



The Buzzz

The Monthly Newsletter of the Gilroy Beekeepers Association

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RFox, Editor

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Editors Message

This will be my last edition of the Gilroy Beekeepers Association Newsletter. The Association is looking for a new editor. For the remainder of the year I will continue to distribute Serge Lebesque's 'In the Beeyard' articles at the beginning of the month.

If you have interest in becoming the new editor please contact either Dave Stocks or myself.

Randy

President's Message

by Dave Stocks

A lot is happening in the Gilroy Beekeepers Association. Although it is not as exciting as being in the beeyard, it is still very important to the future of the Association. Over the past year, the board of directors has been working to procure a tax exempt status for our organization and to make sure we are properly insured. I feel we have made some really good progress, due particularly to the efforts of Randy Fox. There is still work to be done!

We have received some disturbing news from the IRS. I'm not going to go into detail here. Randy will explain it at the September 5th meeting.

We are also in the process of re-writing our by-laws. This is necessitated by our association with California Garden Clubs. Randy will be sending you a copy of the draft for your review. Hopefully in October we will come to the members and request their approval.

In this column last month, I requested the members to submit nominations for Association officers. I received one response! Folks, this is your Association! We need your help and your input! Please come to the September meeting prepared to offer nominations for the office of president, treasurer and secretary.

I'll be in Davis next week at the Western Apicultural Society conference and Grant is lost somewhere in the wilds of Idaho! However, Randy and Vicki have an exciting meeting planned. Among the topics is a honey tasting. Please bring your samples.

If anyone has questions, comments or complaints, you can always let me know at dave.stock@yahoo.com.

Member Photo



From Jim Novak - 15 cells out of 32 cups took. I did 4 grafts after the grafting class. I got a few cells each time but my timing was off twice and was too late and the cells got destroyed. I'm sticking to my timing calendar now. This one was my best attempt. I wish I had this luck earlier

News from the Bee World

Articles courtesy of The W.A.S., Bee Culture Magazine and ABJ

FLOW HIVE - IT'S NOT QUITE THAT SIMPLE

A method that's supposed to make beekeeping simpler for novices by providing honey on tap has drawn criticism from some experts, who say it may encourage casual beekeepers to set up an apiary but not put in the hard work needed to maintain it.

The Flow Hive, created by Australian father-son duo Stuart and Cedar Anderson in 2015, earned nearly 40,000 backers and raised over \$13 million (U.S.) becoming the top all-time campaign on crowdfunding site Indiegogo.

The product is renowned for skipping many steps in the usually multifaceted honey extraction process

with the simple turn of a lever.

In a traditional hive, beekeepers have to sedate the bees, remove the wooden frames from the hive, “decap” the honey from the frames, process it in a centrifuge, and then filter it.

In the Flow Hive, the bees do their work inside the hive, and a few cranks of a lever split the comb, allowing pure, ready-to-eat honey to travel through tubes and into a bottle.

Instead of taking several hours, the Flow Hive can extract its honey in about 15 minutes in the ideal warm and dry conditions, said Ian Baird, owner of Terre Bleu, a lavender farm in Milton that also produces honey.

Bees at work in the Flow Hive at Terre Bleu Lavender Farm in Milton.

It’s supposed to make beekeeping simpler for novices by providing honey on tap. (Andrew Francis Wallace / Toronto Star) | Order this photo

The Flow Hive, which costs nearly \$1,000 — traditional hives cost \$200 and less — could make urban beekeeping and small-scale operations more feasible, Baird said.

“Buying stainless centrifuges and mechanical devices to harvest and extract and clean honey (in the traditional method) certainly is not economical when you’ve only got a couple of hives,” he said.

Amid concern for a decreasing honey bee population in recent years, more people are pitching in part-time to keep the honey flowing. One in every three bites of food we eat also relies on bees for pollination, experts say.

But some beekeepers are concerned that adopting the Flow Hive for small-scale beekeeping could do more harm than good for bees.

“Many people have gotten into beekeeping because of the Flow Hive, but don’t know how to bee keep,” said Peter Chorabik, a Toronto beekeeper who runs over 250 hives.

The Flow Hive, said Chorabik, can make new beekeepers think that the process is much less involved than it actually is, which puts the bees at risk of being attacked by pests and contracting diseases.

“You have to be responsible and know. . . what you’re signing up for when you get your own bees,” Chorabik said. “If you’re a farmer of cattle, and your cattle were sick and they all died in the winter, that wouldn’t be acceptable. But when you have honey bees and they all die in the winter because you can’t take care of them properly, it’s accepted.”

Shawn Caza, a long-time Toronto beekeeper, said he knew of aspiring beekeepers who bought a Flow Hive and bees, but “planned a vacation during the time of the year when one would normally start a new colony.”

