CENTRAL COAST BEEKEEPERS NEWSLETTER

June, 2026

NEXT MEETING July 16 2026

Join us on Thursday, June 18th at the Newport Extension office from 1:30 to 3:30pm to hear Charlie Vanden Heuvel, a Master Beekeeper through both the Oregon and Cornell University programs who will be giving us the latest methods for keeping our bees alive. His topic will be Integrated Pest Management, a more robust management program to reduce Varroa.

What is your spring varroa control plan?

by Dewey M. Caron

It has become obvious that we cannot reduce the stress that varroa mites cause to our honey bee colonies by starting our mite control in the fall. Although it is the dispersal (phoretic) mites feeding on colony adults or reproducing mites in capped pupae cells that we control, the real issue is that mites enable the spread of the deformed wing and paralysis viruses that lead to colony death. Most of you have had a chance to look at bees this spring. We MUST flatten the mite growth curve NOW as our bee colonies and the mite numbers start their spring expansion. Virtually all colonies are now rearing drones; some have started queen cells. There will be swarms from some colonies. Busy time for colony expansion and for the mites to expand too. A proactive plan should start NOW! Waiting until fall to control mites is too damaging. Control begins NOW! Removing drone brood should be in your plan. In the spring expansion, foundress mites select drone cells for reproduction. They can grow their population more rapidly as the two extra capped days of drone pupal development allow female foundress mites to produce 3 female offspring on average. In a worker cell, only one new female is produced.

Mites do not select drone cells at random, but we do not know exactly how a foundress female mite decides which drone cells to invade. Eliminating drones before they emerge (=Drone Brood Removal) will significantly limit the mite population growth as evidenced in several research studies. Female mites only have 3-5 brood rearing opportunities in their lifespan, so removing a capped drone cell significantly limits growth of the mite population. Using an organic acid (formic) or essential oil (Apiguard or ApiLifeVar) will also reduce the female mites dispersing on adult bees before they can enter a brood cell to reproduce. To keep mite numbers low, oxalic acid on extender pads (Varrroxsan) interferes with mite dispersal and limits reproductive success ensuring their growth rate is reduced. All these techniques, with exception of double strip Formic acid in one treatment,

cause minimal harm to the expanding bee population. Formic acid of one strip, followed by a second strip, is less likely to cause harm but it is also less effective against mites in capped cells. I have begun a Beekeeping Today Short Podcast series Bee Science with Dr Dewey Caron. The 3rd Wednesday segment of April 4th of the series has further details and literature to examine on effective spring mite control. The 3rd podcast discusses the essence of a proactive IPPM (Integrated Pest & Pollinator Management) mite control plan. Listen at: https://www.beekeepingtodaypodcast.com/

Swarm Management in Spring

by Dewey M. Caron

Swarming is a natural event in the lifecycle of honey bee colonies. A swarm may be a beginning with capture of a swarm or an end of the honey harvest. It is, for sure, a behavior that continues to baffle new and more experienced beekeepers. At its best, it is an interesting or amusing anecdote to share with other beekeepers. Everyone has a swarm story to relate. What category best describes you? Avid swarm capturer, a pro active beekeeper who focuses on “swarm prevention”, a “natural” beekeeper who never manages swarming or perhaps in your bee management, you seek to control swarming? No matter where on the spectrum of “Swarm Management” you started this season, the bees probably had you changing your options. Swarming started early this year, with uneven weather. Early April swarms were often large, and well worth hiving. It seemed every time we looked this spring, there was a colony with developing queen cells. Swarming proved once again to be both a risk - potential loss of bees – and an opportunity – to grow new colonies. Swarming is often characterized as a “swarming instinct” deeply ingrained in the biology of a honey bee colony - it is reproduction at the colony level. Swarming happens anytime in spring buildup. It is triggered by a combination

of internal factors – such as population growth, pheromonal changes, raising of drones, and the age or fertility of the queen – and its timing is often dependent upon environmental cues like increasing daylight and resource availability. Our beekeeping response is to apply educated decisions about the level of intervention deemed necessary. Colonies can expand so quickly we struggle to stay ahead of them during their spring development. Should we plan for possible interventions or enjoy their process and simply “let the bees swarm?” Regular inspections of the hive in spring are needed to spot the signs – the sooner we catch on to their swarming preparations, the greater our chances of reacting before the bees leave. As a bee colony grows stronger, the queen’s pheromone signals can become less effective at unifying thegrowing number of workers. This weakening of cohesion initiates a cascade of behaviors that culminates in workers building queen cells from cups. Ollowing this act, the queen’s egg-laying rate slows, bees start holding more honey in their honey stomachs, they raise more drones and scout bees start to explore the surrounding environment for potential new nest sites. The hive as a whole, the sum of individual worker behaviors, makes a swarming decision. It is one of nature’s most remarkable cooperative behaviors. So if we desire to manage to reduce swarming in spring development we start ‘late’ – once we see developing queen cells. Removing all queen cells or queen cell cups from a colony is not enough to halt swarming if it is performed as the only measure to prevent swarming. If the colony has already taken the decision to swarm, proceeding this way can result in a queenless colony. We have to immediately provide more space to avoid congestion and to store incoming nectar if you want to stop it. If the swarm has not yet left, consider splitting the hive. If the bees have already swarmed, the first step is to inspect the hive for remaining queen cells. Even if the bees have swarmed, the first actions taken after the event can help revive the hive of a departed swarm. Colonies that have already swarmed still have potential to recover. New queens will soon emerge and begin laying eggs, allowing the remaining bees to rebuild the colony. So halting swarming,

swarm remediation of a colony that has swarmed, or capturing swarm at bivouac. All part of spring management – sometimes all in the very same week. I have begun a Beekeeping Today Short Podcast series Bee Science with Dr Dewey Caron. The 3rd Wednesday segment of April 4th of the series has further details and literature to examine on effective spring mite control.