



The Diablo Bee

Newsletter of the Mount Diablo Beekeepers Association

April 2007

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Newsletter

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Next meeting:

7:30 pm – 04/12/07

**Heather Farm Garden
Center**

**1540 Marchbanks
Walnut Creek**

HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS ISSUE

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2007 MDBA Calendar of Events

April 12	General Meeting, 7:30 p.m, Heather Farm. Steve Gentry will be our guest speaker.
April 14	<i>Bee Work Day</i>

April Meeting

*Important
DATE!*

Steve Gentry will be our guest speaker at the April meeting. He will be talking about spring hive management and integrated hive management. This talk will be an introduction for the bee work day.

Mount Diablo Beekeepers Association

BEE WORK DAY 2007

Saturday, April 14 - 9:00 a.m. till noon

253 Twinview Drive, Pleasant Hill,
at the home of Gary and Joan
Lawrence

Phone (925)-932-2458

Google map link:

<http://www.google.com/maps?q=253+Twinview+Dr,+Pleasant+Hill,+CA+94523,+USA&sa=X&oi=map&ct=title>

What's the Buzz?



THANK YOU!

Thanks to everyone who attended our last meeting with Larry Connor, PHD.



TO BEE OR NOT TO BEE?



Hawaii's honey is still pure, but output is down due to an erratic environment and foreign imports

By Nina Wu nwu@starbulletin.com



Wearing shorts and a long-sleeved T-shirt, beekeeper [Michael Kliks](#) pulls out a honeycomb from the wood box to inspect the work of his bees.

Everything looks fine today to Kliks, owner of [Manoa Honey Co.](#), as he observes the brood that the busy queen bee planted in the wax comb. It's something he monitors closely, given the ongoing crisis that has hit the rest of the world.

Bees are reportedly vanishing, in 22 states across the nation, stricken by mites, pathogens and the most recent outbreak of "fall dwindle disease."

Hawaii remains one of the few places in the world where the bees, because of the geographic isolation and quarantine, remain healthy.

Yet beekeepers in Hawaii are still wary. While the bee population has been steady, production of honey in Hawaii was down 21 percent last year, compared to 2005, according to the latest data from the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Nationally, honey production was down 11 percent last year from 2005.

Something about the environment is out of whack, according to Kliks, a beekeeper, or apiarist, of 27

years. Kliks has about 100 colonies at 12 different sites on Oahu -- from Nanakuli to Kalaheo.

"We watch our bees just like you'd watch your cows, sheep or goats," he said. "We knew 10 years ago something was going on. We haven't had a decent harvest here for at least a decade."

Mangoes and avocados are blooming out of season, he said, as are the kiawe trees -- all of which the bees feed on. "Everything is helter skelter and our bees are starving," he said.

Cheap imports

Honey producers here cite another growing threat -- huge imports of foreign honey.

Oftentimes, these imports, mostly from China and Argentina, offer several mixes of honey that are further diluted by large distributors with high fructose corn syrup. They are then repackaged and sold on store shelves for less than the wholesale price.

Yet they are labeled as a "Product of the U.S.A." or "100 percent U.S. Grade A" honey.

Kliks, also president of the Hawaii Beekeepers Association, is pushing for the passage of a bill that would keep these mislabeled honeys out of Hawaii.

The Senate Bill would require stricter labeling standards from companies, including the specific percentage of honey from each country of origin and the amount of other sweeteners added, including ultrafiltered sweeteners.

The bill also seeks to prohibit the use of "Hawaii honey" or "Hawaiian honey" in ads or labels, unless it is produced entirely in the state.

Opponents of the bill say it is asking for stricter standards than already required by existing federal laws.

But Kliks says the bill is necessary to protect honey producers in Hawaii who maintain their standards and quality.

There is honey out there that is adulterated, contaminated and diluted with other sugars, then labeled as U.S. honey," he said. "They are, in fact,

stealing from us when they do this."

Testing is key, according to Kliks, who wants to set up a lab to monitor the adulterated honeys.

"We have the purest and cleanest honey in the world, and we monitor them very carefully," Kliks said.

"The promise I want from the state is to enforce these by being the bulldog on the porch."

The market here is small compared to the rest of the world, given that Hawaii only produces 4.7 percent of what California produces overall. The Golden State produced close to 20 million pounds of honey last year, to Hawaii's 930,000 pounds.

