

The Monthly Extractor

Volume 40, Issue 10

October 2015



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

This Month's Calendar:

Monthly Meeting

Oct. 12 – Brad Pankratz, President of the California State Beekeepers' Association. Learn what CSBA does for all the beekeepers in our state. SCBA is a member of this association.

From Our President

Happy fall, Bee Lovers!

The leaves are changing and so has the weather! We've even had some rain, with the prospect of big(ger) rains. It's that time when we check our hives and ready them for the winter ahead.

With the end of the year nearing, it is that time, when the SCBA looks for the next year's Busy Bees – we are looking to fill the SCBA Board! Please see below for a listing of the various Board positions. We have 5 "official" board positions that must be filled, plus other positions where the position-holder can decide whether they want to be on the board or not. This allows for flexibility for the Association as well as our precious volunteers.

Here is a listing of the positions. We will have an open election at the December meeting, but I've listed positions where the current representative has volunteered for another year (thank you to them!):

Board Positions

- President
- Membership (1st Vice President)
- Speakers (2nd Vice President)
- Secretary – (Becky Jackson has volunteered for another year)
- Treasurer

Important Positions

Board status as determined by Position-Holder

- Education – (Jen Espinoza has volunteered for another year)
- Regional Coordinator
- Volunteers - (Cathy Kopshever has volunteered for another year)
- At Large – If you are excited to see something accomplished with SCBA, but it doesn't fit in one of the other roles, you can run for an At Large position.

Would you be willing to lend your time to the SCBA? It's a fabulous group of people committed to an especially wonderful cause, the honeybee. How can you say no!?

If you are interested, please approach any current board member.

Wishing you a beautiful month,

Laura Baker, President

From Our Editor

Sharing

Just as these two bees are sharing a cosmos you can be sharing your time and talent with the board of SCBA. As our President Laura Baker says we have to get some new board members for 2016. If each of you thinks about your own skills, you will know you can be useful. We need people who can think of and arrange good programs, recruit others to speak or volunteer at schools, take minutes, keep track of membership, or just be part of the team as a member-at-large.



Ettamarie Peterson, Editor

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My October

Beekeeping To-Do List by Serge Labesque

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Beekeeping notes

Tough love

This year, most of my colonies are low on stores at the onset of fall. Although this did not come as a surprise, because of the prolonged and severe nectar dearth that persists around my apiaries, it is nonetheless a worrisome fact. However, some hives have remarkably more supplies than others even though all my bees are essentially located in the same environment, hived in the same equipment, and subjected to the same management. The difference is evidently made by the bees.

What am I to do? Feed them? Move them to better pastures?

Absolutely not! Bees are not domesticated animals. Their colonies should be self-sufficient. The bees that live inside tree hollows do not depend on beekeepers to transport them to the flows or bring them sugar syrup and pollen substitute patties. They are on their own, and they have to survive on whatever food sources they have access to. If they cannot, they will be eliminated; plain and simple; it's how the process of natural selection works. It's also what makes adaptation of the bees to their local conditions so valuable. No matter how harsh this may seem, we must recognize that this process has brought us a strong honey bee species that has successfully faced all sorts of challenges over many millions of years.

The vigor of bee populations has been declining ever since beekeepers started treating them like pets or like cattle. The explanation is simple: Whenever beekeepers intervene by feeding their colonies or by treating them for pests or diseases, they artificially keep alive elements of the species that are inept and that nature would normally have disposed of. As a consequence of such interventions, unfit colonies can produce drones and swarms, and therefore disseminate undesirable genes, which all the surrounding colonies are at risk of receiving. Because nowadays most beekeepers all over the world interfere similarly with the process of natural selection, it's the bee species as a whole that is deeply affected, wounded in its genetic make-up. When beekeepers feed or treat their colonies, which is done to satisfy humans' selfish interests, the bees pay for this by losing their innate strength. Yes, you read me well: I stated that the beekeepers that feed and medicate their hives contribute to the weakening of the species. I, too, have made these mistakes in the beginning, because I was taught that we need to do everything we can to keep our colonies alive and fed. From the selfless perspective of the bees, this is simply wrong!

So, what am I going to do with my bees, this fall? I'll give them a chance to make it on their own with what they have, nothing more, nothing less than if they lived in trees. This is not neglect! It's good stewardship of the species in respect of nature's laws. I'll try not to be detrimental to the bees, and I'll do the best I know to manage

the equipment and the space I give them. The hives they live in will be as good and sound as any nesting cavities they might have found in live trees. This is my primary responsibility as a beekeeper. I accept that my colonies and my beekeeping operation are less important in the grand scheme of things than the species. For this reason, I must learn to let go of colonies that are unfit, no matter how emotionally trying this may be.

