

The Monthly Extractor



Volume 40, Issue 2 February 2015

**Monthly Meeting: Feb. 9th-
6 p.m.** Come and chat with beekeepers, bring questions, meet cluster leaders, check out our library, buy plants and enjoy refreshments.
7 .m. Serge Labesque speaking on queen rearing and queen selection.

This is our newsletter that reflects the various techniques, theories and art of sustainable beekeeping.

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TIME TO RENEW? On the Membership page (http://www.sonomabees.org/membership/index.html), scroll down where there are three options and instructions for paying your membership: Online, New Member, and forms for payment in person or by mail with check or cash.	Check your membership. If you want to stay on the swarm list, you must be current in your dues! You can renew at the meeting or on line.

From Our President:

Greetings to you all!

The 2015 Board has been busy since our last newsletter. We had our first Retreat to get to know each other, plan and discuss our areas, and do some dreaming. There are some amazing, engaged, excited people on this Board! I feel very fortunate.

We are planning to do a Survey this year. It will be a two-part survey, to include Bee-related questions as well as Member-related questions. I look forward to seeing the results.

Are you considering volunteering for SCBA? If so, now would be a great time to reach out to your Cluster Leader and see if they need any help. If you haven't heard from your Cluster Leader... ..then it's possible you need to update your email address, renew your membership or sign the liability waiver. Speaking of memberships, make sure yours is up-to-date. If you have any questions about it or the Members Only website, please email 1stVP@sonomabees.org or visit the Membership table at our next meeting.

If you are able to attend the next meeting, don't forget the new **50/50 Raffle!!** You can buy 1 raffle ticket for \$1, or 6 for \$5. Half of the proceeds go to one lucky winner, and the other half go to SCBA. I swear this is not a rigged event, even though I won \$117 last month! ;)

Wishing you a beautiful February.

Laura Baker, President

My February Beekeeping To-Do List By Serge Labesque © 2015

Moisture in the hive

Live trees can provide bees with remarkably sound nest cavities, because they actively draw moisture out of the hollows. In addition, their leafy canopies offer protection from the intense summer sun. By comparison, many of our hives simply are heat and water traps.

To address these problems, I have made several modifications to my hives over the years, the most effective of which have been the addition of follower boards, increased upper ventilation slots, and insulated hive top feeders that create moisture-absorbing "attics". These improvements still let the bees easily regulate the immediate environment of their brood nests: temperature, relative humidity, and the level of carbon dioxide.

Excess in-hive moisture is probably one of the bees' worst enemies. And yet, it's the bees themselves that are the main source of water inside a hive through their metabolism. Cold and humid air outside the hive may influence foraging, but is not an issue here. For example, take a situation when it's 40 °F and the relative humidity (RH) is close to 100%, conditions that are common at night, in winter and early spring in our area. As the bees draw this air in to breathe, they must increase its temperature to nearly 94°F within the brood nest, or else the brood would be chilled. In itself, this temperature change could result in the relative humidity dropping to 20%, which is dangerously low for the eggs and young larvae, as they can become desiccated below 50% RH. Fortunately, as the bees generate heat by consuming honey, they also produce enough water vapor to protect the young brood from desiccation.

But this additional water vapor can also cause harm. Indeed, in order not to suffocate, the bees need to continuously bring fresh air into the brood nest. So, warmed air that is laden with water vapor and CO₂ constantly rises out of the cluster. It then rapidly cools down and releases the water it can no longer hold. This water condenses on all the interior surfaces of the hive that are cold, stores and combs included, since the bees do not heat them. When too much water condenses on the upper surfaces of the hives and on the combs that hold beebread and honey, the stores become mildewed, the honey may ferment, and cold water drips down onto the clustered bees. The spoiled food and the cold showers delay the development of the colony and, at times, may create bee health and nutritional problems. Live trees prevent these problems by pumping the detrimental excess moisture out of the bees' nests. Most manmade hives do not do this.

How much water a bee colony can produce inside its nest depends mainly on its size. It is easy to calculate that a decent-size colony may generate one half-cubic foot of water between December and the end of March from its stores and the nectar it may collect in early spring. This is the equivalent of almost four gallons of water or five inches of water that rains down onto the bees and combs of a colony that is overwintering on seven frames per super! You might say that it rains more inside our hives than onto our homes and gardens these days.