“The honey harvest is really the tip of the iceberg in terms of what a beekeeper needs to do maintain healthy hives,” Caza said.

Stuart Anderson, the co-creator of the Flow Hive, said his company educates new beekeepers.

“We provide material on colony health and pests and diseases on our website and lots of educational videos and other content,” Anderson said in an email statement. “We actively encourage aspiring beekeepers to join a bee club and/or to connect with a mentor beekeeper.

“Our stand is that beekeepers are responsible for the health of their bees and this requires knowledge, skill and care. . . (I) am very proud that the invention of the Flow Hive has brought tens of thousands more people into beekeeping.”

For all the speed and utility the Flow Hive has to offer, professional beekeepers also have critiques of the product.

One concern is that the Flow Hive produces a lower yield than a traditional hive, a pattern that Baird has noticed in his operation. Baird will stick with the traditional hives for the bulk of his honey-producing operation.

Sometimes, getting the honey from a Flow Hive can be an issue, according to Caza.

“Others had the honey spill out of the comb within the hive and subsequently leak out the bottom,” he said. “I also heard from people with the opposite problem, the honey came out through the intended path, but was extremely slow.”

Fred Davis, a Toronto-based beekeeper, said a really hot summer is needed for the honey to flow well.

“Last year, it was scorching hot, which helped,” he said.

Davis also believes that bees do not like the plastic frames used in the Flow Hive as much as the wood frames in traditional hives.

“Would I use it again? I’d probably say no,” he said.

For all his criticisms, Davis said the Flow Hive has no effect on the honey’s flavor.

“The taste is the same, honey is honey,” he said.

Anderson stands by his product, saying that the Flow Hive has been tested in Canada and it’s been found to work successfully in colder climates.

“People in every region of the U.S.A. are harvesting successfully with the Flow Hive,” he said.

The beekeepers the Star talked to may disagree with Anderson, but they do see the Flow Hive as a useful educational tool.

“Our farm is an agritourism ecotourism farm and we thought it would be also very educational to show the public,” Baird said.

This month in the Beeyard

By Serge Labesque

There will be winter

Whether winter is mild and brief, harsh and long or inconsistent, it’s a challenging season for the colonies. Although honey bees do not hibernate, their populations decrease substantially in the fall and their activity outside the hives during the cold months is often hindered by inclement weather. Yet, the colonies must not just survive this tough time of the year. They’ll also have to regain much strength before springtime arrives. Success in meeting these goals takes good preparation.

Over eons of evolution honey bees have devised an amazing system to stay alive between fall and spring. One element of this is their clustering mechanism; the production of winter bees is another. However, this system would not function without nests suitably organized to provide protection and sustenance at times when no food may be gathered. Remarkably, everything that will be necessary to keep the colonies growing at the end of winter and in early spring must be in place inside the hives before mid-fall.

Here is how bees make it happen:

As the brood nests shrink steadily and the honey flow wanes during the summer, combs in the lower parts of the hives become empty. This allows pollen foragers to unload their pellets and receiver bees to place nectar in the vacated cells, which sets the stage for drastic changes within the brood chambers. Then, for a few days, sometimes for two weeks or so, the queens increase their egg production. At the same time, the bees begin to either accumulate fresh stores, or to relocate uncapped honey from distant parts of the hives into the upper combs of the brood chambers that were previously used for brood rearing. Consequently, the brood nests start to move downward into the unfilled lower parts of the hives, closer to the entrances and next to the fresh provisions. The brood that will be raised there around the fall equinox will be well fed. This is an important step for the colonies, as these young bees will become nurse bees for the winter bees.

Although the bees relocate uncapped honey and place nectar in the fall brood chambers, any bee bread that was not consumed is left in place and protected from spoilage by a glaze of honey. This bee bread will be critical for the development of the future brood, in mid-winter, as the bees will need this source of protein to raise young bees at times when the weather may preclude foraging.

In early fall, the accumulation of stores throughout the brood chambers intensifies. The brood nests may be pushed further down on the combs and they become quite compact. The scarcity of empty cells in the brood area forces the queens to gradually reduce their production of eggs, sometimes to the point of altogether stopping egg-laying by mid-fall. That's when the fall brood nests contain mostly sealed brood that will become the winter bees. Actually, the size of these mid-fall brood nests is a foreteller of the volume of the future winter clusters. The winter bees will emerge over the following two weeks, while the last of the summer foragers frantically top off the stores before finally disappearing.

