

# The Nevada County Beekeepers Association



## President's Message

My note last month was a little out of wack! I said spring was here, then it snowed and rained. We have had rain, snow and sun every few days. I'm sure the bees like it as much as we do.

On April 17 we went to Orland to the second annual Hobbyist Day, hosted by Olivarez Honey Bees. Olivarez sells bees. It was a fun filled day. Our own Randy Oliver and Sue Cobey from UC Davis were the speakers. Mann Lake had a booth to sell their wares. We had a great BBQ lunch, then there were some demos.

Your President, Larry Meritt

## May 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting

Our May 3rd meeting will be a presentation on bee breeding by Randy Oliver. Please join us for a no-host dinner at Tofanelli's, 302 W. Main Street in Grass Valley. I hope to see a good turnout. As always it will be at 5:30 PM. Any questions please drop a line or call me (530) 632-3303

thank you, Jeremiah Farrell, VP

## Raffle

Please remember to bring your unwanted bee equipment or whatever else you have extra at the house for our raffle. Thanks. Karla Hanson, raffle chair, promises that she will remember to buy raffle tickets...

## Bee Bits

By Randy Oliver

We appear to be going for an unbroken record of snow every single week this spring! But luckily we are generally getting a couple of good flight days every week, which the bees are using with gusto. The moisture content of the ground has been filling the bloom of manzanita and fruit trees with nectar, and I've shaken fresh nectar from the combs every sunny day.

Pollen flows have also been excellent, and the bees are in great shape. There is an extremely strong swarm impulse, so don't be surprised if your colonies have already taken flight. Check back for fresh eggs two weeks after the swarm leaves to make sure that the new queen has mated successfully.

Get your honey supers on NOW. This year may be the best honey flow in a while. I'm expecting clover and vetch to produce, and if the weather cooperates, we could have an incredible wildflower/blackberry crop! Update on my Russian survival yard: we split all the surviving Russki colonies, and grafted larvae from the best six. These bees build up fast, *and want to swarm!* I've never seen such swarmy bees. We also notice that they are considerably more defensive than the stocks that I'm used to—we wear veils and often gloves in the yard. Surprising, since I did not notice such defensiveness when I saw them in Georgia. I'll see how the new queens turn out. If you wish to try them, let me know, as I will likely have a few extra Russian nucs. I'm very curious to see how they survive, now that they are in their second year. I'm also testing a group of Zia queens from New Mexico (Mark and Melanie were guests at our last meeting). All queen mothers were from two to four years old (which also means that their colonies survived at least that long without treatments)! Melanie generously fulfilled my request, and grafted from ten different queen mothers.

I just received copies of the new book *Managing Alternative Pollinators*. The book details methods for

propagating bumblebees, mason bees, leafcutter bees, etc. I will be placing a copy into the library.

(Ed Note: Following is an excerpt from one of Randy's upcoming articles discussing the major bee pheromones.)

Ethyl oleate (EO) is produced in the crops of foragers, and inhibits the transition of mid-aged bees into foragers.

The adaptive response of mid-aged bees to EO feedback from foragers is beautiful in its simplicity. It works both ways. Forager behavior is modulated by how eagerly mid-aged bees receive their nectar loads—the quicker the unloading, the more stimulated they are perform waggle dances about the source. Conversely, mid-aged bee graduation into foraging behavior is inhibited by the EO that they receive along with that nectar (remember, foragers produce EO in their crops.) However, when foragers are lost due to the wearing out of their wings or flight muscles, or to the other rigors of foraging, such as drift, risky weather, pesticides, predation, or disease, the EO suppression of forager recruitment from the labor pool is lifted, and more bees can quickly take their places. So how about during a major honey flow? Under that circumstance the colony wants to strike a balance between the proportion of foragers to storage and processing workers. I'm guessing that EO dilution due to the intense nectar flow may help to recruit more foragers.