October in the apiaries

The flight paths in front of the hives are busy, filled with foragers that are frantically coming and going. It's the colonies' last chance to gather stores for winter. In a few days, in a few weeks at most, these summer bees will have done all they could to secure a future for their colonies, and they will be gone.

At times, yellowjackets mingle nervously with the foragers and attempt to enter the hives to prey on the brood or bees. We reduce the size of the hive entrances to allow the guard bees to defend them effectively. Excessively large entrances at this time of year expose the colonies to the danger these insects present and to the heightened risk of robbing.

Meanwhile, inside the tightly packed brood chambers, younger bees are nurturing brood. The size of the brood nests has shrunk while they were being driven gradually downwards and closer to the hive entrances by the deposition of nectar in cells vacated by emerging bees and by the relocation of uncapped honey from more distant combs. Now, every cell of the brood chambers that does not contain a developing bee holds pollen, nectar, or honey. The heater bees will consume this stashed nectar and honey to keep the brood at the warm temperature of 94°F during the fall nights, which are becoming longer and cooler.

Because they are finding fewer and fewer empty cells where they can lay their eggs, the queens are forced to slow down. Towards the end of the month, most of the brood will be capped, in pupation. Its quantity will be a good indication of the future winter bee clusters.

There are several advantages to this natural constriction of the fall brood nests, and we do well by managing our colonies accordingly: One advantage is that it may lead to a period of broodlessness that will allow the colonies to gain control over the mite populations; another is that the winter bees will be spared the life-shortening duties of nursing brood at an early age; the queens will have a chance to rest before resuming egg-laying later on in the winter; and the colonies will overwinter on less stores, a consideration that is important in a year such as this, where the bees did not have access to ample food.

The stores that are accumulated above the brood nests deserve particular attention. A solid mass of capped honey is not the best. In their centers, there should be some beebread. Usually, we find it covered by a glaze

of honey. The bees left it in place as they moved the brood nests downwards in the hives. Oftentimes, uncapped honey has been placed in the cells that were left vacant by emerging bees.

These combs should not be removed or relocated, because the bees will consume their contents in January or February to feed their burgeoning brood nests, especially when poor weather prevents foraging for fresh pollen. Because that is where the first brood of the year will be raised, these combs should comprise mostly worker-size cells.

If we combined or requeened hives at the end of summer, we need to verify without delay that these manipulations were successful, or act promptly to make any corrections that may be necessary.

Heeding the bees, I make my hives more compact in early fall by removing unused, old and misshaped combs, bringing the follower boards closer together, and, should I be so lucky, by harvesting surplus honey. Although leaving a little extra honey is safer for the bees than harvesting too much, it is good to understand that leaving unnecessarily large masses of honey in the hives will tend to penalize the colonies at the end of winter, when it has become cold. Therefore, I aim to leave about 35 pounds of honey in fully developed colonies that have large brood nests at the end of October. Younger colonies and those that have smaller brood nests are left proportionately less honey, as little as 15 pounds for nuc-size colonies. Knowing that a deep Langstroth frame and a medium normally hold respectively five and three pounds of honey, it's easy to gauge the amount of honey a hive contains by counting the number of frames or their equivalent in partially filled frames.

Going into winter, I like to configure my hives so that they are rather narrow and relatively tall instead of wide and squat. This ensures that the clustered bees do not drift away from their stores during the winter. Large colonies are left in stacks of supers that have seven frames at most. I frequently place nuc-size colonies in two supers that carry four frames each, the brood nests being in the lower ones and most of the stores in the upper levels. I use follower boards in all the supers to do this. This configuration creates wide air gaps between the sides of the hives and the follower boards, which permits a gentle movement of air convection that keeps excess moisture away from the bees and their stores during periods of cold weather.

In the upper part of my hives, I use hive top feeders that are filled with dry lavender. These "attics" greatly improve the conditions inside the hives for the bees. The lavender mats absorb moisture and provide insulation that prevents the condensation of water vapor against the ceil-

ings of the hives, and its subsequent dripping on the bees. The hives are closed with lids that include screened vents to allow excess moisture to exit. Finally, telescoping tops are secured to prevent the wind from lifting them.

Having done all of this by the end of the month, I make sure that the mouse guards are in place and I install clean monitoring trays under the screens of the hive bottoms. These will be my "communication boards" with the bees during the next months. The colonies are now housed in good quarters and ready to face inclement weather. Barring any emergency, I will not open or disturb the hives until January or February of next year, but I'll nonetheless keep

a watchful eye on them.

Although this was a challenging year in my apiaries, I am already looking forward to next year, which, in the apiaries, begins now.

