

# The Monthly Extractor

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November 2015



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

## From Our President

Happy November! It's hard to believe it's November and nearing the end of the year.

### 2016 Board Elections

The 2016 Board nominations are coming together and thank you to our amazing volunteers! We are still looking for someone to fill the Membership and Treasurer positions. Nominations are still open for all positions and we will be announcing the nominations following the November General meeting on November 9th. Be prepared to announce yourself or have someone do it for you! Additionally, please be on the lookout for an additional email regarding voting. Voting will be done electronically, but there will be some ballots at the December meeting/potluck/ auction (due by 7PM that night).

Here are some additional updates:

- **Membership updates:** Kelli Cox, Membership position, has included some changes related to Memberships below. Please read, and if you have any questions, please contact Kelli ([1stVP@sonomabees.org](mailto:1stVP@sonomabees.org)).
- **December Potluck and Save the Bees Auction:** We are very excitedly planning for the December Potluck and Save the Bees Auction.
  - Auction Items: We are definitely still looking for auction items, so please contact Christine Kurtz at [petalumabeelady@yahoo.com](mailto:petalumabeelady@yahoo.com) if you have an item. No item is too small, as Christine consolidates items into amazing packages. A preference is that you bring them to the November general meeting if possible, so that Christine has time to organize everything before the auction.
  - A reminder that we have decided to move the "appreciations" for our volunteers from December to next January.

Enjoy the Fall, the cooling weather, and wishing you and your bees a cheerful month,

*Laura Baker, President*

## Important Membership Information!!!!

We are heading into a New Year and there are some important membership changes coming.

### PLEASE READ

As of January 1st membership rates will be increasing. Our new Annual rates will be:

**Individual** - \$30.00

**Family** = \$40.00

**Business** = \$60.00

**Additionally we are moving to a standard calendar year membership.**

*This means all memberships will need to renew annually on January 1st and expire December 31st as they did in the past.* If you joined AFTER July 1, 2015 we are extending your membership through December 31, 2016. If you renew for the 2016 calendar year before December 31st, you CAN renew at our CURRENT RATES of Individual \$25, Family \$35 and Business \$50.

Please note: you can renew online, at the **November membership meeting** or by mail (SCBA, P.O. Box 98, Santa Rosa, 95402.)

**We will not be renewing or signing New members at our December meeting**

**Very Important.** We have changed our data base system and no longer support "Grace Periods." This means if you are not CURRENT with your membership, chances are your membership has expired and you will not receive "The Extractor" SCBA Newsletter, or be recognized on the Cluster Lists so unable to attend Hive Dives or workshops.

PLEASE don't wait until the last minute to renew!  
If you have any concerns or questions email:

[1stvp@sonomabees.org](mailto:1stvp@sonomabees.org) or  
[assistant@sonomabees.org](mailto:assistant@sonomabees.org).

### Contents

From Our President .....	1
This Month's Calendar: .....	2
Beekeeping To-Do List by Serge Labesque .....	2
Speakers and Programs 2016 .....	3
Bee Plants of the Month .....	4
December 8 Silent Auction .....	4
Educational Display Was a Big Hit .....	5
General Meeting Minutes .....	6
Regional Clusters .....	7
East Cluster News .....	7
How to Host a Hive Dive.....	8
On Pondering about...Bees and Hive Beetles .....	10
2015 Board Members .....	12
Contact Information .....	12
Ads in This Newsletter.....	13

# This Month's Calendar:

## Monthly Meeting

**Monthly Meeting: Nov. 10th** – Your very own editor/2nd V.P. Ettamarie Peterson will share with you her trip to Ireland's Beekeeping Summer Course in Gormanston and visit to other apiaries in Ireland.



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## My November Beekeeping To-Do List by Serge Labesque

© 2015

### Shed bees

[On sunny Labor Day morning, in Glen Ellen, CA]

*"I wrapped a chain around the shed, hooked it to my pick-up truck, and I pulled the whole thing down to the ground. And man, did I get stung!*

*It's over there in the backyard."*

Without any more explanation than that, the man hurriedly drives away, leaving me to remove bees from the wreckage.