When the congestion within the brood chambers forces the queens to stop laying eggs, there is a period of broodlessness during the late fall or in early winter. This is very beneficial, if not vital to the colonies, as it spares the young winter bees from having to perform nursing duties too early in their lives, which would decrease their longevity. In addition, this period of broodlessness offers an opportunity to the colonies to control varroa with their grooming behavior, before the colonies start raising a new generation, and it also helps reduce the consumption of their stores.

To perform this chain of tasks in a timely manner, the bees need to sense and respond to the local summer environmental cues that winter is coming. As always, the future of the colonies depends on their hard and methodical work.

September in the apiaries

Beekeepers have to make quite a few decisions at the end of summer. Many of these are crucial for their bees and, come next spring, will affect the vigor of their apiaries: Which colonies to take into winter? Which ones require immediate attention? How to manage them through the fall? How much honey should be left in this or that hive? This is just a sample of numerous questions that have to be answered.

Once the hives have been assessed, which I normally do around Labor Day, it's time to implement any plan we devise, as there are only a few weeks left before closing the hives for winter. Some procedures, such as requeening or combinations, if they are necessary, are better done as soon as possible; others may require several weeks to complete. As the hives are inspected and manipulated, their volume is gradually reduced by removing unused, old and misshapen combs, and by harvesting a few frames of surplus honey. Fall hive management is indeed the opposite of spring hive management, in that the volume of the hives shrinks and their contents become more compact during the preparations for winter. All of this is done while respecting the work the bees are doing and the arrangement they have created in the brood chambers.

The colonies that are queenright, healthy, carrying sizeable brood nests and sufficient stores to cover their needs until spring do not present a problem. But we need to figure out why the others are not performing as they should and make necessary corrections.

As long as honey was harvested only in reasonable quantities and young colonies were not started too late in the year, then there is no need to feed any colonies. Just like the bees that live in trees, those in our hives provide for themselves. Requeening, combination, and shrinking weak hives to nuc size before overwintering them are better options. The mite populations are rapidly increasing at this time of year, and it becomes evident how particular hives are handling the parasite. Diseased colonies or those that carry large numbers of varroa mites may be requeened or their volume may be reduced to strengthen them. They should not be neglected. No matter the volume of the hives, the overall organization of their brood chambers and stores must remain the same. The point is to restore balance between the bee populations and the size of their nest cavities in order to provide better overwintering conditions.

Swarms may still be caught at this late time of year, but they are mainly a distraction that brings dangers. Indeed, they are often absconding swarms that are fleeing stressful conditions or excessive mite loads. They stand very little chance of making it through winter. However, I give them a box, but I never combine these unknown bees with any of my colonies.

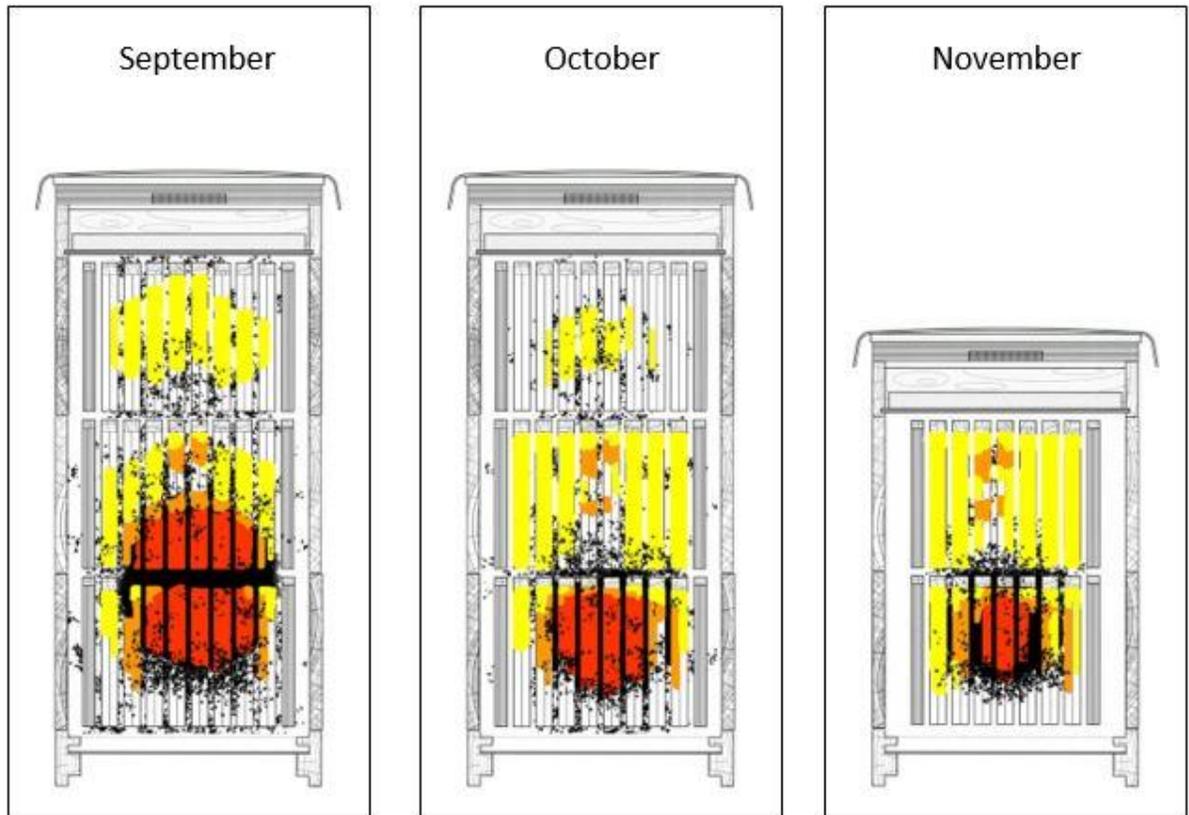
The elimination of the drones can be striking when first witnessed, but it is a normal and healthy step the colonies take during their preparations for winter.