In summary, this month:

- Assess colonies, their health, queens, brood nests and stores. Verify that they are queenright.
- Check how the bees have organized their brood chambers and how the stores are packed around them. Ensure that there is some comb with empty cells, uncapped honey and pollen centered above the brood nests, surrounded by honey.
- Combine or requeen hives that are not performing satisfactorily (early in the month). Better yet, reduce their volume to strengthen them.
- Adjust the volume of the hives to match individual colony strength and needs.
- Remove old and misshapen combs (follower boards greatly facilitate this).
- Early in the month, configure hives for the consolidation of honey stores (Scratching the cappings of patches of poorly located sealed honey helps.)
- Harvest, extract and bottle only surplus honey.
- Render wax from discarded frames and from cappings
- Return wet frames and cappings to the bees for cleaning (by placing them above hive top feeders or inner covers).
- Watch out for yellow jackets and any instances of robbing. Reduce the entrances of the hives that are threatened.
- Ensure that hives are adequately ventilated.
- Install mouse guards and reduce hive entrances.
- Routinely clean and torch tools and equipment.
- Store unused equipment to protect it from wax moth or mouse damage, and from the weather.
- Secure the hive tops against high winds.



In Memorium: Kathy Emery

It is with great sadness that I have to share with all our members that Kathy Emery died in September. She was a strong member of SCBA. She volunteered at many events and was the person who started our popular refreshment time making many goodies for her fellow beekeepers. She inspired others to help with refreshments and volunteering at events.

Bee Plants of the Month

By Alice Ford-Sala

Herb of the Month:

Cilantro/ Coriander *Coriandrum Sativum*

Family Apiaceae (Umbelliferae)

When you harvest the leaves of this pungent herb, it is called Cilantro. When you harvest the seeds, it is Coriander. But don't let this slight confusion keep you from running out right now and planting some seeds directly in the ground! I used to struggle to keep cilantro growing long enough to harvest, thinking it was frost sensitive. As you may know if you have grown it in the summer, it bolts (flowers) quickly, almost before you've had a chance to make salsa. I learned that now is the time to plant it, when the weather cools and the rains come. Cilantro does not transplant well, so prepare the soil by pulling weeds and cultivating lightly, then sow the seeds, covering lightly with soil and pressing firmly into the ground. If the rains aren't regular enough to keep the soil moist while the seeds are germinating, sprinkle the seedbed with water every couple of days.



Cilantro/Coriander

It will grow all through the fall and winter, and then you can let it flower in the spring. Bees and beneficial wasps are highly attracted to the sweet smelling white blossoms. You can save some seeds to use in cooking, and to replant. It will self-seed with rain or irrigation.

The leaves are commonly used in Mexican and Chinese dishes such as sauces, salads, soups, or made into a pesto sauce—yummy with pumpkin soup!

The roots can also be harvested and used in place of garlic. The seeds, which taste quite different from the leaves, are often ground and used in Indian cuisine; it is part of the spice blend Garam Masala. It is widely used in Middle Eastern cooking, also. The seeds are often included in pickling spice blends. Coriander/cilantro is said to have anti-bacterial properties, as well as being useful for insulin regulation, prevents nausea and aids in digestion.

Native Plant of the Month:

Wild Flowers

Now is the time to plant wildflower seeds! The best way to prepare the ground is to pull/hoe weeds from the area you wish to plant. Hopefully you didn't let them go to seed so you don't have too much competition from weed seeds. The first rains should sprout those weeds, and then you can get rid of them. Rake the soil and then scatter your wildflower seeds. I usually mix a blend of seeds with some potting soil and then cast the mix onto the ground. It makes it easy to identify where you sowed the seed, and the fine soil helps with germination. Pressing the soil with your feet or a board helps the seeds germinate better as they have more contact with the ground and moisture. I put screens over where I planted to keep the cats and birds out.

Here's some easy to grow bee-friendly wildflowers:

Clarkia (amoena, bottsae, concinna unguiculata) Farewell to Spring, Punch bowl godetia, Red ribbons, Elegant Clarkia
Family Onagraceae - Evening Primrose This pretty family is easy to grow, the flowers range from cup shaped to long ribbon petals. Some are light pink or purple, others dark pink or red. Bees enjoy the late-spring blossoms. It re-seeds easily.

Eschscholzia Californica California Poppy Family Poppy -Papaveraceae

Here's our beautiful state flower that blankets whole hillsides and blooms along roads in the spring. Bees will visit the flowers repeatedly during the day when the flowers open in the sun. I love it when I see them bringing in the bright orange pollen to nourish the spring brood. Besides the classic orange poppy, there are red, white, purple and even pink cultivars.

