

Jan./Feb. 2002

VOTE!

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VOTE!

Most people would describe commercial beekeepers as "ruggedly independent." They prefer to make their own decisions and deal with the consequences. They find that working under direction from "bosses" or "regulations" to be too restrictive.

Thus, it behooves those beekeepers to be certain to vote on the continuance of the National Honey Board. The results of the referendum are surely going to affect your future, regardless of which way the vote goes.

Take a good look at the issues and send in your vote (before March 1st). Don't just sit back and let others decide for you what the future of the Honey Board should be.

If you believe that you should have a vote but you have not received a ballot, contact Kathie Birdsell of the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service at (888) 720-9917, without delay.

CheckMite+, again

Remember, your certificate from the ag commissioner for using CheckMite+ expired on December 31st. The last Section 18 for the product expired at the beginning of February. So, in order to use the strips, you now need a new "permit" and new "labeling," both of which are available through your ag commissioner.

Varroa Tray

Sonoma County beekeeper, Serge Labesque, has designed

and sells a screened bottom board with an improved plastic tray for holding mites. The tray is molded plastic with a channel around the perimeter that holds a ring of oil that prevents the mites from leaving the tray and getting back on the bees.

If you wish to contact Serge about the device, he can be reached at (707) 996-3149.

Beekeeping Supplies

Can't find a bee supply company or can't remember its name? Try the following website:
www.beesource.com/suppliers/usequip.htm

Cost of Production

Often I am asked, "How much does it cost to operate a colony of bees for a year?" I know that the answer varies from operator to operator. Worse yet, many operators really can't give a very close, realistic estimate.

Beekeepers in Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada, enlist the cooperation of economists, periodically, to help them make this determination. In the Winter 2002 issue of *Beelines*, published by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, here are the estimates:
Alberta - \$139.38
Saskatchewan - \$130.68.

We must remember that these figures are in Canadian dollars.

Thus, the U.S. equivalent should be between \$87.57 and \$82.10 at current exchange rates. How does that compare with your current estimates?

BOB is Coming

Who is BOB? No, it is what is BOB? BOB is the acronym for blue orchard bee. We also know the bee as the orchard mason bee, or as *Osmia lignaria*.

This native pollinator has been studied for years and is thought to be an exceptionally good pollinator. The propaganda says 250-300 females will pollinate an entire acre of fruit trees.

This also is the pollinator that is supposed to move into those cute little (expensive) bird house shaped wooden blocks with holes drilled in them that you find in nursery outlets and seed catalogs, etc.

Well, BOB is getting quite a bit of attention and if husbandry techniques can be worked out a bit better, they may become available in substantial numbers (which they aren't, presently).

BOBs are being championed as the pollinator for sustainable agriculture. Researchers from the USDA/ARS Bee Biology and Systematics Laboratory in Logan, Utah, have just published a new soft-cover book on this insect. The booklet describes: building domiciles, rearing and wintering the bees, use in pollination,

detering parasites and pests,
and their natural history.

If you are interested in a copy of **"How to Manage the Blue Orchard Bee,"** write a check for \$13.90 (\$9.95 for the text, \$3.95 s/h) payable to **Sustainable Agriculture Publications** and send it to:
Sustainable Agriculture Publications, 210 Hills Building, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0082.

You can pay by credit card at (802) 656-0484 and substantial discounts are available for orders of 10 or more copies.

Dr. Laidlaw Tribute - CSBA
(continued from last issue)

Dr. Robert Page collected some very interesting facts and photographs from Harry's past and rolled them into a highly entertaining and interesting presentation about the first person who could artificially inseminate a honey bee queen by hand. That's right - at the age of 16 Harry demonstrated that ability to a number of incredulous spectators, including some of the world's most eminent apiculturists. It was later, after being accepted into college with only a third grade formal education, that Harry perfected artificial insemination using an insemination device. A number of Harry's colleagues and acquaintances spoke on his behalf, and then I presented Harry with a plaque honoring him for his many contributions to science.

Besides being a creative scientist, Harry is a wonderful human being. He wished very much to meet everyone he could at the meeting, so we had him as guest of honor at the UC Davis open house at the Harry H. Laidlaw, Jr. Honey Bee Research Facility that immediately followed the luncheon. Harry really enjoyed whole affair.

Bob Danka (USDA/ARS, Baton Rouge) brought us up to date on the studies being conducted at his lab. Lab personal have devoted a lot of effort to tracheal mite control. They have obtained and developed lines of bees that have little problem with tracheal mites, and they are willing to share semen with queen breeders who would like to integrate that (or those) trait into their stocks. Also, Bob has helped an individual (Edwin Holcomb in Tennessee) set up a lab that can compare samples of your stocks to stocks of bees with known levels of resistance to mites, so that you have an idea of where your bees are in the scheme of things. You simply send in a sample of emerging bees and they are caged, with other bees of the same age, in a population of mite-shedding bees. Later, they examine the tracheae to determine how your bees compare to stocks of known attractiveness.