Robber bees and yellowjackets may threaten the hives at this season. To avoid these dangers, the entrances of the hives should be kept defensible.

The bees know how to prepare for winter. We just need to make sure we do not interfere with their work and that the hives we provide are configured well.

In summary, this month:

- Assess the colonies, their health, queens, brood nests and stores.
- Monitor the progress of the colonies in their preparations for fall and winter.
- Requeen or combine hives that are not performing satisfactorily and those that have failed or failing queens. Note that only healthy hives should be combined.
- Reduce the unused volume of the hives (Follower boards greatly facilitate this.)
- Consolidate honey in honey supers (Reduce the volume of the honey supers with follower boards.)
- Manage frames in preparation for fall culling of the old and misshapen ones.
- Beware of yellowjackets and of the risks of robbing. If necessary, reduce the entrances of developing colonies and of those that are under attack. Make sure the hives have no secondary entrances.
- Avoid hive manipulations that can trigger robbing.
- Provide and maintain sources of water.
- Provide some afternoon shade, if possible.
- Ensure that hives are adequately ventilated.
- Harvest, extract and bottle surplus honey, if there is any, and in moderation.
- Return wet frames and cappings to the bees for cleaning (by placing them on top of hive top feeders or inner covers during the evening).
- Render wax from discarded frames and from cappings.
- Beware of the fire danger when using the smoker in dry-grass areas.
- Routinely clean and scorch tools and equipment.



Cross-sections of a hive at monthly intervals during its preparations for winter: As the colony prepares its nest for winter, the brood nest (shown in red) is driven downward in the hive by the accumulation and consolidation of stores in the upper part of the brood chamber (bee bread shown in orange, and honey in yellow). After a brief spike in egg laying by the queen around the end of summer, the amount of brood decreases gradually. By mid-fall, the brood nest contains the future winter bees that will form the winter cluster. Note that the center part of the stores still holds pollen that was left in place while the brood nest shrank and drifted into the lower part of the hive. This bee bread will be used by the bees to feed the brood in mid-winter, when inclement weather precludes foraging.

Serge Labesque © 2017

Classes and Conferences

Nov 14 - 16: California State Beekeepers Association annual convention, Harrah's/Harveys in Lake Tahoe, CA. Info <http://www.californiastatebeekeepers.com/events.html>

Calendar of Events

Meetings

First Monday of the month

Santa Clara Valley Beekeepers Guild

6:15 pm

Dwell Christian Church San Jose

1292 Minnesota Ave San Jose CA 95125

<http://beeguild.org/>

First Tuesday of the month

Gilroy Beekeepers Association

7:00 pm

Old City Hal Restaurant

7400 Monterey Rd.

Gilroy, Ca

<http://www.gilroybees.com>

First Wednesday of the month

Santa Cruz Beekeepers Guild

6:30 pm

El Rio Mobile Home Park,

2120 N. Pacific Ave.

Santa Cruz, CA

<http://santacruzbees.com>

First Thursday of the month

Beekeepers Guild of San Mateo

7:00 pm

Trinity Presbyterian Church

1106 Alameda de Pulgas

San Carlos, CA

<http://www.sanmateobeeguild.org/>

First Saturday of the month

Monterey Bay Beekeepers

8:00 am

<http://www.montereybaybeekeepers.org/>

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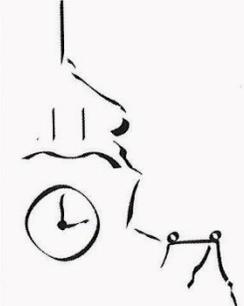
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