

The Nevada County Beekeepers Association

Local Buzz



December 2009

President's Message

I want to thank everyone for allowing me to serve as your president for the last two years. I hope we all have a great bee year in 2010. Anyone who knows an almond grower should call me @ 530-263-5618, thank you!

Your President, Rob Slay

December 7th Meeting

Our next meeting will be a potluck and pirate gift exchange, Monday December 7th starting at 6 PM at the Grass Valley Veteran's Hall. Main course items have been arranged - turkey by Debbie Cavallaro and ham by Karla Hanson. Last names beginning with A-M bring a side dish to share; N-Z please bring a dessert. Bring your own place settings and drinks. A prize will be awarded for the best place setting, so bring your fancy settings!

After dinner we will have a pirate gift exchange. Please keep the gift value \$15.00 or less. Once again, Deborah Morawski will be overseeing the gift exchange and have numbers ready for people to pick.

Thank you Debbie, Karla, and Deborah! Also, please note the earlier than usual starting time, potluck at 6 PM!

Bee Bits

By Randy Oliver

I'm writing these notes on Thanksgiving morning. As a beekeeper, I feel that Mother Nature has given me much to be thankful for! Following two years of drought, this has been a great year for beekeeping in the Sierra foothills. We enjoyed the most beautiful, long spring in a long time, and are now blessed with

enough fall rain to bring the flora into bloom, yet with warm, sunny days during which can enjoy a delightful Indian summer.

I live at 2900 feet elevation, yet I can still pick tomatoes and peppers today in my garden! The bees are responding to the serendipitous weather. The colonies in my test yard of Russian bees on Cement Hill had shut down broodrearing during September, discarded much of their field forces, and hunkered down for the winter ahead.

This surprised me, since I was still feeding them syrup and pollen supp, which had up 'til that point appeared to be supporting steady population build up. I corresponded with some members of the Russian Bee Breeders Association, and found that Russians don't respond to pollen supp the same that Italians do--they really want natural pollen. Anyway, I was surprised by how quickly the clusters went from well over 10 frames to about 4-5 frames.

When I checked back on the same yard a couple of weeks ago, I immediately saw that the foragers were bringing in loads of orange pollen. I opened up several hives, and the danged bees had started broodrearing back up in response to natural pollen, and had lovely "wet" brood. So even as the days were getting shorter, and the nights colder, the Russians reversed their course, and took advantage of a pollen flow to rear more fresh bees.

In the same yard I had five test colonies headed by queens from Zia Queens--Mike and Melanie from New Mexico. M&M (as they call themselves) breed from survivor stocks. Four of the five Zia colonies had large clusters, and had put on good weight. They had done very well all summer.

I'm running the Cement Hill yard as a survival yard--I haven't given the hives any treatments for mites, nosema, or anything else. A few of the Russian colonies have died, with signs of mites on the combs. So far, I haven't monitored mite levels, and am just putting them to the test.

I did the same with two other breeder queens in my home yard, which were also purported to be mite

resistant. Both of their colonies didn't even make it from spring until fall! Ditto with some test queens sent to me from a Hawaiian breeder who had brought in mite resistant stock. And I wasn't surprised when mites ramped up in yet another test yard of 20 Aussie colonies. The Aussie bees made a ton of honey (they started completely clean of mites), but picked up mites despite their isolation, and needed treatment in late summer.

I'm heartened by the greater degree of mite resistance that I see in colonies these days, yet it is still frustratingly difficult to find stock that can survive without any treatments in apiaries of more than a few hives.

Meanwhile, small-scale beekeepers are often having good luck with minimal treatments. Sugar dusting, drone removal, and oxalic dribble are all effective. Check my website for updates on all these methods--I add them to the ends of the articles.

It is interesting for me to take an objective, and data-driven look at sugar dusting. We all know that our Janet is a proselytizer for sugar dusting. A study earlier this year concluded that dusting didn't make a "significant" difference in mite levels. This is a pet peeve of mine--that obtaining statistical significance in a trial is very different from having a substantial effect. I've had the chance to discuss the conclusions of the paper with a few other researchers, who, along with me, interpreted the data a bit differently.

It appears to me that sugar dusting can have a substantial effect on mite levels. Check the end of "Does Dusting Work, part 3."

Jeanne Hansen had good success with dusting a fall broodless colony with sugar five days in a row--knocked the mites down to near nothing.

Her meticulous data were very valuable. If more beekeepers would keep and share such data, we could make great progress in our knowledge!

Let me change the subject to that of feeding bees. I had a yard on Dog Bar road that for some reason didn't make honey (they were late splits, but normally get a good late flow there). When I checked them in late summer, they were mostly on the verge of starvation (you will nearly always find a few that put on honey, even when the rest don't, and that was indeed the case there). We hit 'em with two rounds of pollen supp, and a few jars of syrup, and they quickly recovered. After adding a few combs of Nevada honey to the light ones, they now seem ready for winter.