But Hawaii's honey producers have a competitive advantage: The geographic isolation and ability to market quality honeys from a paradise state for a higher price. They also can produce honey year-round because of the warm climate.

A stinging business

Kliks and the other apiarists in the state, about 30 of them in all, say it's getting harder to keep up their livelihoods.

Garnett Puett, a fourth-generation beekeeper, beeswax artist and owner of **Captain Cook Honey Co.** on the Big Island, says honey production in Hawaii has its share of challenges.

Among them are access to land, finding enough labor, and the limitations of living on an island where the bees have been quarantined since the mid-1980s. Building a bee business takes years of patience and investments, according to Puett, one of the state's leading honey producers.

"We lose locations every year because of developments," he said.

However, he does it because he loves it.

"It's in my blood," he said. "I had my first hive when I was 5 years old."

Today, he oversees about 125 sites and 3,600 colonies on the Big Island, some of which are on borrowed

farmlands. He does pretty well, producing more than half a million pounds of honey per year.

For the last nine years, he's been offering a line of certified organic honey made from nectar of the Ohia Lehua Blossom, Christmas Berry and Macadamia Nut Blossom.

Still, Puett is constantly aware his way of life is vulnerable to changes in the environment. If the Africanized honey bee or varroa mite were to somehow get into Hawaii, he said, "it would wipe out my business."

Puett worries just as much about genetically modified crops, which he says threaten his population of bees if they should end up pollinating and producing honey from those crops.

Personally, Kliks said he produced less than 4,000 pounds of honey this year, half what he used to make. During the peak of the honey business in the late 1980s, he produced 20,000 pounds.

He sells the honey, branded as Pele's Gold and Crater Kiawe, to more than 30 stores, including Down to Earth, Shirokiya and Executive Chef.

Puett says his honey production is 30 to 40 percent down from what he remembers 20 years ago.

Though they don't know what's going on, beekeepers say climate changes may be responsible for some of the lower production.

Kliks, 65, says the trade itself is dying, as beekeepers on the mainland lose interest in their trade, while overall morale is low. Personally, he hasn't found anyone who wants to carry on his business.

"It's a human loss of faith," said Kliks. "There are beekeepers that have lost hope and stopped replacing their assets. They've given up."

Though he gets stung by the bees about 10 times per day, on average, Kliks keeps going because he believes "it's a rightful livelihood."

Besides making honey, bees also produce wax and perform the important function of pollinating crops -- from almonds to macadamia nuts, apples, oranges, melons, blueberries and cherries.

"They do good," said Puett. "Bees don't do anything but good."

NEXT MONTH: THE HAWAII QUEEN BEE MARKET!

Newbie Nuggets.....

NEWBIE NUGGETS

HONEY EXTRACTING HINTS

Household items can serve as good alternatives to supplies found in beekeeping catalogs.

A serrated bread knife makes a good uncapping knife. Use a sawing motion. No need to heat it. Change directions if it catches the wood. Some beekeepers really like using a hot-air electric paint stripper to quickly melt the cappings. Using this tool can be dangerous and requires a quick hand and practice!

Kitchen strainers, nylon paint strainers, and women's nylon stockings can serve as good honey filters. Clean ones, of course.

Tupperware and Rubbermaid both make good plastic containers to hold honey and cappings. Honey is acidic, so don't use items such as aluminum and galvanized steel that will react with the honey acids. Stick with plastic, stainless steel or glass.

Let the honey settle. Honey that rests for a few days after extracting will not leave tiny bubbles around the rim of a jar. Be patient. Almost all debris left in the honey after filtering will either float or sink within a few days. A spigot just off the bottom of a container will prevent both floating and sunken debris from being accidentally bottled.

Uncapping is easier with only 8 or 9 frames spaced evenly in a 10-frame super. The

thicker comb means almost no scraping with the fork. After bees have drawn out the foundation the first season, return only 8 or 9 frames into each extracted super to make the next crop easier to uncap. Uncap all the way down to the wood on the top and bottom bar, regardless of how far the comb is drawn out, so the comb will be nice and even next year.

Warm honey flows best. Warm honey spins out of the comb faster and more thoroughly than does cold honey in an extractor. Warm honey also strains faster through a filter. Honey at 80 degrees Fahrenheit (27 c) or higher will be extracted most easily. This is normally not a problem in the summer, but in cool weather a light bulb under a stack of supers overnight can provide a lot of heat if the escape of the heat is controlled. Don't melt the wax!