A cloud of bees fills the air above the flattened structure. Thousands more are collecting honey from the debris. It's robbing on a grand scale. I'll have to work fast to have a chance of saving the colony that lived here.

I find the nest after lifting disjointed wood planks, torn tarpaper and old roll roofing. What had been a very large colony now lays in a mass of mashed comb and bees. I mount sections of brood combs in frames as quickly as I can, and soon two supers are filled. It's unlikely that much of this crushed brood will survive though, but there are eggs, and along with them there may be an opportunity for the bees to produce a queen, if it is necessary. I add as many of the bees as I can collect and I close the hive. Soon, Lizanne joins me and together we pile chunks of honeycombs in nuc boxes. This feral colony had a very decent amount of stores, but these are disappearing rapidly, taken away by thousands of robber bees.

Having salvaged as much of the hive as we could, we search the remaining combs that once extended from floor to ceiling for any sign of a live queen. No such luck. We load the hive in my pick-up truck. What else can we do other than to abandon the rubble to the robber bees?

Back at home, I place the hive in a dark tool shed and I give water to the bees with wet sponges that I press against the hive bottom screen. Judging by the sounds they produce, the bees calm down rapidly. So much so that, the next day, as I set the hive out on a stand, I am encouraged to peek inside for any sign of a queen. And...

there she is! A beautiful queen surrounded by a respectable mass of bees. Elated, I immediately give her a nice frame with empty drawn comb.

During the following days, forager activity increases at the hive entrance, which I nonetheless keep rather small, because I also returned to the bees their fragrant chunks of honey.

Sunday brings a brutal and dramatic turn of events. Checking the hive as soon as I return from a mentoring session, I find it under massive attack by robber bees. These are not just any robber bees. They are unmistakably Cordovan bees, those yellow Italian bees that are bred by commercial bee producers for their pronounced yellow coloration. I close the hive entrance and make sure that there is no other entry. That's when I spot a swarm hanging in an oak tree, some twenty feet away, and I promptly hive it in a nuc box. Undoubtedly, the besieged colony has absconded, abandoning everything to the robbers.

At dawn, the next morning, the hive and swarm box were moved to another apiary, away from these predators. But unfortunately, the bees absconded again two days later, this time not to be seen again.

Witnessing such a beautiful feral colony ruined first by human ignorance and then by bees that do not belong here is a sobering experience. But what irks me most is that I was unable to save it. I regret not meeting that man again, as I wanted to tell him about the importance of the bees, and that calling a beekeeper beforehand could have safeguarded the colony, not to mention sparing him a few stings. Even though the conditions were not favorable, I should at least have tried to raise a few queens from this stock in order to preserve some of its desirable genes. I could have reduced the risk of robbing by only giving back to the colony what it could consume overnight. In hindsight, I think that I should also have discarded most of the mashed brood and placed the beat-up colony onto empty drawn combs.

At this point, I can only hope that the bees found a safe nest cavity and that the queen will survive winter.

## November in the apiaries

It's all done. This year, the colonies were ready for winter in mid-October. Their hives are sound, secured against mice and winter storms.

Now, the bees are huddling inside compact brood chambers with hopefully enough stores to cover their needs until spring. Winter bees are being born and the brood nests are shrinking, the queens having reduced or stopped laying eggs. On nice days, the last of the summer bees display a good level of forager activity for a few hours. Yet, this bustle probably brings little benefit to the colonies.

Also, we know that these foragers will soon disappear. It's the young generation of bees that will have to carry the hives through the winter months. The longer nights and cooler temperatures keep the bees clustered and quiet. When finally, toward the end of the month, all the brood has emerged, store consumption will be minimal. Then, the varroa mites will have no opportunity to reproduce and hide. They will be exposed to the bees' grooming behavior.

Since open hive inspections at this time of year may harm the colonies, if only by breaking propolis seals and disturbing their clusters, I limit my hive checks to the inspection of the exteriors of the hives, of the flight paths when the weather permits, and of entrances. I also glance at the monitoring trays to gauge what the bees are doing inside the hives. During these walks through the apiaries, I verify that the colonies are safe, that no branch could possibly come in contact with their nests when it is windy, as this would keep the bees agitated.