On the flip side, between blooms (or during rainy weather), when the foragers hang out waiting for scouts to mobilize them, their EO feedback prevents mid-age bees from shifting to forager physiology. As you may remember from my "Old Bees" series, this is important, since bees don't start "aging" until they shift to foraging behavior (this observation is strongly supported by Harris 2010). So by preventing the mid-aged bees from shifting, the colony maintains a ready reserve force of relatively long-lived workers just waiting for something to do.

## Snack Sign-up

Thanks to all these people who have already signed up to bring snacks to our meetings. Please be sure that when preparing (or buying) snacks, there are no partially hydrogenated oils in the cookies or cakes. It would be nice to have at least four people to sign up for snacks per month. If you can help fill in the schedule please email Karla Hanson at [queenbeez@att.net](mailto:queenbeez@att.net).

### May

Mark Kerns  
Valerie Farrell  
Beverly Meritt

### June

Diane Benton  
Jeff Purcell  
Nancy Tavares  
Linda & Steve (last name?)

### July

Dan Wheat  
Boorinakis/ Harper  
Patrick McCauley

### August

Rob Slay  
Myra Traugot

### September

Mari Wolf

### October

Sherry Skolfield  
Charles Whittlesey

### November

Diane Benton

## EGGLAYERS UNION SETS STRIKE VOTE:

### Mandatory Retirement Age at Issue

(Article Courtesy of Eugene Makovec, Newsletter Editor, Missouri State Beekeepers Association)

April 1, 2010  
St. Louis, Missouri

Members of the International Sisterhood of Egglayers, Local 1851, are set to vote this week on a strike action against SweetBee Honey Corporation.

At issue is SweetBee's new mandatory retirement age of two years for queen bees. The policy was announced on March 1, and drew an ominous hum of indignation from egglayers across the company's 1200-hive operation.

"It's completely arbitrary – it's not even a matter of individual ability," buzzed Myrtle, a 26-month-old queen who declined to give her last name. "They just assume we're too old and can no longer do the job."

Myrtle was summarily dismissed as she reached her second anniversary at SweetBee, just weeks after the new policy took effect. She was able to find work in a

nearby observation hive, and while she considers herself lucky, she acknowledges that this is a huge demotion for her. “This used to be where old, worn-out queens went to die,” she mused. “I love my hive-mates and am treated well by my keeper, but it’s not the same as running a full-scale production hive. I need to be challenged.”

“It’s just not fair,” complained Rosie Romano-Ortis-Petrova-Schultz- Bertolli-Bremer-Maggiano-Boehner-Milosevic-Anderssen-Bommarito-Yurovich-Hegel, a 22-month-old single mother of 54,371. “I feel like I’m just coming into prime production age. I’ve got a lot of mouths to feed, and now I have to worry about one day being plucked out of my work station like some yellow jacket, and tossed out into the grass... or worse.”

SweetBee officials declined to comment for the record, citing ongoing negotiations. But one high-level manager, speaking on condition of anonymity, called it “a matter of simple economics...It is true that you can’t put a definitive age on productivity,” he said. “But the simple fact is, once they get beyond that two-year point, it’s really hit-or-miss.” And since the union has consistently resisted the idea of its older members submitting to viability testing, he added, “This was our only option.”

Another company official concurred. “Close to 50 percent of queens experience significant production declines in their third year, and the worst part is, it’s so unpredictable. You have a queen who looks to be doing a great job, and suddenly she starts producing nothing but drones. It’s very difficult, and very expensive, to replace her when that happens in mid-season.”

It is widely acknowledged that queen productivity declines with age, often during the third year and almost always by the fourth. The reasons are complex, but experts agree that the largest issue is a decreasing supply of sperm in the egg-layer’s spermatheca. This organ is supplied on a mating flight within the first two weeks of a queen’s life, and is never replenished. (Sperm is required for fertilization of worker eggs, while unfertilized eggs develop into drones.)

In previous labor negotiations, management has floated the idea of requiring queens to make additional mating flights, possibly annually, in order to circumvent this supply issue. But while drones have generally supported that proposal, the egglayers’ union has been vehemently opposed. Some members object on ethical grounds. “It’s just not natural,” said one queen. “No queen in nature has ever been subjected to this ritual

more than once, and we shouldn’t have to start now.”