Two years ago, I removed the follower boards from two of my overwintering hives, and I shut their upper ventilation slots to see the difference they made. I could not have hoped for a clearer result than what I observed, even though both colonies ultimately paid dearly for it. It demonstrated to me that the hive configuration I normally use and recommend effectively eliminates the damaging effect of in-hive moisture. Yet, there is often a better way, and we need to be on the lookout for it. Our hives should perform at least as well as live trees do, even if different mechanisms are involved, don't you think?

February in the apiaries:

How are the bees doing nearing the end of this winter? The answer depends on where you look. This year, the disparity between apiary locations is blatantly evident. In places where the bees had access to nectar and pollen during the summer and fall (urbanized areas, expanses of land with irrigated melliferous crops, areas benefitting from the influence of the ocean or the Bay), the colonies promptly bounced back out of winter in January, and most are thriving. On the contrary, in areas where the vegetation depends heavily on rainfall, the effects of this long drought on the colonies have been disastrous. Even so, there are bees that are handling these tough conditions remarkably well.

Puzzling facts: Many beekeepers who keep bees in various locations have given reports of many hives that absconded in mid-winter. Few dead bees, plenty of stores, brood nests abandoned... The bees just left. What is going on?

Altogether, this year again brings a difficult situation, but it also presents us with an opportunity to toughen our local bee populations. Since the colonies that could not make it are gone, more than ever we

need to plan on propagating our resilient surviving colonies during the spring. Purchasing packages, nucs or queens from outside our immediate area would be a big mistake! Indeed, to obtain strong well-adapted local bee populations, we need to allow the genes of the surviving colonies to multiply, and the possibility of our young queens mating with drones that carry ill-adapted genetics should be avoided.

It's time to go see the bees. The hives that are found dead or empty need to be closed and removed from the apiaries. They will be examined to try to determine the cause of their failure and to decide what needs to be done with the equipment and the honey that may remain.

The observation of the bees at the hive entrances and the examination of the debris accumulated on the monitoring trays are still our main sources of information about the colonies at this time of year. The populations are still too small to permit detailed and lengthy open-hive inspections without harming them.

However, on a nice sunny day and when foragers are flying, cursory inspections of the top of the hives will help locate the brood nests. The colonies may need additional space to prevent the congestion of their brood nests. This is particularly true for overwintered nucs that hold young queens, as they can run out of space quite early. A super with a few frames that preferably hold empty drawn combs, and with two follower boards can be added above the brood nest. Alternatively, one or two frames may be inserted between the follower boards and the outer frames. This will provide space for the expansion of the bee population and for the storage of incoming nectar. This is a manipulation that can be done in less than a minute, as we do not break clusters or examine the brood nests at this time of year.

As spring approaches and the brood nests are growing, the bees consume their stores faster. So, the risk of starvation increases. The amount of stores left in the hives may be estimated by hefting them, but the situation may also become dangerous when tightly clustered bees are no longer in direct contact with their stores.

There will probably not be a summer honey flow this year in the dry interior hills of the county, where I keep bees. But will there even be a spring flow? For this to happen, the annual plants that are normally the main sources of spring nectar and pollen need some rain to grow. Unfortunately, at this point in time this year looks frighteningly like the previous ones. This is another reason to keep planting bee forage. Although it has been said that it does not make "economic" sense to plant for bees, most of us, who do not make a living from keeping bees, should add a few bee plants here and there. The bees are telling us that it's time to repair the damage that has been done to our environment.

In summary, this month:

- Inspect the exterior condition of the hives:
 - Verify that hive tops are still properly set and secured.
 - Observe the landing boards and the ground in front of the hives.
 - Verify that the hive entrances remain unobstructed.
 - On nice days, observe the flight paths and the bee activity. Maintain adequate and safe ventilation through the hives. Adjust the entrance reducers, if necessary.
- Examine the debris on the monitoring trays.
- Lift the back of the hives to feel if the colonies are running low on stores.
- Take care of or dispose of the equipment that held colonies that failed, as appropriate.
- Perform cursory inspections of the upper part of the hives on a sunny windless day.
- Place supers with a few frames of empty drawn comb and follower boards, where needed.
- Keep the upper ventilation slots open.
- Build and repair beekeeping equipment.
- Plan for spring.
- Plant bee forage.