Gilia (capitata, tricolor) Globe gilia, Bird's eye gilia Family Phlox-Polemoniaceae
Globe gilia is easy to grow and is a nice contrast to California poppy with its blue round heads. Bird's eye gilia has larger flowers (and blue pollen!) and the outer edges are dark purple.

Phacelia (tanacetifolia, campanularia, minor, viscida)
Tansy Leaf Phacelia, Desert bluebells, California bells, Sticky Phacelia Family Waterleaf-Hydrophyllaceae
Phacelia used to be planted in orchards in California for the bees to work on after the fruit trees had stopped blooming. It would be nice to have some at least in hedgerows or fallow ground in our modern orchards. Bees do love these beautiful blue blossoms. They range from light blue to indigo with intricate markings on the inside of the petals.

There's lots more bee-friendly wildflowers to plant, good resources are:

Gordon Frankie's Urban Bee Garden
<http://nature.berkeley.edu/urbanbeegardens/index.html>

Pollinator Partnership
<http://pollinator.org/bff.htm>



Bee headed into a California poppy
by Ettamarie Peterson

December 8 Silent Auction

By Christine Kurtz

Thea Vierling and Christine Kurtz are patiently awaiting your lovely donations! So far we have gotten some great homemade wine, a honey extractor with a honey bucket and filter, 2 complete hive set ups, a lovely framed picture of hives in France, a full bee suit, candle making paraphernalia, knick knock that we can put in theme baskets, some t-shirts, a candle holder with beeswax candles. Last year we collected over 100 items and we had an amazing auction. We need your help to make this one just as amazing. Please help us gather some donations. Can you ask your favorite restaurant, your hairdresser or a business you frequent? It does not have to be bee related, after all we bring our spouses to these events that might not be as bee crazed as we are. Do you know someone who has a craft or is an artist? Do you make or craft things yourself. And wine...we always like wine or mead too. Do you own a winery or know a wine maker or perhaps a brewery or beer maker. We always make a couple of kid bee related themed baskets do you have a book, a toy, stickers or anything we can put together. Anything about cooking or gardening, most of us those are our other hobbies. Your extra bee trinkets, if you've been into bees for awhile, you know you have way too many of those gifted to you during the holidays and birthdays, are you ready to clean out and pass them on? Anyway you catch our drift, the possibilities are endless. We even got cash a few times. Looking forward to hearing from you. We can e-mail you an auction request form. To minimize us driving all around Sonoma County please coordinate if you can with your cluster leaders or you can always bring donations to the general meeting. Remember there is a lot of work behind the scene (and it's happening through all the holidays). We have to figure out how to display, how and what to group together, make bid sheets, figure out how to store everything, paper work, endless hours on the computer etc... so if you can refrain yourself to be last minute we'll love you that much more.

We are a 501 3c educational foundation and are tax deductible. You can reach Thea at regionalcoordinator@sonomabees.org or Christine at auction@sonomabees.org. You can also call Christine at 849-3220.

Here are some photos from last year's auction. You can see the variety of items that were donated and how they were displayed.



BEE WISE:

“LIVING WITH A BEEKEEPER”

by Emery Dann

Every beekeeper is unique—non-beekeepers might say it differently! “Normal people” do not play with stinging insects of any kind. They know better! Beekeepers keep bees for different reasons, but one reason is NOT to annoy their non-beekeeping family members, no matter what they may think. As beekeepers, we can unintentionally annoy those close to us! Now take, for instance, our family dog...

Our dog is a fast learner! She has been “bee trained”! She once was curious... “What is inside those wooden boxes?” She would stick her nose up to the entrance. No more! She now makes a quick 180-degree turn whenever she even sees a beehive. She has very good hearing and knows that stings can follow the buzz! The bees on duty said, “That’s a black bear with a wagging tail!” “Defend!” Now I have to threaten her with her “death” to get her into my pick up when there are a few bees inside the cab...I tell her, “They won’t hurt you” (have you non-beekeepers heard that before?)! Our dog just tilts her head and looks at me, as if to say, “Are you out of your mind?” Our dog is not the only one who has questioned my “bee insanity”! I am talking about other family members. Now don’t get me wrong, my family have all been in bee suits and helped me working a few times with wild honey bees. Where many of us beekeepers would say, “I would love to help you in a cloud of bees buzzing around up close and personal...” Not everyone feels the same way, for some very good reasons!

I have made bee mistakes that affect my family! Beekeepers don’t always make time to do everything they need to do...and so we may leave “honey trails” behind us. Honey and wax on the stove, floor, or doorknobs--fingers get sticky. Shoes make unimaginable suction noises every time they release from honey on the floor! But the biggest reactions from my family happen when live flying bees “mysteriously” show up inside our home, garage, or the vehicle we are driving! Everyone knows WHO is responsible (ME), including our dog!!!

