

Local Buzz



June 2009

President's Message

As I'm writing this it's May 20 and the blackberry flow has started in the Lake of the Pines area just a few days ago. Time to install your honey supers if you have not already. See you at next meeting, please don't forget about the raffle, we always need donations!

Your President, Rob Slay

June 1st Program

The June meeting will be a presentation by Christy Tveit on 'landscaping for bees'. Christy will present a program about landscaping to encourage honeybees she recently entered into a Haagen Dazs competition.

Bee Bits

By Randy Oliver

This is the best bee year that we've had in memory! If you kept your colonies from swarming, every colony should have already put on at least 50 lbs of honey, and the blackberry is just beginning to bloom at this writing!

If you haven't been keeping bees for many years, don't get caught by surprise by a large honeyflow. Get those supers on!

Sorry, I will not be at the next meeting--got an invitation to speak in Hawaii. If you want to shadow, buy equipment, or ask questions, do so soon, as I will be out of town quite a bit from late May through early July.

(Ed: Following are some excerpts from Randy's upcoming article for the American Bee Journal 'The Learning Curve, Part II, Killing Mites without Killing Your Bees')

Those of us who remember the arrival of varroa can easily understand why beekeepers (generally reluctantly) were forced into becoming pesticide applicators. The



NCBA Vice President Karla Hanson and member Stephanie Hughes retrieving a swarm in Yuba City last month.

introduction of the miticide fluvalinate, in the forms of Mavrik® and Apistan®, was arguably the best, and simultaneously the worst, thing that could have happened at that time. It was the best since it was an incredibly effective miticide, which appeared to be a virtually nontoxic to bees and humans. One shot a year with the “Silver Bullet” was all that was needed to keep varroa in check.

Forward to today. Hobby and sideline beekeepers everywhere are eschewing synthetic miticides, with some considerable degree of success. Commercial beekeepers are at their wit’s end. They are acutely aware of the fact that the dumping of miticides into their hives is tough on the bees, and that the problem is getting worse each year.

Luckily, there are recent products on the market, some of which are quite effective. However, let me make one point clear—*I have yet to see any miticide, synthetic or “natural,” that does not have some degree of negative effect upon the colony.* The issue then is whether the benefit outweighs the cost, and whether there are insidious cumulative sublethal effects within the hive, perhaps in synergy with other miticides, agricultural chemicals, or certain parasites.

The Elephant in the Living Room

The plain truth is that a colony of bees does not differentiate between agricultural pesticides, and beekeeper-applied miticides. *What actually affects the colony is the cumulative load of all toxins that the colony is exposed to*, whether from smokestack pollution, dust drifted over from China, pesticides sprayed by farmers, or miticides applied by beekeepers with the best intentions. Honey bees are essentially “flying dust mops” whose bodies pick up the dust of any toxin in the environment.

We now know which pesticides are present in sick colonies, as well as in those that are apparently healthy—notably the miticides fluvalinate and coumaphos. Of secondary concern are paradichlorobenzene (commonly used to fumigate combs to control wax moth), the wood preservative copper naphthenate, and various chemicals used to control small hive beetle, ants, and other hive pests. The elephant that we have been ignoring is the beekeeper contribution to the cumulative effect of all the toxins in our hives.

None of the beekeeper-applied chemicals generally cause frank toxicity problems *on their own right*. Nor may properly-applied agricultural pesticides and fungicides. What happens is that the Law of Unintended Consequences kicks in: two or more chemicals may exhibit synergistic effects. This implies that single-

chemical assessments will systematically underestimate actual risks....” It is likely that coumaphos will also be found to synergize with carbamate pesticides (such as Sevin®), since they both have a similar mode of action. Since commercial bee combs typically test positive for coumaphos, this may well make the bees in such colonies more susceptible to harm from this common ag chemical. Another red flag for me are the reports of high fungicide levels found in bee-collected pollen.