It's time to take care of the equipment that was removed from the apiaries earlier in the fall, to clean it and, if necessary, to repair it. After scraping wax and propolis build-ups, I sanitize the wood and metal surfaces with the flame of a propane torch. Then, everything is placed in the storage racks, exposed to the wind and light for good protection against wax moths and mice. The old and misshapen combs that did not get melted in October will have to wait until sunnier and hotter days.

The year that is coming to a close was deeply marked by the persistent drought in my apiaries. Due to the lack of ground moisture, there was very little nectar available to the bees, and the nutritional value of the pollen they could collect is questionable. It's time to begin a review of the notes that were made during the year. There is always something to be learned from them in preparation for next beekeeping season.

### In summary, this month:

- Complete the preparation of the colonies for winter by the end of the first week of the month.
- Raise hives off the ground, if they are not already on stands.
- Remove old and misshapen combs (follower boards greatly facilitate this).
- Ensure that the hives are adequately ventilated (upper ventilation slot open).
- Reduce the hive entrances.
- Install mouse guards.
- Secure the hive tops against high winds.
- Install clean monitoring trays. From them, we will obtain important information about what is happening inside the hives during the next months, without disturbing the bees.
- Inspect the exterior of the hives.
- Observe the flight paths.
- Clean and scorch tools and equipment.
- Store unused equipment to protect it from damage caused by wax moths, mice and the weather.
- Review notes from the year.
- Start building frames and other pieces of equipment for the next season.
- Look forward to next season.
- Enjoy some honey and be thankful for the bees.

Serge Labesque © 2015

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## Speakers and Programs 2016

By Ettamarie Peterson

With help from board members SCBA has some tentative programs lined up for next year. These have not all been confirmed so are not set in stone, as the saying goes. If you have a contact or an idea for a program you would love to have arranged, please let Ettamarie know! This is your association and we want to serve your needs.

Here is what we think most of 2016 will have: January is Rob Keller. February is Paul Stamets (200 chairs max in our hall, no charge for visitors). March is Serge on splits (not confirmed). April may be the Planet Bee people (from Whole Foods). May could be on swarms and feeding hives, a panel of people. June is Christine Kurtz on Bee Diseases. July is no meeting, but our picnic. Ideas for August and October: Alternative style hives, Cluster Leader's debate, hot topics (feed or not, smoker or not, etc.) September (or May) could be Eric Mussen on Africanized bees found in Lafayette, CA and how this could change swarm season education. November is gadget night and December is silent auction. Beekeepers Ball with the Bee Girl from Oregon was an idea that was kicked around as an alternative for December instead of the traditional dinner. Of course we would want to keep having the auction, as it is our main fundraiser.

Let us hear from you! Some speakers need lots of advanced notice so please speak up now!

# Bee Plants of the Month

By Alice Ford-Sala

## Native Plant of the Month:

**Sedum oregonum Oregon Stonecrop**  
Family Crassulaceae

Sedum is a huge family of succulents, usually low growing, but sometimes up to 2 feet tall.

Our lovely native grows from California to Alaska, growing in crevices, cascading down stone walls and making a drought tolerant groundcover. Please don't plant her where there is foot traffic. Like most succulents, sedum is easily crushed. Evergreen, in cold weather turning a rosy hue, she bears yellow nectar-sweet flowers in summer that are beloved by bees and butterflies.



Oregon Stonecrop

Only two to four inches tall, she will spread out and fill in a rock garden, or cover some well-drained soil. Planted in a container with other succulents or cacti, Oregon Stonecrop will spill over the edge, adding texture and color to the pot. Very frost tolerant (unlike some other sedums), the only fatal problems would be soggy soil and people and pets stepping on her.

## Beneficial Plant of the Month:

**Glaucium flavum aurantiacum Horned Poppy**  
Family Papaveraceae

OK, I have to confess I found Annie's Annuals in Richmond (you have to go looking for the nursery, it is very out of the way) this last summer. They do most of their business on line or in local nurseries, but the mother ship is spectacular! I wandered out wishing I had more: 1. Money 2. Time to browse 3. Space for plants. I did find Horned Poppy amongst many other plants, and it has done quite well so far in the garden. I am expecting blooms next summer. They are scarlet-orange with yellow centers that bees visit regularly like all members of the poppy family. When finished flowering, they bear seed pods up to an inch long.