In fact, I have learned that cleanup and keeping bees where they belong (outside) is very important to my own health! Like the joke where a woman was asked if she ever considered divorce? She said... “Divorce never... murder, yes!” Let’s face it, most non-beekeepers did not sign up or dream how their lives would change when their loved one became a beekeeper! They had no idea of the meaning of “swarm calls”, how their bathroom would be used, or that THEY could get stung, or that they would hear more about bees than they ever wanted to know! Most of those close to us eventually do tolerate our beekeeping--from a distance. Bring in another jar of honey for the family. “Here is what the bees made for you, how do you like it?” This does not convince our dog!

I am poking fun at myself here! Just like our dog, the phrase non-beekeepers often think is—“Are you out of your mind?” When I bought my first nuc and was transferring it into a hive box, my family was watching me (from the inside of the house) run around the neighborhood in my veil after dark when I thought I was being chased by angry bees. “Look—there goes Dad, the bees are chasing him!” What happened was a lonely bee crawled up INSIDE my veil and when she realized where she was, she buzzed furiously! She wanted to get out of my veil as much as I wanted to get away from her. I thought I was being chased by an unknown number of bees in the dark! Too close for a new beekeeper. With all of my many bee adventures, I am thankful to still have a family and a dog that loves me (most of the time)!

Sonoma County Beekeepers’ Association

General Meeting Minutes **September 14, 2015**

Held at the Rohnert Park 4-H Building, about 60 present.

President, Laura Baker opened with thanks to the Heirloom Festival helpers and organizers. Also a shout-out to Thea (still on vacation) for organizing the wildly successful Sam Comfort workshops. She announced that elections are coming up and Board positions need to be filled. They will be listed in the next Extractor. Contact Laura if you are interested in stepping into a leadership position.

Cathy Kopshever, Volunteer Coordinator announced an Oct. 10 event at Shone Farm if anybody would like to staff a SCBA table there.

Christine Kurtz announced the SILENT AUCTION coming up in December. Items are needed now to make it even better than last year’s. Email her at auction@sonomabees.org

The 50/50 raffle earned \$78 to a lucky ticket holder. John McGinnis asked for someone to head the raffle sales next year, as he will step down.

Kelli Cox, Membership VP introduced new members/visitors by having them stand and say a little about themselves. I counted 9 visitors tonight.

Please be patient with the new website and with emailed queries. There are many people involved, including Linda Hale, Chris Dicker, Kaiya, and Kelli.

Dues will go up for 2016 to \$30 individual, \$40 Family, and \$60 Business. Those renewing before the end of the year will get the old 2015 rate. Everyone's expiration date will be Dec. 31. If you signed up after July 1st this year, your membership will extend through the entire next year! What a bonus!

Chris Conrad next led the Gadget Night and invited people up to share.

- Robert Sterler from Cazadero showed his home-made hive bottoms with lots of built-in conveniences.
- Christine Kurtz showed her improved hive stand. She will put dimensions in the newsletter.
- Leonard showed a PTFH (plumber's tape frame holder).
- John McGinnis showed improved ant moats for hive stand legs using Ziploc containers and pie tins.
- Jean showed using a twist tie on the end of a monitor board with a knot in it to help pull it out. She also showed a wasp trap using a milk jug with holes and a skewer to hold bait over soapy water. She recommends raw bacon as the bait.
- Roger showed an entrance reducer with screwed on flip pieces. It's a mouse guard too. He also showed shaved cork rafts for syrup feeders, and using thin dowels instead of wiring frames.
- Jim Grant showed rubber band (from inner tubes) 'gaskets' to seal gaps around 2 imperfectly seated hive bodies. Can use exercise bands too.
- Will Ackley told of removing yellow jackets from a wine barrel. He had to wear 3 layers of clothes with rain gear on top of that. The stings weren't able to penetrate that final layer.
- Nadya Clark showed that a duct tape tab can be made through the slot of a monitor board for ease in pulling it out. She described using saran wrap around a dinner plate to place on top of your extracted honey in a bucket to lift out the floating debris. Clears the honey easily.
- Chris Conrad closed by showing his extendable water jug pole for swarm catching.



Jim Grant showing his "gaskets"

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.

Meeting ended at 8:16 pm.

Submitted,

Becky Jackson

Regional Clusters

By Thea Vierling

What a year it has been for our regional clusters and it is still going on! Many clusters are still providing hives dives for their members. Fall Hive Preparation! It has been one of the most exciting years yet for this component of SCBA services for our members. Each year our cluster leaders have been better prepared and organized with Bee Cafes and Hive dives. When beekeepers work together, they learn new skills and share hive knowledge. It does not get any better than that!

