I would have done if I had really gotten around to it" factor). The short version is that if these guys can't move their bees to good forage, then they really put the pollen supplement to them. Perhaps 15-20 lbs per colony per season (I personally know that feeding that amount is possible, and that it indeed creates monster colonies, but have a hard time imagining where large commercial operations find the labor to open the boxes that many times).

Presentations by Dr. Frank Eischen, and by Dr. Gloria DeGrandi-Hoffman clearly demonstrate the value of feeding protein to colonies in times of dearth. Frank's numbers are amazing when he shows the relationship between protein feeding to the percentage of colonies that finally grade out in almonds.

**Bottom line, start feeding early (August or September), about a pound a week, and continue until bloom. Not only that, but he demonstrated how protein feeding makes bees more resistant to parasites such as varroa and *Nosema ceranae*.**

Dr Diana Sammataro and Milagra Weiss have

been looking into high fructose corn syrup as bee feed. This turned out to be more difficult research than expected, and not all HFCS's act the same. In general, though, sucrose gets the thumb up.

### **Pesticides**

A current hot button topic is whether the neonicotinoid insecticides (notably imidacloprid and clothianidin) are causing sublethal yet deleterious effects in bees, and whether they are related to CCD. This connection is being hotly debated worldwide, and many have taken sides. Into this polarized environment, Drs Jerry Bromenshenk and David Fisher (Chief Ecotoxicologist, BayerCropscience) stepped up to the plate to see if a mutually beneficial dialog could be opened between the beekeeping organizations, and the major pesticide manufacturers. So far, we've had two long and productive meetings, and the ABF and AHPA are currently seating members to a Beekeeper Advisory Board to the pesticide industry.

I've had the pleasurable surprise to find how open and receptive the Bayer scientists are. This gives me great optimism for the process, if we beekeepers hold up our end of the deal. One obstacle is the visceral distrust that some have of multinational chemical companies. However, beekeeper/supplier Lloyd Spear explains the reality well (by permission): "Here on the East Coast we have more than our share of respected, large beekeepers putting all the blame on neonics, but the researchers are not, and I think they deserve more support.

"I spent the better part of my adult life working in the corporate environment, including development of major crop pest controls, and it is beyond my comprehension that a group of individuals working for a large chemical company would conspire to (1) design studies that would deliberately hide adverse effects on beneficial insects (2) not publish adverse data (3) not listen to constructive commentary and questions from concerned parties. Sometimes people forget that the 'corporate environment' consists of people just like you and me, who are concerned about the environment, what they eat and drink, where

their kids play, etc. Even if there were some grand "whose" that wanted to keep matters secret, he or she would be incapable of doing so as the hundreds of staff that contribute to a major product (such as the neonics) just will not let themselves be so manipulated.

"... I wish we would all give greater support to those who are dedicating a good part of their careers to solving the problem and stop condemning those who do not wholly agree with certain ignorant premises."

Well spoken, Lloyd!

Dr. Maryann Frazier noted that in her testing program, the average bee sample tested positive for six pesticides (which, according to Dr Bromenshenk is not a historically unusual figure). Unfortunately, the two most common are the beekeeper-applied miticides coumaphos and fluvalinate. Graduate student Judy Wu documented the deleterious effect of coumaphos upon bee brood, and another researcher mentioned that one of the breakdown products of amitraz is also harmful. The bottom line is that the data that I've seen to date suggest that the effects of miticides outweigh those of the neonicotinoids!

However, this is not a clean bill of health for the widely used neonics. As Dr Fischer explains, in the matter of any poison, toxicity is a function of dose. Bayer's responsibility is to label their products such that **when properly applied**, the inadvertent dose to bees will cause no harm. With beekeeper input, we hope to have further studies designed that truly answer questions as to the real world effects of the neonics, especially when combined with synergistic other chemicals such as in tank mixes.

The Bayer meetings brought two potential sources of high exposure to light: when neonics are applied by "chemigation" and bees drink the water, or when maple trees in the Northeast are injected with large doses of imidacloprid to control the Asian Longhorn Beetle. Problems of proper application fall under the purview of the EPA and state or county agencies.