Native to Mediterranean Europe, where it is also called Sea Poppy as it grows on sand dunes and cliffs there. Well-drained, somewhat sandy soil is obvious for such a plant. Each plant is 18 inches high as about as much wide. They are neat, compact plants, forming a cute rosette while you await the summer blooms. She will look pretty with her gray-blue-green toothed foliage growing with other coastal plants such as Eriogonum (native buckwheats) or Erigeron (seaside daisy).



Horned Poppy

## December 8 Silent Auction

By Christine Kurtz

### The Silent Auction is coming!!!!

Thea and Christine are getting so excited as donations for the Silent Auction are trickling in. We have received all sorts of bee equipment, a two frame extractor, honey straining buckets, an observation hive, candle making tools, haircuts, wine, bee themed shopping bags, private mentoring.....work behind the scene is going full force and we need your help in gathering donations to make it a successful event. Donations do not have to be bee related, actually it's nice to have a varied lot, after all some of us are bringing our non-beekeeper partners who wouldn't know what to do with a recapping fork or wooden box! To minimize the carbon footprint and driving all over the county you can coordinate with your cluster leader to drop off the donations to them or bring them to the November 9 general meeting. Make sure the paper work is with the donation so the proper thank you can go out after the event. If all else fails you can contact Christine at [auction@sonomabees.org](mailto:auction@sonomabees.org) or Thea at [regionalcoordinator@sonomabees.org](mailto:regionalcoordinator@sonomabees.org). Thank you all for your assistance, we cannot do it without you!

Here are some of last year's auction items:



## BEE WISE:

### “SPEED UP OR SLOW DOWN?”

by Emery Dann

Most of us have predictable patterns. Sometimes in our lives or as beekeepers we need to speed up. Sometimes we need to slow down. For example, 2 years ago I met an Arizona Highway Patrol Officer driving to Phoenix! This October I met a California Highway Patrol Officer driving to Santa Rosa. What I realize is that my thinking patterns were the same in both cases. I was going too fast. I allowed the pressure I felt to be unaware of the speed I was going. I pulled over off of Bennett Valley Road into the Bennett Valley Golf Course. I clearly saw the red and blue lights in my rear view mirrors. Then everything DID slow down for me! What I “had” to get done suddenly was no longer as important when I gave my insurance card and drivers license to the officer, apologizing and thanking him.

So I began to think about my life and beekeeping. There are times I need to speed up and other times I need to slow down. Here is a quote from Dan Millman: “I learned that we can do anything, but we can’t do everything... at least not at the same time. So think of your priorities not in terms of what activities you do, but when you do them. Timing is everything!” How does this relate to my beekeeping? I realize I can be too fast or be too slow... Too many changes, too fast, can cause bee stress on a hive. But also, if I am too slow to realize what my bees need, this also causes bee stress that is not good! We all want strong beehives!

Timing is EVERYTHING! For example: When there is honey to extract, I need to do it immediately! The longer I delay extracting, the more wax moth or hive beetle damage will happen that can ruin some of the honey.

Timely hive inspections—especially checking top feeders, if you use them. Hive beetles hide “upstairs” where there are not as many bees. Hive beetle larvae can explode from hundreds to thousands very quickly. Ants can also destroy a hive. There is not much food around in the winter—but guess what? Honey beehives are “sitting ducks” unless protected from ant abuse! Watch out for “bridges” that can bypass your ant protection. Talk about an explosion in the ant population? Argentina ants have no natural enemies here. Their secret weapon is that they can have 200 or more ant queens all laying eggs at the same time. This is an ant population explosion that can make the bees abscond—leaving you an empty hive!

Yellow jackets and robbing honey bees are dangerous. I keep entrances reduced all year to make it easier for the guard bees to protect. I hang a cloth or shade cloth from the top of the hive down to cover the entrance, and I find it keeps yellow jackets and robbers out effectively. Robbers and yellow jackets want an easy way to get inside. The bees inside the hive will quickly learn how to get in and out. Works extremely well!