Bob also discussed the Russian bee stocks that have been imported by the USDA. The stocks were selected because of their continuously low mite infestation levels. They are resistant to tracheal mites and

usually have *Varroa* levels 50% lower than non-resistant stocks. However, they do die off when *Varroa* infestations reach about 10,000 mites per colony. Many of the tested colonies across the country have hardly any mites in them. Hybrid crosses between some of the Russian and common U.S. stocks have been producing good honey crops and handling mites pretty well. There will be more importations of Russian stocks over the next four years, with the goal of disseminating enough Russian queens to queen breeders to introduce their genetic assistance through their drones.

Barbara Knoll, a Supervisor of Expedited Services for the US Postal Service, explained the current frustrations of her office after the USPS struck a deal with Federal Express to carry their mail by air around the country. FedEx took the cream (first class mail) and refused to carry anything "alive." Northwest, Delta and Continental will carry live animals for the post office, but they don't fly around California enough. Southwest and America West said "Forget it!" United will carry live animals, too, but not for the Post Office. So finding "routings" is the hardest problem. If you wish to ship queens through the post office, call well in advance. The post office has to find carriers that keep the temperature in the ballpark, that put bees in the pressurized cargo area, and that are met at landing to handle the queens quickly. If you wish to exert pressure somewhere to help with this

problem, contact your congresspersons, because FedEx has a sweet deal and they aren't about to change it for anything.

Dr. Tom Webster, from Kentucky State University, shared with us some of his observations on colonies thought to be headed by "survivor queens." In other words, these populations are thought to have survived the last 15 years without any *Varroa* treatments.

Preliminary observations on two traits revealed the following: early in the season "survivor" bees had infestation levels of 10-30%, while previously treated "common" stocks had 2-8%. Later in the season, infestation in the survivors had dropped to 10-20%, while it increased to 5-15% in the commons. Non-reproduction by mites ran 25-95% in the survivors, but only 5-40% in the common stocks. It appears that some of our Kentucky bee stocks share similar traits to the SMR bees from the Baton Rouge lab.

The scheduled presentations concluded with a panel discussion on co-ops as a potential way to move honey better, at higher prices. It appeared to me that the following themes were clear: 1. you have to determine which type of co-op you want - sometimes a bargaining association may be preferable; 2. you have to hire a really competent manager and provide financial incentives to keep the person on his or her toes; 3. you have to accept an OK price for your honey (neither

the best nor the worst); 4. watch out for "expansion" into other member services - that only works when commodity prices are high, because the services "cost" something to get them; 5. Karen Spatz related there is a Center for Cooperatives on the UCD campus that will help groups establish or operate a coop, and 6. when you really have your act together, there are federal funds (\$5,000 to \$500,000 grants) available to help conduct coop business, especially for Market Value Added Grants.

Saltcedar Targeted

Frequently called "tamarisk," saltcedar is one of the country's noxious weeds (as is yellow starthistle) for which researchers are trying to find biological control agents. Saltcedar produces nectar and pollen that are important to the nutritional health of honey bees, but the resulting honey is not "table grade." This article on the subject was published in the July-August issue of California Agriculture.

New biological control agent released against invasive saltcedar

One of the West's most noxious wildland pests - a non-native tree called saltcedar that invades riverbanks, pushes out native willows, chokes streams and impoverishes riparian habitat - is about to get the unwanted attention of a Chinese leaf beetle (*Diorhabda elongata*). In May, a team of

biologists from UC Berkeley and the USDA/ARS in Albany, California, released the small black-and-yellow striped beetle in the Owens Valley.

"We hope that the beetle and a leafhopper, that already lives on the trees, will give the saltcedar a one-two punch to knock it out," says ecologist Tom L. Dudley of the UCB Department of Integrative Biology. Tom heads the vegetation section of the Saltcedar Consortium, a task force of agencies and stakeholders from eight western states.

The beetle is one of only a handful of natural enemies released in biological control programs to control wildland weeds, compared to more than 100 targeted agricultural plant pests, Dudley says. In addition, most biocontrol releases have targeted herbaceous weeds, not woody plants like saltcedar.

The quarter-inch-long beetle is a good prospect for biocontrol of saltcedar because both larvae and adults feed exclusively on the plant, and the adults produce two or more generations of offspring per year. In addition to eating green vegetation, the beetles create leaf wounds that allow water to escape, causing branches to wither and die.

A 3-year test in the field with beetles confined to cages showed that the beetle can survive winter and reproduce, and that it effectively defoliated saltcedar.