Extracted honey absorbs moisture from the air. Uncovered honey also catches insects, so keep the honey covered.

Sufficient honey containers are needed on extracting day. Enough containers need to be on hand when extracting, so it is good to learn how much capacity you'll need before extracting. In rough numbers:

- a. A shallow super typically yields between 25 and 30 lbs of honey, or 2 to 2-1/2 gal.
- b. A medium super typically yields between 35 and 40 lbs, or 3 to 4 gal.
- c. A deep box typically yields between 60 and 70 lbs, or 5 to 6 gallons.

Actual yields may vary due to amount of frames per box, how well they are extracted, age of comb, and other variables.

Utensils that are used with melted wax will not be used for anything else. Melted wax leaves a waxy film on every pot, spoon, dipping cup or strainer it comes into contact with.

Crock pots with an inch of water are good for melting cappings that have been drained of honey, but the pot will never be the same. Old crock pots are also near-perfect for melting wax during candle making, and they are often available at garage sales. Heat to between 150 and 180 degrees Fahrenheit; no need to boil.

Bad comb and rotten boxes should be replaced while extracting. Extracting provides the perfect opportunity to cull bad combs, frames and boxes that need paint or replacing. Have replacements on hand on extracting day. When short a few frames, frame feeders (also called division-board feeders; the kind that normally replace a frame or two) can be put in the empty spaces in the supers so any burr comb built there will be inside the feeder where it will actually be useful to prevent drowning when it is time to feed.

Let the bees clean the "wet" empty supers after extracting. Whether intending to return the supers to the bees or store them off the hives, the bees do a great job of drying supers after extracting. A stack of supers can be placed on a hive, over an inner cover that has a hole, and they will usually be dry the next day.

Announcements

BEES FOR FREE: Beehive in hollow tree in Concord. Due to be chopped down 925 680-7244

Dr. Gordon Frankie U.C. Berkeley urban bee expert will be speaking about restoring native bee habitat in Sacramento on April 26, 2007 at 7 pm. If interested in carpooling please call Kelly 925 240-1930 or Debbe 634-4584

Kelly Knapp and Debbe Holeman are interested in giving homes to bumble bees and any other native bees. Also, they want to learn about restoring native bee habitat. Please call 925 634-4584 or 240-1930 or email kellysmiles75@yahoo.com

Contra Costa County Fair is coming up Thursday, May 31 through Sunday, June 3. Anyone interested in participating can email me (Judy Casales) at info@dominiquehoneybees.com or call at 510-881-4939. Thanks!

Wine Country Honey, Sonoma County

We raise our bees with IPM methods and have been breeding from survivor stock! This year we are offering packages for \$65.00 for a 3# and \$80.00 for a 4#. We have 5 frame nucs and complete hives and Wine Country Queens, which are Italian, by the way. At Wine Country Honey, I've partnered with a third generation beekeeper, Scott Nelson, who wants to improve on tradition and raise bees without chemical treatment. We currently have 2400 hives in the almonds. We'd like to let you folks know we are here. Please check out our website at www.winecountryhoney.com If we can help you by phone, our store is open Monday through Saturday from 8:30 - 5:30. Stop in if you are over this way. Hope 2007 is a bee-you-tee-full year for the bees and the beeks!

Kathy Cox
Bloomfield Bees Honey
<http://www.bloomfieldbeeshoney.com>
Nelson Family Apiaries
<http://www.nelsonfamilyapiaries.com>
Wine Country Honey
<http://www.winecountryhoney.com>

Recipe of the Month

Vinaigrette:

¼ cup balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons honey
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon coarsely ground pepper
½ teaspoon salt
4 cloves mashed or minced garlic

Vegetables:

4 plum tomatoes, halved
2 zucchini, cut lengthwise into ¼-inch thick slices
1 Japanese eggplant, cut lengthwise into ¼-inch thick slices
1 red bell pepper, de-seeded and cut into 8 wedges
1 sweet onion, cut into six wedges

Combine the vinaigrette ingredients in a bowl.

Divide the vegetables and vinaigrette evenly between two large ziplock bags. Seal and marinate in the refrigerator for one hour, turning the bags occasionally.

Place marinated vegetables on a grill rack coated with cooking spray. Grill 7 minutes on each side, or until the onions are tender, basting with the reserved vinaigrette.

Makes 8, 1-cup servings.

The Diablo Bee
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