This past year our leaders included Lynne Black for North County, Chris Conrad for Central, Chris Dicker for West, Sally McGough for South and Lizanne Pastore for East. They all did a FABULOUS JOB!!! Two of our cluster leaders told me that what they learned this past year could not have been learned in 5 years. They had so much "hands on" in so many different hives that it really was valuable to be cluster leader. Being a cluster leader is an amazing experience and a lot of fun!

Of course, we wish that these folks would continue for another year but they also want to give others a chance to give back to the association!!! I am sure there are folks out there who can hardly wait to volunteer for this position and we hope you will contact Thea at 707-483-0426 or email regionalcoordinator@sonomabees.org as soon as possible if you are interested. At this time we need someone for North County but remember it is great to have extra hands and backups. So whether or not we have someone already, let us know if you are interested



East Cluster members splitting a Top Bar Hive



East Cluster members helping with a swarm high in a tree.



South Cluster Members looking at a queen, which was just marked.

South Cluster Workshop

by Christine Kurtz

On September 19 South Cluster had a winterizing workshop with Serge Labesque. The group gathered under a large oak tree for a discussion of where the hives are in their seasonal biology and behavior. Then we hived into four colonies. Fall is a precarious time for the bees as diseases can ramp up especially due to varroa. Are the bees able to keep this parasite under check? Managing them through hygienic behavior or a break in the brood cycle? Have done so through the last few months or scrambling now? How healthy is your colony? The bees emerging now will be the nurse bees that are raising the winter bees, they need to be healthy and have good nutrition available so in turn they can feed that next generation that will live longer and see the colony through.

Another thing we checked for is whether the colony is queen right. We saw the queen in one of the colony on a super that was set aside temporarily for inspecting the brood nest. The queen was gallivanting in the honey stores. Someone chimed: "What is she doing there?" The queen can be anywhere in the hive, even under the inner cover at times so beekeepers need to tread very carefully especially this time of year as an injured or crushed queen won't be able to be replaced successfully. Serge very gently picked up the queen and put her on the supers on the stand that we already had inspected for safekeeping.

This time of year the bees consolidate their stores, nectar is moved closer to the brood nest and is actually deposited in the upper brood nest which pushes the bees back down in the lower supers, which shrinks the available cells the queen can lay in, which then shrinks the population. We definitely saw that in all four colonies. We also consolidated some of the hives by removing frames that had not been drawn out with wax or were drawn out but completely empty. Don't be fooled by the empty drawn frames in the most bottom super, they look empty but very often contain beebread. The bees use this area as a pantry for future use. Serge told us not to bother with that area this time of year. We went directly to the brood nest and next checked on honey stores. This area needs between 35-40 lbs. of honey. So we counted including frames that had honey in the combs or had partially sealed honey (a medium frame sealed both side is ~3lbs and a deep ~5lbs, the ones that are partials you adjust the weight accordingly). Even though the last couple of years the bees didn't need that much because of our summer like winters, we cannot foresee what this one is going to be like. Weather prediction used to be an educated guess but with this uncharted erratic global weather being so weird we better be safe and ready with adequate stores. There was a fall nectar flow going on so bees were bringing some stores from the outside not only consolidating.



In the brood nest we looked at how healthy it looked. It is best to see brood of the same age in the same area. Sometimes we saw different ages in one area meaning that there were cells vacated of larvae or pupae from hygienic behavior and the queen came through again later and laid again. This makes the brood nest look a little spotty. What will be important is whether there will be enough healthy bees coming up at the rear, with the critical mass necessary for continued survival. If there are too many sick bees a colony can get overwhelmed.

A few scarce drones were still present although eviction had been going on for quite some time. Only one hive had pupating drones. Whether the bees will let them emerge and live to reproduce at this time is unknown. I hope so, we do need a few drones out there desperately trying to re-queen last minute.

Overall it was an incredibly educational workshop followed by a light lunch and discussion on how south cluster is going to split and share their surviving bees in the spring. A nice little community has been forming of the last couple of years and more and more beekeepers are willing to help each other! Thank you Serge for your patience and expertise. We all learned a lot.



South Cluster Workshop Held at
Christine Kurtz's apiary

Photos by Christine Kurtz

West Cluster News

By Liz Newton and T.L. Ginn

Thanks to Chris Dicker and Doug Vincent for such an enlightening demonstration and talk last July and also wanted to follow up on the work that Doug performed on our hives.

Doug came back six weeks after the demonstration and we inspected all three boxes. Two of the hives had re-queened, and one had not. We combined all resources from queenless hive into the two-queenright hives. We have been keeping an eye on them ever since, and both seem to be functioning well. Pollen is still coming in, and strong defenses against yellow jackets and other intruders are continuing. We realize there are no guarantees; however, things certainly look much stronger than they have at this time of year than in past years, and we have our fingers crossed that at least one of our colonies will overwinter successfully.