Then there is the safety issue. There are occasional reports of virgin queens falling victim to birds or other predators during mating flights. “Foragers deal with this danger as a part of their job,” said Myrtle, “but they’re also more nimble than we are, and have extensive flight training to boot.” After mating, the only time a queen would typically leave the hive is in a swarm, when she’s surrounded by a large contingent of workers.

The last time the apiculture industry saw open labor strife was in 1962, when the International Union of Drones (DUI) declared a general strike, protesting the industry-wide policy of releasing drones in the autumn months in preparation for the winter dearth period. But the ill-fated strike occurred in late September, at a time when apiaries had little to gain from negotiation with the union. The action was settled within days in a humiliating defeat for the union. In an effort to save face, and in exchange for a promise not to strike the following spring when a work stoppage would have had more serious repercussions, DUI leaders asked for and obtained an unrelated concession -- the free-agent status that their membership enjoys to this day. (Some conspiracy theorists maintain that this was the result the union had in mind at the outset, though most experts agree that drones are just not that intelligent.)

Under the free agent policy, drones are allowed to drift from hive to hive as they see fit. It is not uncommon for a drone to leave his home hive in the morning, visit several drone congregation areas during the course of the day and then follow other drones back to a different hive in the evening. In recent years this state of affairs has been blamed in part for the spread of mites and disease conditions between hives, but there has been no serious discussion about amending the policy.

As far as the impending strike vote is concerned, most believe the motion will pass easily. “It’s just too much,” said an executive at another apiary. “SweetBee can’t expect this big a change to go uncontested. But (a strike) won’t last long,” he added. “The company certainly can’t do without the queens’ services this time of year. I’m guessing management will cave quickly – if they let them walk out at all.”

Meanwhile, Romano-Ortis-Petrova-Schultz-Bertolli-Bremer-Maggiano-Boehner-Milosevic-Anderssen-Bommarito-Yurovich-Hegel, the 22-month-old soon-to-be retiree, is busy planning for life after SweetBee.

She's developing a plan for a pheromone-marketing business, and is looking for consulting work.

## Swarm Hotline

If you haven't signed up for the swarm hotline this year you may call Lynn Williams 530-675-2924 to get on the list of people who will pick up swarms. Please state where you will drive to. Marysville/Yuba City area is especially needed since a lot of calls come from here. Co-chair of the swarm committee is Karla Hanson 265-3756.

## For Sale: Country Rubes Combo Screened Bottom Boards

Special NCBA Club Price!  
Call Janet for details. 530-913-2724 or email at [rubes@countryrubes.com](mailto:rubes@countryrubes.com).

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## April Minutes

President Larry Merritt opened Q&A. There is a "short interfering RNA protein" which breaks viruses. 'Honey Laundering' is worldwide, involves transshipping shiploads of adulterated honey to a country which does not reject it, eventually to us.

Guests from New Mexico described rearing queens on a survivorship basis, at 8300ft altitude. Southwest Survivor Bee Project. [www.ziaqueenbees.com](http://www.ziaqueenbees.com)  
Finance Janet Brisson: March Start \$2553.22; Inc \$407; Exp \$141.78; End \$2818.44.  
PROGRAM Randy Oliver showed slides of swarm control.  
Jack Meeks, sec



American Beekeeping  
Federation

## ABF ALERT: USDA EXTENDS SIGN-UP FOR ELAP – NEW DEADLINE MAY 5, 2010

The **USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)** has published a revision to the regulations covering the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP). The revision details how beekeepers who have lost colonies to CCD (Colony Collapse Disorder) or certain natural disasters can receive disaster benefit payments from FSA. More details can be found on the USDA FSA website under news releases. Claims must be filed by that date for losses in 2008 or 2009. Claims for subsequent years should be filed within 30 days of the discovery of the losses. USDA officials said some leeway could be given on the filing deadlines since the program is new. Anyone experiencing problems with the deadlines should insist that the county FSA office accept the application and pass it on to the state and national FSA headquarters. There are provisions in the regulations for leniency on the deadlines and for failure to enroll in the **Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)**.

