



The Diablo Bee

Newsletter of the Mount Diablo Beekeepers Association

September 2007

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Next meeting:

7:30 pm – 08/09/07

Heather Farm Garden

Center

1540 Marchbanks

Walnut Creek

HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS ISSUE

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2007 MDBA Calendar of Events

Sept 13 General Meeting, 7:30, Heather Farm, Debbe Holeman will talk about making mead.

Sept 20 Board Meeting 7:00 p.m.

Oct 11 General Meeting, 6:30, Heather Farm. Barbecue and election of board, awards, and grand raffle.

Nov 8 Crossover Board Meeting, 7:00

What's the Buzz?



THANK YOU!



Much thanks to Nathanael Beach for his captivating and informative talk on the benefits of being a member of a honey bee association, and for educating us on identifying and controlling the small hive beetle and the wax moth.

September Meeting

Important DATE!

Our next meeting is September 13th at 7:30PM at the Heather Farm Garden Center in Walnut Creek.

Debbe Holeman will be giving an informative talk about making mead. So come thirsty.



Are Bees Too Busy?



The following is an excerpt from a very entertaining and informative article entitled “Are Bees Too Busy?” in the August 1 issue of East Bay Express. It also spotlights two of our very own – Steve Gentry and Judy Casales. For the complete story, go to eastbayexpress.com and click on the “Archives” to find that issue.

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.....Meanwhile, commercial beekeeping has come to resemble other kinds of factory farming. While the bees themselves retain more freedom of movement than almost any other living creature raised by man, a commercial bee lot is more like a cattle feed lot than a wild meadow.

Beehives are crammed close together in rows just a few feet apart; in the wild, a square mile supports at the most three or four hives. A wild colony's diet is diverse, comprising pollen and nectar from myriad plants. To compensate for the lack of forage around bee lots, bees are typically fed high-fructose corn syrup, the same stuff that's contributing to a human health crisis. And just like other agricultural livestock, bees become stressed when you crowd them together. They're more susceptible to diseases and parasites, less able to function naturally.

It's all making some bee scientists wonder: Is the epidemic known as Colony Collapse Disorder real, or are the bees simply being worked to death?

If you want to put bees' value into dollars and cents, just look at California's almond industry. Almonds are our state's second-largest crop, with farmers raking in \$2.34 billion in 2005. This year's yield, grown on 615,000 acres, is expected to be a record 1.310 billion pounds, up 18 percent from last year — despite the dire statistics about Colony Collapse Disorder.

As you drive through the Central Valley, admiring the miles of orchards in bloom, they look so peaceful and natural. In fact, our almond industry depends on a herculean human effort to subvert the natural order of things. In nature, most flowers don't get pollinated.

But you don't get a billion-pound harvest by letting nature take its course. In the old days, an orchard owner might invite a beekeeper to keep hives on the land in a mutually beneficial arrangement. The agribusiness way is to rent hives for the two-week almond pollination season. This year, growers paid \$150 per hive, placing three to five hives per acre.

Since 1999, beekeepers in the Pacific Northwest have earned four to five times more income from pollination than from the combined sales of honey and wax, according to a survey by Oregon State University.

But it was hairy out in the fields this year, as beekeepers from around the country raced to get their hives to California before they collapsed. Some growers found themselves renting empty hives.

Thousands of beekeepers had done the math and begun building up their stock. It's not uncommon for a commercial operation to run to ten thousand hives, trucking them from California to South Dakota to Florida in the course of a single year. One million hives, or nearly half of all the hives in the United States, were hauled into California this year, according to Randy Oliver, a Grass Valley beekeeper who has pollinated almonds for 25 years.

For a honeybee, the lucrative almond pollination season comes at the worst possible time. The natural lifecycle of a bee colony follows the seasons, with a hibernation-like rest period during the winter. Unfortunately for the bees, California almond trees bloom around February 10, a miserably rainy time of year.

A colony may rear ten to twelve generations of bees in a year. The queen moves through the hive, laying eggs in comb toward the center of the nest. The eggs hatch in three days; the larvae are fed nectar by nurse bees until they emerge from their cells in 21 days to begin work in the hive. A few are male; they're called drones because they do nothing but hang around and eat, on call in case the queen dies and a new queen needs to mate. The females get to work, spending three weeks as house bees. They may feed the larvae, keep the hive clean, attend the queen, or just fan their wings to cool the hive. Some act as sentries, attempting to chase away bears, skunks, and robber bees from other hives. Then they go out to forage for another three weeks, completing the lifecycle. Elderly

bees don't retire; they simply fly out one day and don't return.

As the days shorten and the sun dims, the hive produces its last generation of the year. These "winter bees" must survive the cold months and live long enough to raise the vigorous new brood that will bring back the spring pollen and begin the cycle again.