Hives After Re-Organizing

North Cluster Hive Dive

By April Lance

On Sunday, Sept 6, 2015 over 30 North County Beekeepers gathered at a "Cluster Meeting: to open two hives, make inspections, decide upon necessary manipulations, locate the eggs, brood, nectar, pollen, nectar, royal jelly, brood, queen, worker bees and any drones, add boxes, move frames, pull a frame, taste honey and more. The "hive dive" portion of the afternoon was lead by Julie Zak, an experienced local beekeeper, assisted by property owner and host April Lance. Julie explained how to open the hive, use your tools, discussed when and if it is necessary to utilize smoke, pull frames and add boxes.

The day included two groups, which split their time between the actual hive dive and the educational portion of the program, orchestrated by North County Hive Dive Leader Lynne Black and her assistant, Cheryl Caletti. Key note speakers of the day were Lynne Black and Mike Turner who reviewed preparing hives for fall and winter and feeding during these difficult dry weather periods which are extremely hard on the honeybees. Turner runs a business managing and setting up hives on a monthly basis for individuals and businesses in Marin, Napa and Sonoma Counties. Lynne Black, who also co-owns Black-Rose Onion Sets (the best onion sets in Northern California) coordinated the entire day and provided attendees with a very informative printed packet of materials.

One of the guests stated: "It is hard to tell if this is a culinary extravaganza or a hive dive", as Napa, Sonoma and French wine was enjoyed together with roasted chicken, zucchini bread, home-grown watermelon, as well as stuffed local figs, confections and other shared exotic local fare. Everyone felt they left learning at least one new important task regarding their own hives, if not more, and enjoyed the Hands-On Experience.



Hive Dive in April Lance's Apiary
Photo by Theresa Giacomino

On Pondering about Honey

By Christine Kurtz

What a strange year it has been. An early nectar flow which flat lined in the middle and spiked again later. Through it all, through the worry and the holding of the breath, 6 of my 21 colonies produced surplus Honey (all 6 going into their third winter). What is it about these colonies that were not fed, not medicated and grown on a 100% of their own comb that helped them navigate through one of the worse drought and still make surplus honey? And although I am aware that things can change so fast with bees, I sure hope that they are here next spring, because those are the gems that are locally adapted to my conditions and those are the ones I am going to propagate.

I have never entered a honey competition before. Heard of them but never had the time or maybe the deadline slipped away unannounced on my calendar. Of course, it would have had trouble to be put there in the first place but that is another story. The seriousness enmeshed in the ridiculous concerning these competitions never occurred to me. Little did I know that there is some prestige involved and that I now have award-winning honey.

It was Rob Keller from Napa Bee Company that coaxed me into entering some honey at the Heirloom Expo where we were both speakers this year. He is one of the most enthusiastic beekeepers I know and his excitement about the competition became contagious. This was a big deal with Welsh Honey Judges flown in from Florida and Illinois. Trained and serious and very kind to us novices who had absolutely no idea what we were doing. Yes, there was a list of rules to print out (if you are interested, here they are <http://theheirloomexpo.com/happenings/heirloom-expo-honey-show>), but then there were also other little things of "Who knew?"

First, the best is to buy a whole case of Queenline honey jars. Jars after all aren't made like they used to. Dinged, you will see if there are imperfections in the jar or, lo and behold, an air bubble than can mistakenly be taken as a bubble in the honey (as you'll see later a BIG no no). Pick your best three jars. I entered the Class H2 competition that required 3 Jars of the same honey. Not having any Queenline jars, as I am more of the Kerr/Ball reusable jar kind, Rob brought me 3 to the expo.

Second, best is to let the honey settle in the jar a month and 1/2 prior to the competition! Every possible bubble must make it to the surface. Who knew? I literally brought the 5 gal bucket with me and filled the jar on site. The honey I extracted the night before! I know they are still

talking and shaking their heads about it, I guess that was a first for them. Some overly enthusiastic contestants even take a thin crochet needle and poke all the bubbles out by hand right before handing the honey over. Queenline jars have shoulders that catch bubbles. Who knew?

Third, when you pour the honey in the jar think middle. Middle of the bucket that is. Don't use the honey that first comes out. Pour into your own jars and set aside. Pour the middle section into the competition jars and never the top. The bottom can have left over crystals or any heavy particles (a no no) and the top can have foam (another no no). Who knew? Like I said, I poured on site and from the bottom.