It is simply amazing to me to see how good husbandry, and the addition of protein when little is available naturally, can put colonies back into good health. As I travel, I find that successful commercial beekeepers throughout the country are learning the same thing.

Surprise, surprise--bees are just like any other livestock, and benefit from a bit of TLC during our long, dry summers.

Happy holidays to all!

Randy Oliver

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November Minutes

Jack writes: "Sorry--no minutes this month--my Taurus broke down en route and I had to be towed home."

Let's all thank Jack for his many years of taking minutes for us, and give him our sympathy about the car next time we see him!

Heifer International—Donate Bees

Need a unique Christmas gift for someone? Here is a story submitted by Pam and Dan Hart about a program

in which we can donate money for bee hives in different countries:

The Buzz About Bees

From Uganda to El Salvador, bees from Heifer International help struggling families earn income through the sale of honey, beeswax and pollen. Beehives require almost no space and, once established, are inexpensive to maintain. As bees search for nectar, they pollinate plants. Placed strategically, beehives can as much as double some fruit and vegetable yields. In this way, a beehive can be a boost to a whole village. Although most Heifer partners keep bees as a supplement to family income, beekeeping can be a family's livelihood. Your gift can help Heifer provide a family with a package of bees, the box and hive, plus training in beekeeping - and this unique gift will be passed on to another family in need.

<http://www.heifer.org/site/c.edJRKQNiFiG/b.2668675/>

Janet's Sugar Syrup Fiasco

By Janet Brisson

What makes a fiasco? Well, it's when everything goes wrong, terribly wrong. I was making heavy syrup, 2 parts sugar, 1 part water. I've done this many times, put everything in a big pot, 2 gallons of water and 128 cups of sugar for 7 hives and heat until dissolve. But on this day, I was trying to multitask. I washed dishes. The next time I glanced at the stove, the syrup was boiling. Now, when you tell this story to any experienced beekeeper, like Randy, they laugh before you finish. They know what's going to happen next. Unfortunately, I didn't.

I had enough syrup to fill 8 half-gallon canning jars and we have 7 hives. I put the filled jars on our hives and left the 8th on our kitchen counter intending to save it for that big booming hive that has been draining syrup faster than the others. By the time I came back into the house, I noticed the jar on the counter turning cloudy. That's unusual. As the day went on, a big lump of sugar seemed to be forming in the middle of the sugar. By the next day, I had a solid lump of sugar in the jar. A quick call to Randy confirmed my suspicions; I was on my way to making sugar candy for the bees. Tip #1 - boil the water first, then add your sugar and never let the solution boil.

Mike quickly made me 7 trays. He painted them with varnish, but probably should have used fiberglass and resin. I dug the sugar out of the glass jars and reheated it. I probably should have added something else at this point, I could have added corn syrup or powdered sugar, but I didn't. I tried to boil it to the soft candy stage, but it just wouldn't get that hot. I figured since the sugar had hardened so fast in the glass, I had the formula right. Tip #2 - find directions and follow them, stop trying to reinvent the wheel.

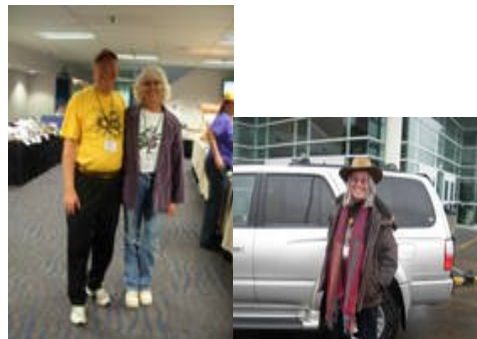
I poured it into the seven trays and immediately 4 of them started to leak. I grabbed wax paper and stuffed them into the cracks. The leaks slowed down and stopped. Tip #3 - if you are making something that is supposed to hold liquid, test it with water first.

Since the trays were not filled to the top, I made another batch of boiling sugar syrup, again, I couldn't get it hot enough, but felt I had boiled it long enough. I poured it into the trays and trays started to leak again. What a mess. Tip #4 - Don't do this in your kitchen - Where every the syrup spilled, it harden and was horrible to clean. You have to chip it apart first and melt what is ever left with hot water.

And the story goes on; we left the trays in the kitchen to harden and went off to Oregon. 6 days later, it still have not completely hardened like a candy board, there are trails of harden syrup on our tiled floor and I'm not quite sure what to do next. I was planning to use them over our holiday trip, and hopefully they will harden up by then. If not, then the fiasco will continue. I'll let you know next January.

Janet

Janet also wrote: Hey, I saw Toni Goldenberg up in Seaside at the NW Corner Conference. She looks great. I attached a picture and there's one of Dr. Dewey Carron and me. I really don't have anything to report on the conference, I was so busy talking, almost non-stop. I was at my booth almost the whole time.



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 January 2010 edition is December 21st. 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

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Nevada County Beekeepers Association



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 December 2009

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