Serge Labesque © 2015

Beekeeping Classes at Santa Rosa Junior College- Instructor Serge Labesque

Introduction to Beekeeping

Section #9045

Tue, February 3 through February 24, 2015, 6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

2009 Lark Hall

Santa Rosa Campus

Course fee: \$90

Intermediate Beekeeping for spring and summer

Section #9044

Tue, March 3 and March 10, 2015, 6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

2009 Lark Hall

Santa Rosa Campus

Course fee: \$57

These classes are presented through SRJC Community Education

To register

This can be found at: <https://portal.santarosa.edu/CommunityEducation/Information.aspx>

The options are:

- Online
- By phone: (707) 527-4372 during regular business hours
- By mail: with a check sent to Community Education Registration, 1501 Mendocino Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95401
- By fax: (707) 522-2731

Or in person at Community Education

Bee Plants of the Month By Alice Ford-Sala

Native Plant of the Month Dudleya Stone-crop (Crassulaceae) Family

Drought tolerant? Check. Easy to care for? Check. Attractive in a container garden? Check. A rock garden favorite? Check. Stunning cascading down a dry hillside? Check. What is this plant that also goes by the alias Live-forever? Why, it is our own native Dudleya, a succulent plant that comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. One of my favorites is chalk dudleya ,D. pulverulenta. It has blue-green fleshy leaves that have a whitish powder that help it survive dry summers on a cliffside. Bees and hummingbirds visit the red flowers that are borne on tall stalks. D. brittoni is a dramatically interesting variety, native to Baja California. The rosettes can grow up to 1½ feet wide. The flowers, also borne on tall stalks are deep red that fade to yellowish orange. In our wild California, they receive no water in summer, so you can safely neglect them all summer long. In winter, they can take rain, but they do not like standing water or cold damp air, so plant them in a well-drained, sunny or partially shady location. There are many more varieties, so look them up at your local native plant nursery to find some suitable for your microclimate.

Beneficial Plant of the Month Hawthorn Crataegus Rosaceae family

The hawthorn family has many attractive and useful members, but please don't plant the classic English hawthorn, C.monogyna, as it is invasive in some wild lands, crowding out natives. A nice and very bee-friendly native is C. douglasii, western hawthorn. This plant can grow up 6 to 20 feet tall, trained as a small tree or a multi-trunked shrub. The foliage is dark apple green in summer and rosy orange in fall. The flowers are white clusters of tiny flowers that bees happily visit throughout the spring. The tiny red apple-shaped berries are nutritious for your feathered friends. They do have thorns; so think about where you want to plant them- as a hedgerow, like they do in Europe? They will deter unwanted visitors if planted as a living fence. You can also plant them as a small street tree, or in a lawn. Hawthorns grow alongside creeks and streams, and need some moderate water but not standing soggy soil.

Bee Symposium at U.C. Davis By Doug Vincent and The Organizers

This year's Symposium will be at UC Davis, May 9th. The main focus is "Keeping Bees Healthy". All the info is here - <https://registration.ucdavis.edu/Item/Details/147> Spaces are going quickly so do not wait to sign up if you want to go.

\$75 includes breakfast and lunch plus reception after. There is a BIG discount for ANY student. Students should copy and paste the special coupon on the registration page.

We are excited that the Robert Mondavi Institute for Honey and Pollination has continued our Bee Symposium! I am sure they will do a great job. Here is more information from U.C. Davis:

Saturday, May 9, 2015 at 8:00am to 6:30pm

Keynote Speaker: Marla Spivak, Distinguished McKnight Professor, University of Minnesota, 2010 MacArthur Fellow

Presented by the Honey and Pollination Center at the Robert Mondavi Institute and the Department of Entomology and Nematology

Additional Speakers Include: Christine Casey, Brian Johnson, Elina Lastro Niño, Amy Toth, Neal Williams
Continental breakfast, lunch, and post-event reception included:

- General Admission: \$75 • Students: \$15 (must have valid student id)

About the Minutes of Meetings

The board of directors agreed that the board minutes are important but perhaps not frequently read by the membership and other readers of our newsletter. Therefore it was decided to make them available to those of you who are interested to go to the link provided if you want to learn what the board is doing for you. We had a board retreat in January to think about the future of SCBA. Those minutes are also available going to the link provided. Our general meeting minutes are educational and helpful to the many members who cannot attend so we have decided to continue including them in the newsletter. Let us know if you have any opinions, positive or negative about these decisions. We value your input.