Some 10 saltcedar species were introduced into the United States since the early 19th century as ornamentals, wind-breaks or to stabilize the soil. Since then, two species, *Tamarix parviflora* in coastal and central California and *Tamarix ramosissima* in more arid areas, have invaded river floodplains and lake shores throughout the West, forming dense thickets that can restrict stream flows and cause flooding and erosion. Saltcedar occupies more than one million acres of western land today.

Saltcedar also competes with native plants, such as willow and cottonwood; sucks up twice the water that willow does; and draws salt from deep in the soil and deposits it on the surface, killing understory plants. It supports fewer insects than native vegetation, and fewer riparian-dependent migratory birds. Cows won't touch it, and it interferes with recreational access to public and private rivers and lakes. Herbicides and bulldozing have been ineffective because the tree grows back.

Supporters of the consortium include several water resource agencies and cities like Woodland, which has suffered frequent floods as a result of saltcedar infestation at Cache Creek. Other consortium members include UC Davis, Texas A&M University, New Mexico State University, University of Wyoming, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA/APHIS,

U.S. Geological service and other cooperators.

"This will be the most intensively researched biological control program ever conducted in the US or any other country to evaluate the success of an introduced insect in establishing and affecting a targeted weed, and to document the recovery process of riparian ecosystems impacted by non-indigenous pests," Dudley says.

WAS 2002

I know that it is a long way off, but the 2002 Conference of the Western Apicultural Society is going to be a bit different and one that you probably won't want to miss.

The Conference is going to be held in a small hotel/casino, the Biltmore, in Crystal Bay, on the North Shore of Lake Tahoe, from the afternoon of Monday, August 12th through Thursday evening, August 15th.

As President and Program Chair, I am trying to devote portions of the program to specific areas of interest including, Hive Products for Health, Honey Bee Behavior, Practical Beekeeping, and Honey Bee Research.

Our "meal away from home" will be a catered BBQ held at Sand Harbor, a Nevada State Park right on the beach. If you are interested in the theatrical play of the evening, you might

wish to get reservations to the outdoor Shakespeare presentation. You'll only have to walk about 100 yards to get to it.

There are all sorts of water activities at beaches along Lake Tahoe: sailing, kayaking, swimming, sunning, and fishing. There is hiking in the mountains, biking in the mountains, and just plain sight-seeing. We hope to be able to visit the UC Davis Lake Tahoe Research Group and get a little ride on their research vessel, the John LeConte.

The hotel is impressive. Meals in their restaurant are nearly too big to finish (if you know me, that has to be a lot of food). They have a downstairs (casino area) bar that has 30 micro-brews on tap. Ladies get a free margarita every night at the "Pub and Grill." Most nights there is free, live entertainment. And, you can park and live in your self-contained recreational vehicle for free.

When Helen tried out the "machines" they paid off pretty well. In fact the Muncneys have been know to leave Sparks, Nevada, skirt Reno, and go to the Biltmore to gamble, because, "It pays better."

We reserved a "block" of 55 rooms of various sizes and bed configurations. The least expensive (total \$69.84) are behind the casino and referred to as "carriage houses." Then prices climb to (\$99) for bigger rooms in the hotel, where

the casino (and elevator) is. Although the cut off for the rooms is July 12th, if you want a good choice of reduced rate rooms, you had better reserve one **NOW**. There won't be any available rooms in any of the casinos all summer, so you had better reserve one with us. You must give them the "Group Number" **0812WAS** when you call to get one of our rooms.

The number is 800-245-8667. If you make a reservation and decide not to come, you will not be charged for the room as long as you notify them up to three days before the conference.

Honey Poster

Is your office or your honey house a bit drab? It probably could use a beautiful color poster to brighten things up.

In this case I am referring to a honey-related poster, not the kind you get in the CD/video/record stores. The National Honey Board has printed an 18" (tall) X 24", "vibrant," full color poster featuring 12 queenline bottles of various, well-known U.S. honeys. Next to each honey jar is a picture of its nectar plant and a short description of where the honey is produced and what it tastes like according to participants on a sensory tasting panel.

A companion "Floral Source Guide" was published. It contains the same photos and information printed in an

elongated, horizontal, center-folded format that ends up being about 8" high and 11" wide, when folded. This item appears to have been designed to be a "give away" to your important clients. It contains additional "generic" information on honey.

Both of these items are available for purchase by anyone from the National Honey Board. Single copies of the poster cost \$5 and the guide \$1, including shipping and handling. Bulk orders, ten or more, get significant discounts - the posters drop to \$2.50 and the guides to \$0.75. Credit card orders will be handled at (800) 553-7162. Or checks can be sent, made payable to the

National Honey Board, to 390 Lashley Street, Longmont, CA 80501-6045. It may take 4-6 weeks for delivery.

Sincerely,

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