"Winter bees live for about six months," Oliver said. "Come spring, when the hives are moved to almonds, these same bees that survived the winter and raised the first brood then have to go out to forage. They can't do it." Instead of gathering the pollen, the exhausted bees drop dead outside the hive, Oliver surmises.....

Where's Waldo, 104? Still working!



Waldo McBurney, 104, takes a break from tending his beehives in Quinter, Kan., on Oct. 17

Spry Kansas senior raises bees and sells honey, just retired from running

QUINTER, Kan. — Waldo McBurney lives in two worlds: one of buggies and hitching posts — and the other of a growing trend of older Americans working longer.

Still spry and agile at 104, McBurney briskly walks most days from home to work in this High Plains farming community, where he raises bees and sells honey.

When McBurney was born on a nearby farm, flying was left to the birds and people communicated by writing letters. A three-mile trip to town in a wagon took a half hour, and working 10 hours a day, six days a week was the norm.

McBurney has worked since he can remember. At age 4 or 5, he gathered eggs from the hens in the old sod house where his parents had lived until shortly before he was born. His first paying job at age 13 was guiding a lead team of horses pulling a wheat thrasher. For that, he was paid 50 cents a day.

"After you finished with the chores, we would light the kerosene lamp and read," he said.

He started gardening on the farm and even now raises fruits and vegetables in his backyard, bending down to pick tomatoes and put them in a pail.

"I like to see things grow, whether it's cats, or calves or tomatoes," said McBurney, his hands steady and his grip strong.

Award winner

In October, Experience Works gave McBurney its "America's Oldest Worker for 2006" award at a ceremony in Washington.

"He may not be the oldest worker but he is up there and definitely outstanding," said Cynthia Metzler, president of the national group, which provides training and employment for the senior citizens.

Metzler called McBurney "a real role model for all of us" at a time when Americans are working longer.

"People are living longer and don't have enough money to sustain themselves. Some want to work to remain active," she said.

While it can't be said definitively that McBurney actually is the oldest American working, the odds favor him.

"I can just go about anywhere and be the oldest. The ones my age don't run around that much," said McBurney, with wisps of white hair and weathered face and hands.

Sign erected

The United States has an estimated 77,770 centenarians, about 0.026 percent of the population. The average American life span is 77.9 years.

After McBurney's award, the town erected a sign near his office: "Congratulations, Waldo. America's Oldest Worker."

"I never considered myself a great character. They are testing my humility," he said.

Those who know McBurney say he's indeed a humble man who believes in helping his neighbor.

"He doesn't think he's more special than anyone else. I don't know if I've heard a negative word out of his mouth," said Laura Kesler, vice president of KansasLand Bank. "He always looks at the positive side, and that's probably why he's lived as long as he has."

For McBurney, work is good.

"I'm not a strong believer in retirement. I don't think retirement is in the Bible. Maybe it's there, but I haven't found it," he said.

Hobby becomes a career

After graduating from college in 1927, he worked a quarter century variously as a vocational-agricultural teacher, county extension agent and at the local co-op. In the 1950s he started a seed-cleaning business. He also took a decades-long hobby of beekeeping and went into the honey business.

He operated the seed-cleaning venture until age 91 and still raises bees and sells honey, although much less than before.

"I'm trying to get out of the bee business because my back isn't standing up like it should," he said. "I hope somebody else will be handling the bees. I'll keep a few at the house to raise our own honey."

In 2004, McBurney published his book, "My First 100 Years: A Look Back from the Finish Line," which he sells in his office.

"Selling books isn't retiring," he said. "I expect to be working."

He enjoyed running all his life and at age 65 took up long-distance running. A decade later, he began competing in the Senior Olympics, the World Masters and other events, winning 10 gold medals for track and field events.

Just retired from running

McBurney stopped competing a couple years ago, but almost every day he still walks the four blocks from his white framed house trimmed in blue to his Main Street office.

"My running got so slow I could walk as fast as I could run," he said.

He wears glasses, but his eyesight is good enough that his driver's license was renewed in September. Yes, he still drives, but not often.

McBurney lives a low-key lifestyle with his wife of 44 years, 92-year-old Vernice. They have five adult children from previous marriages.

"He's pretty gentle, but he has a mind of his own," she said.

He said with a chuckle: "When we got married, the deal was she would look after me in my old age and give me a decent burial. Well, she's taken care of me but she hasn't

buried me yet."

He attributes his longevity to many things - genes, exercise, food, mental attitude and faith. Many in his family lived into their 80s and 90s.

McBurney believes in a healthy diet with lots of whole grains, fruits and vegetables, much of it grown in his garden.

"The kids in the city come home from school with nothing to do. They sit down in front of the TV with a bottle of pop and a sack of potato chips and they get fat, and fat is a killer," he said.

No drinking, no smoking

McBurney says he never smoked or drank alcohol, which he believes helped him live longer.