We caught this prune grower making a halfhearted attempt to wait until dusk to spray a fungicide. Fungicides sprayed directly onto the blossoms to straight into the hive when the bees collect pollen. Marysville, CA photo by Larry Merrit.

So what happens when you mix a brew of chemical toxins within a bee hive? Research by Maryann Frazier found that East Coast bees in commercial operations test positive for six pesticides on average.

For commercial beekeepers who make their living by providing pollination services to the agricultural sector, exposure to pesticides can be a major and recurring problem.

Overt pesticide kills are fairly easy to spot—there are piles of dying bees with their tongues sticking out twitching in front of your hives. Unfortunately, *sublethal* pesticide toxicity is another matter, especially when more than one pesticide is involved. To further complicate matters, there are also often “compounding risk factors”. These include the quality of nutrition available to the bees, the age of individual bees, temperature, genetics (some stocks are more pesticide resistant), and parasites (including mites, nosema, bacteria, and viruses). Indeed, it is virtually impossible to make any concrete statement about the toxicity of any particular pesticide to bees for all circumstances!

Looking Ahead

There isn’t a beekeeper I’ve met who isn’t acutely aware of the “too many poisons in the beehive” problem, and

who wouldn't love to go back to chemical-free beekeeping. I'm heartened by the fact that as I listen to beekeepers throughout the country, a number small commercial operators actually have! Or at least gone solely to "natural treatments." These guys, in my opinion, are the leading edge of the future.

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Stings and Anaphylaxis

Most people will have only a localized reaction to a bee sting. In the normal reaction to a bee sting, the skin is reddened and painful. Swelling and/or itching may also occur, but the pain usually disappears over a few hours. In a large local reaction to an insect sting, the swelling, redness, and pain may persist for up to a week.

In anaphylactic reactions, victims experience wheezing, difficulty breathing, and a drop in blood pressure that leads to shock if not treated promptly. Around 50 people are killed each year in the U.S. due to severe anaphylactic reactions to bee stings. These type of reactions usually occur within minutes of the bee sting.

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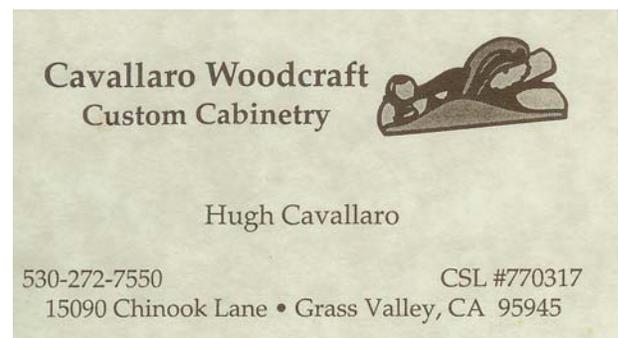
Toronto Hotel Keeps Bees

(By Dierdre Wollard via the internet)



The Fairmont Royal York Hotel in Toronto, Canada has a hidden amenity that I've never heard another luxury hotel claim, its own apiary. The hotel set up three beehives on its roof last summer in partnership with Foodshare's Field to Table Centre and the Toronto Beekeeping Co-operative. The bee colony of over 10,000 bees created close to 300 pounds of honey. This year the hotel added three more hives hoping to increase production. Royal York's chefs use the fresh honey in salad dressings, baked goods and other items. The honey also makes its way into the milk and honey pedicures at the hotel spa.

The hotel already has a rooftop herb garden growing mint and other culinary herbs which contribute to the unique taste of the honey. The hotel's success with the bees has inspired the Fairmont Algonquin in St. Andrews, N. B., and the Fairmont Waterfront in Vancouver to set up their own apiaries. Guests at the Fairmont Royal York can request educational beehive tours over the summer.



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 July 2009 edition is June 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

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Nevada County Beekeepers Association



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June 2009

June 1st Program

The June 1st program will be Christy Tveit
– Bee Landscaping, 7 PM at the Grass
Valley Veteran’s Hall.