Then you should have done everything to your honey that you would not do to the honey you sell to your customers. Heat your honey to melt every last crystal and pour through a filter to filter out every possible speck of pollen! Who knew? Mine went from the extractor, through the metal filter that only filters out big chunks of wax and the occasional bee part, into the bucket into the jar! Do not use cheesecloth as a filter either as you will have unwanted filaments in your honey (a no no).

You then fill your jar to the first bead or above so you do not see a line between the honey and the lid, when entering the higher-level competition (not the novice level) like I said you need three jars. They all have to be filled exactly to the same line. "Even Steven". Well I got all to the first bead at least (first line of where you screw lid on) because she told me so as I was doing it but I didn't know to match all the three jars "zackly" the same! Not one fuller than the other. Rob had his filled with an inch gap cause he read on some international honey competition online that it was so but oh no not this one. Who knew? Each competition has its own rules. Read the rules and regulation of the actual competition you are entering. They can differ greatly.

All 3 jars have to have the honey from the same bucket, same color period. If you don't have enough to fill three jars...too bad. Phew I got that one right.

No bee parts whatsoever! No bees' knees either! Last minute, some gentlemen that looked like they just emerged from the back jungle of Oregon did enter some honey with some bees' knees in them. Wild bunch! Well they were disqualified on the spot because they were past the deadline anyway. By the way no bees' knees here allowed (pun intended)! Nor heads, wings or butts for that matter either.

No foam or wax particles on top period. You can take a piece of plastic wrap and push it against the top touching the honey and pull it out to remove such unsightly

things. Rob's had foam like a cappuccino and mine looked alright like Dinner coffee but since I just poured it, it might have come to the surface later right before the judge looked. But who knew? And who has plastic wrap handy just in case?

You must bring clean metal lids with you or buy them for a buck apiece there (maybe, don't count on it unless they tell you they have extras). No honey is to be found under the lid when the judges examine. Even clean off the inside of the top of the jar before closing the lid. Ooops.

Take alcohol and clean the jar. Your jar needs to be naked of fingerprints and smootz. Ooops! You tilted the jar while polishing and now you need another clean lid. Fork out them \$1 bills.

You then must wear, considered the best, archival grade gloves while handling the jar from this point. Then you must massage and polish that jar with a lint free cloth until it shines like the surface of a lake on a breeze free night. Who knew? Ooops you tilted the jar again while vigorously polishing. There goes another \$3.

Then they hand you small rectangular stickers with anonymous numbers that must be placed 1/2 inch from the bottom "zackly". On all three jars "zackly". If not pull it off and do it again! Ooops you tilted the jar. Another \$1.

By now you are more nervous than ever, sweat on your brow and a bit shaky (being the hottest day of a heat wave doesn't help either) you must hand off the sparkly clean jar holding it one finger on top and one on the bottom to the receiver who also uses one finger on top and one finger on the bottom just in case a finger print comes through the glove. You better have great dexterity and great balance cause you could drop it or tilt it for another

\$1 clean lid. Accidents happen so recommendation is that you always have a back up jar from the same lot, don't give them a different honey cause they'll know. Colors need to match "zackly".

The judge will look at your honey for clarity with a flashlight, the viscosity, and use a refractometer and hope your honey is at 17% otherwise outa here. The tasting is not for flavor although all the honeys were deemed exceptional so taste did matter? (Some people put honey aside when they extract because of a special flavor but technically flavor does not matter because it's too subjective) what does matter is that there is no off taste like smoke or chemical used to move bees down for ease of harvest, so minimize smoke or don't use funny chemicals when harvesting honey for a competition, just use your feather and hope no barbules fall into your honey. Barbules don't sound as good as bees' knees but sorry they can't be in there either.

So I'll take this 2nd place ribbon with humor and great education, with the one fingerprint they found on it, with enough bubbles to shame a kid's birthday party, post it on

the fence where I sell all of my honey, occasionally, mostly never anymore. Anyone want some award winning honey? I swear no heated or over filtered honey here. Oh I guess people on my Christmas list will get some cause it's gonna make it just that much more special. But I suppose, if you were in the honey bizz that could really matter and you can put it on your bizz card and all and on your farm stand sign and sell more honey, even if you had to heat your honey and over filter it and the taste didn't matter as long as there was no honey under the lid, no finger print on the jar, was bubble and bees knees free, didn't taste like smoke and you didn't drop it while handing it off finger to finger.



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Contact Information

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.

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Ads in This Newsletter

Check with Treasurer Denise Wright for annual costs of running ads. It is cheaper than the monthly costs for ads, which are \$10 for a business card size, \$20 for ¼ page, and \$40 for a half page. The editor needs to know you have paid her and needs a jpg copy of the ad. The current and back issues of the newsletter are on the www.sonomabees.org web site so many people besides the 400 or so members view the ads. Contact information is on the last page of this edition.



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