"I always got along fairly well without them, so I still don't know the taste of either of them," he said.

Faith has been the center of McBurney's life, and it's why he doesn't worry about death.

"The Bible says God will supply all your needs," he said. "I feel like the next life is secure."

McBurney has adapted to the changing times, and even has a cell phone.

"I don't use it very much. I had to get it because my wife wanted to know what ditch I'm in if I don't get back," he said.

When he flies, airline officials look twice at the birthday listed on his driver's license.

"Some of them act like they doubt it," he said.

20 Things You Didn't Know About... Bees



03.08.2007

Undertaker bees, the queens who were called kings, how honey helps wounds...

by Liza Lentini

1 There are 16,000 species. Most are solitary insects; only about 5 percent are social bees, the most common being the honeybee. As many as 80,000 of them colonize a single hive.

2 Drones—the male honeybees—live only for mating with the queen. If there is a shortage of food in the hive, the workers kick their lazy, gigolo asses out.

Worker bees have strictly regimented roles, including that of undertakers

3 To die for: When drones mate, they die afterwards from a ruptured abdomen. Sex detaches their endophallus, which gets stuck inside the queen.

4 She continues to mate—the drones aren't terribly smart, apparently—until she collects more than 70 million sperm from multiple males.

5 The queen was known as the king until the late 1660s, when Dutch scientist [Jan Swammerdam](#) dissected the hive's big bee and discovered ovaries.

6 Someone call Homeland Security! Australian researchers discovered that honeybees can distinguish human faces. The insects were shown black-and-white pictures and given treats for right answers.

7 Oh, someone did call Homeland Security. In the [Stealthy Insect Sensor Project](#), Los Alamos scientists have trained bees to recognize explosives.

8 The term “honeymoon” is derived from an old northern European custom in which newlyweds would consume a daily cup of mead, made with fermented honey, for a month.

9 The term “bee's knees” was coined by American cartoonist [Tad Dorgan](#), who was also responsible for “the cat's pajamas,” “the flea's eyebrows,” “the canary's tusks,” and (apropos of nothing) “Yes, we have no bananas.”

10 During World War I, honey was used to treat the wounds of soldiers because it attracts and absorbs moisture, making it a valuable healing agent.

11 Honey never spoils. Ever.

12 Bumblebees can estimate time intervals. Researchers have found that the insects extend their tongues in tandem with the rhythm of a sweet reward. This aids in the

hunt for nectar, whose availability waxes and wanes.

13 *Melittosphex burmensis*, recently found preserved in amber in a mine in northern Myanmar, is the oldest bee known. It lived 100 million years ago.

14 After he had pioneered the laws of genetics with pea plants, Austrian monk Gregor Mendel bred a strain of hybrid bees. Unfortunately, they were so vicious he had to kill them.

15 The buzz that you hear when a bee approaches is the sound of its four wings moving at 11,400 strokes per minute. Bees fly an average of 15 miles per hour.

16 A newly hatched queen immediately kills all other hatched and unhatched queens in the hive.

17 The Honeybee Boogie: In 1943 Austrian zoologist Karl von Frisch published his study on the dances bees perform to alert fellow workers. A round dance indicates that food is close by; a waggle dance means it is distant.

18 Worker bees have strictly regimented roles, including that of undertakers who drag their dead siblings from the hive.

19 On the April 1984 Challenger flight, 3,300 bees, housed in a special but confining box, adapted perfectly to zero gravity and built a nearly normal comb. But they didn't go to the toilet. Since bees excrete only outside the hive, they held it in for seven days. A NASA spokesperson said the space hive was “just as clean as a pin.”

20 According to an old wives' tale, a bee entering your house means a visitor is on his way, and if you kill the bee, the visitor won't be a pleasant one. Suffice to say, invite that unexpected honeybee guest to sit down to tea.

Newbee Nuggets.....

HONEY BEE FACTS

The natural diet of the adult honey bee is pollen and honey. Sometimes, however, when nectar is not available, bees collect sweet-tasting juices from overripe fruit and plant exudates. Also, certain insects secrete honeydew, which bees may collect and store as honey. During periods when no pollen is available, bees may collect powdery animal feed or spores from plants and store this material as they would pollen. This may have some food value but does not sustain brood rearing and is considered a poor substitute for pollen.

Recipe of the Month

Banana Smoothie

--Makes 1 Smoothie--

Ingredients

- 1-1/2 cups milk
- 2 medium ripe bananas
- 1 cup plain or vanilla yogurt
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Dash of nutmeg
- 5 ice cubes

Directions

In a blender, combine all ingredients except ice cubes and blend until smooth. Add up to 5 ice cubes, one at a time, and blend until smooth.

Announcements

☞ Please send in your favorite honey recipes or bee articles via email to ersten3@yahoo.com or Kieran@usmones.com

☞ Membership Dues

Dues should be sent to:
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