The Bayer dialog, coupled with the meetings with the EPA in Washington, are groundbreaking events that herald a new

model of cooperation between the manufacturers, the regulators, and beekeepers. We should all be appreciative of the great amount of time and effort those involved are putting into this cause.

**January Minutes**

Pres. Rob Slay opened with Q & A  
 Eric Mussen will be our February guest  
 Bayer insecticides which are mimics of nicotine are suspected bee destroyers, and under scrutiny in Europe.  
 Randy Oliver presented a program on bee breeding and genetics. Evolution of mites is ahead of evolution of bees. Queen quality can be estimated by noting whether the empty Q cell still has a little royal jelly left after the five day sealed period, indicating a strong queen. The more drones in the area, the more diversity of pheromones available.  
 Deformed Wing Virus produces supersedure. Feral colonies are adapting to local conditions.  
 Jack Meeks, sec

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 NCBA c/o Janet Brisson  
 20693 Dog Bar Road, GV 95949

**Beekeeping Class Schedule**

The Sacramento Area Beekeepers Association (SABA) is presenting a series of classes. More information is available on the SABA website, [www.sacbeekeepers.org](http://www.sacbeekeepers.org) or by contacting one of the course coordinators: Ernie Buda at [2211budae@att.net](mailto:2211budae@att.net) 916-761-3802 or Bruce Waln at [bruce\\_waln@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bruce_waln@sbcglobal.net)

Beginning Natural Beekeeping 7, 2009	Serge Labesque	Sat. Feb.
Beginning Beekeeping 7, 2009	Randy Oliver	Sat March
Beginning Natural Beekeeping 11, 2009	Serge Labesque	Sat April
Beginning Beekeeping 23, 2009	Randy Oliver	Sat May
Intermediate Beekeeping 20, 2009	Dr. Eric Mussen	Sat June
Intermediate Natural Beekeeping 18, 2009	Serge Labesque	Sat July

All of the classes will be held at the Sacramento County Department of Agriculture building at 4137 Branch Center Road, Sacramento, CA from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. The instruction will start promptly at 8:30; registration starts at 7:30 am. Each course fee is \$35.00. Registration is required by the Monday before the course date, late registration will require specific approval of a course coordinator.

### **Article ‘Honey Laundering’**

John R. Miller recommended a series of 6 articles published last month in the Seattle Intelligencer, Washington’s oldest daily newspaper. The ‘Honey Laundering’ articles deliver a serious indictment of the state of the honey industry—exposing a number of unscrupulous activities, and confirming that mislabeling and ‘transshipping’ from undisclosed countries of origin is common. The articles, available at <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/specials/honey/> cover the topics:

‘country of origin no guarantee on cheap imports’

‘antibiotic use could taint honey’s reputation as a miracle drug’

‘don’t let claims on honey labels dupe you’

‘US honey producers don’t have it easy’

‘honey isn’t all sweetness’

‘importers accused of evading fees’

### **Cottage Cosmetics**

A how-to guide for making fine olive oil soap and all natural personal care products using beeswax is available from local author and herbalist, Linnie McNaughton. The guide includes detailed instructions. To order send a check for \$15 to:

Green Blessings  
21055 Dog Bar Road  
Grass Valley 95949  
Call (530) 906-0831

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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](mailto:lesliegault@yahoo.com). The deadline for the January 2009 edition is Dec 23<sup>rd</sup>. 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](mailto:lesliegault@yahoo.com)

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Nevada County Beekeepers Association



c/o Steve Reynolds  
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 February 2009

February 2<sup>nd</sup> Program  
 Dr. Eric Mussen, State Extension Apiculturist, giving his annual 'State of the Hive' address. Join the NCBA Board in a no-host dinner at the Lin Q Buffet, in the JC Penney's/Raley's Mall in Grass Valley, Monday night Feb. 2, 5:30 PM . Meeting @ 7pm at the VA on So. Auburn Street.