Minutes of Board of Directors – Go to
Minutes of the BOD Retreat – Go to

Treasurer's Report February 1, 2015 By Treasurer Denise Wright

The combined bank account totals are \$26,455.34. Membership dues are coming in steadily early this year, \$3151.84 this month. Your timely payment helps us plan for the year, so thank you!

New this year is our monthly meeting 50/50 raffle. The raffle brought in \$122 for our association in January and the same amount to the winner!

We are working with a budget for 2015 of \$21,505. You are welcome to email me (treasurer@sonomabees.org) to receive a copy of the yearly budget and/or the monthly report that I present to the Board showing the current month's income and expenses.

Minutes of General Meeting January 12, 2015

SCBA General Meeting
January 12, 2015

7:10 pm meeting called to order by President Laura Baker wishing everyone a Happy New Bee Year! About 65 present.

Laura was born and raised in Santa Rosa and has been studying beekeeping for 5 years, with active hives the last 2 years. She and the Board welcome suggestions to improve SCBA. A survey will be done this year of the membership.

The new 2015 Board was introduced:

President- Laura Baker, president@sonomabees.org
1st VP Membership- Kelli Maciel, 1stVP@sonomabees.org
2nd VP Meetings & Events- Ettamarie Peterson, 2ndVP@sonomabees.org
Secretary- Becky Jackson, secretary@sonomabees.org
Treasurer- Denise Wright, treasurer@sonomabees.org
Volunteers- Cathy Kopshever, volunteer@sonomabees.org
Education- Jen Espinoza, education@sonomabees.org
At Large 1- Cheryl Veretto, atLarge1@sonomabees.org
At Large 2- Chris Conrad, atLarge2@sonomabees.org
At Large 3- John McGinnis, atLarge3@sonomabees.org
Regional Coordinator- Thea Vierling, regionalcoordinator@sonomabees.org
with Christine Kurtz co-chairing with Thea.

John McGinnis introduced and explained a new fundraiser at each meeting: the 50/50 raffle. Buy your tickets and a name will be drawn at the close of the meeting. The winner gets half of the total money collected, and SCBA gets the other half. (Laura Baker was the lucky winner tonight of \$100).

Christine Kurtz reported that the Silent Auction earned a profit of \$9000, which was \$4000 more than last year! Thanks to everyone who helped make it a success.

Swarm Chairman, John Krafft gave pre-meeting class on swarm etiquette. To be on the Swarm List, you must 1) be a member. 2) Talk to John and attend an orientation. If you were on the list last year, you are automatically on again this year if your membership is current. If it lapses, you will have to contact John to be reinstated.

A question came from Joan about establishing a bee yard in a brackish environment (Petaluma River bank). April Lance provided an answer, recommending that a fresh water source be made available for the bees.

Ettamarie introduced speaker Rob Keller. His topic was on SWARMS.

Rob has 15 years beekeeping experience and owns the Napa Valley Bee Company.

- Bees have a biological and physical need to swarm.
- The general public fears bee swarms.
- Beekeepers should educate bystanders when they go to collect swarms.
- Rob uses a piece or two of clean new comb in the swarm box to optimize their desire to stay there and not take off. Don't use old nasty comb.
- Rob treats swarms as an 'incubator' colony. 1-2 weeks after hiving them, he takes the frames of bees, stores, and larvae and gives them a queen cell. He puts the old swarm queen in a nuc to evaluate and see how she does.
- Collect the swarm by nudging the box with comb up to the cluster to let them walk in, rather than banging them into the box.
- When you get a swarm call ask the caller 1) How high is it? 2) Do I need a ladder? and 3) Can I cut the limb they're on?
- Rob feeds the new colony sugar syrup at first to get them started.
- Natural swarming provides a break in the brood cycle to reduce/eliminate Varroa mites.
- Don't leave your dead-out hives hoping to catch a swarm in them. Clean the dead-outs, and then provide a clean bait hive.
- Cutouts or extractions from a building, if possible, he doesn't take all the comb and bees, but leaves half there with the old queen. Then he puts a queen cell in his cutout half. Later, he repeats the process to get another 1 or 2 hives from the colony in the wall.
- If Rob sees his hives get huge mite loads, and curly wing virus, he will remove those bees to another yard and break it's brood cycle. He says having hives 50-100 feet apart lessens the spread of mites through hive drift.

The 50/50 Raffle names were drawn, with the first one getting the cash (Laura Baker) then called names for a variety of other prizes (bottle of wine, tee shirts).

Respectfully submitted,
Becky Jackson, secretary

Regional Cluster News By Thea Vierling

Regional Groups are busy, busy, busy!

Regional groups are having their equipment workshops, which includes hive setup, frame choices, bottom boards, feeders and cleaning of equipment. The workshops are well attended and well received. They have been amazing. Don't wait to find out about your workshops; e-mail your cluster leaders! Hopefully you know their email addresses by now!

Here are some photos taken at the workshops.

Central cluster also discussed equipment making and cleaning.



Chris Conrad is shown here cleaning out the propolis and old wax from a frame.



East cluster has experts Lizanne, Nadya and Christine discussing hive components.



South Cluster, leader Sally McGough, has Christine Kurtz discussing bottom boards! Also Ettamarie showed how to use skewers, yes wooden Bar-B-Que skewers, to strengthen the wax in a frame. South Cluster had lots of questions.

North cluster did a great honey tasting event at the Pedroncelli winery. Yes they did one in December but this one was even better. Here is a nice picture of the cluster leader, Lynne Black, with 3 members: Julie Dilly, Marilyn, and Denny Pederson.



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A detailed black and white illustration of a traditional skep beehive, which is a dome-shaped structure made of woven straw or similar natural materials. The beehive is surrounded by some foliage at its base.

Old bee hives and old campaign posters can be made into new nuc boxes, perfect for swarms!



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Regular monthly meetings of the Sonoma County Beekeepers' Association are held on the second Monday of each month, at 7 pm. The meetings cover a wide range of topics of interest to beekeepers. Everyone wanting to learn about honeybees is cordially invited to attend. You do not need to be a member nor a beekeeper to attend these meetings. Dues can be paid online at our website sonomabees.org, at our monthly meeting or by mail. Please see our web site for the application and various kinds of memberships available.

Our mailing address is
Sonoma County Beekeepers' Assoc.
P.O. Box 98
Santa Rosa, CA 95402-0098

2014 Board Members and Other Helpful People

Pres. Laura Baker President@sonomabees.org

Past Pres. Ettamarie Peterson pastpresident@sonomabees.org

1st Vice Pres. Membership Kelli Cox— 1stVP@sonomabees.org

2nd Vice President Ettamarie Peterson – 2ndVP@sonomabees.org - 707 479-1613

Secretary – Becky Jackson - Secretary@sonomabees.org

Treasurer Denise Wright Treasurer@sonomabees.org

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Reps. at Large –Cheryl Veretto atLarge1@sonomabees.org, Chris Conrad

atLarge2@sonomabees.org, John McGinnis atLarge3@sonomabees.org

Volunteer Coordinator – Cathy Kopshever volunteer@sonomabees.org

Editor Ettamarie Peterson – Editor@sonomabees.org 765-4582

Swarm Chairperson- John Krafft swarms@sonomabees.org

Webmaster- Cheryl Veretto Webmaster@sonomabees.org

Education- Jen Espinoza – education@sonomabees.org

Historian – Kirstie Stramler historian@sonomabees.org

Extractor Techs- Call Ettamarie 707-479-1613 or Janet Leisen 707- 528-2085 or Denny Pederson e-mail denny1@sonic.net to rent the electric extractor for \$5 a day. Rental fee is \$5 per day. Denny is located in Forestville. Janet is North of Santa Rosa. Ettamarie is in Petaluma. There is a hand extractor at Deborah Rogers' home and her e-mail is deborah@olivequeen.net She lives in Glen Ellen.

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