One thing to slow down or stop is to delay extracting hives until the beginning of spring. Removing a beehive in late fall or winter is like taking a wrecking ball to your home and then letting you live there during the winter. Not at all healthy or comfortable! By this time of the year (late Fall and Winter), I ask people to wait until next year for the bees to have the best outcome. Think about what you need to speed up in your life and beekeeping or slow down. We can look at our patterns! Adjusting our patterns in our lives or beekeeping is vital and critical to our well being for us and our bees! We will not see red and blue lights flashing behind us, if we examine our lives, slow down and BEE WISE!

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## Sonoma County Beekeepers Association's Educational Display Was a Big Hit at the North Bay Science Discovery Day Event

Thanks to volunteers Maggie Weaver, Stevie Jean Lazo, Tom Moore, Jeff Parker, John McGinnis and Ann Jereb and help from Luc Caron, a Liberty 4-H beekeeper who were able to educate probably about 2000 people at the North Bay Science Discovery Day on October 25th. The people who came by the display asked lots of good questions (besides the usual, “Where’s the Queen?”). This event is especially good because it is geared for the whole family. All ages from toddlers to grandparents were there looking at our photos, observation hive and pieces of a feral beehive that had come from a tree which had been chopped down this spring. The volunteers gave visitors lists of bee-friendly plants, SCBA brochures and the paper puppet Thea Vierling made.

Tom Moore checked the observation hive as a little girl in a bee costume “flew” by.  
Photo by Ettamarie Peterson



# Sonoma County Beekeepers' Association

## General Meeting Minutes October, 2015

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

President, Laura Baker opened by saying there are Board Positions open for the 2016 year: Treasurer, Membership, and others. If you're willing to help, please contact any board member. Next meeting will be nominations, with the election in December. Our Volunteer recognition is moved to January next year.

Karen spoke next about a petition to sign for the Citizens for Healthy Farms and Families. It will keep GMO crops out of Sonoma County—right now only corn grown for silage is GMO.

Nadia, our Librarian spoke about a recent Hive Dive, which had 24 responders, and the host planned catering for those 24. But only 10 showed up. Please don't treat our Hive Dive hosts like this. If you've signed up—go! If you can't go, let them know! Thea will contemplate charging for hive dives if this occurs more often.

Cheryl gave away free seeds, including CA poppies. There are always plants for sale too. All money goes to SCBA.

Thea highlighted a growing ailment—PPB (Piss Poor Beekeeping). Please check that you don't contract this. Symptoms include not checking through your hives, letting them die and get robbed out, being fearful of opening and inspecting your hives. There's help, but you have to make an effort for yourself. Take classes, come to meetings, form a Bee buddy, participate during meetings, be on the Board, check out library books and learn.

Christine Kurtz announced the SILENT AUCTION coming up in December. Items are needed; she only has ¼ of what we need. Email her if you can donate something at [auction@sonomabees.org](mailto:auction@sonomabees.org)

She also reports that in her consulting, she has found a few clusters of American Foulbrood in Bloomfield, Blucher Valley, Freestone, and Point Reyes. Please check your hives in order to halt its spread. She gave info and slide pictures of what to look for. If in doubt, contact her.

Christine also reported on an article about Africanized Bees being found in the Bay Area. These most likely arrived by car, not by natural spread. You, as a beekeeper with neighbors, are responsible to keep your bees gentle. Small Hive Beetles are also arriving. She saw a slimed hive in St. Helena. The excrement from the larva and adults ferments the honey, ruining it and the combs. They're here and testing this environment. Read and learn what you should be looking for and how to use beetle traps.

3 New members/visitors identified themselves.

The 50/50 raffle gave \$114 to a lucky ticket holder. Cheryl's daughter, Mikayla is now selling tickets to give John McGinnis a reprieve. There was also a Bee Bag raffled off (Cheryl won it).

Ettamarie Peterson introduced our speaker: Brad Pankratz from the CSBA (California State Beekeepers Association). Brad lives near Chico and has 3 generations of beekeepers in his family. He has 2500 hives, mostly for pollination, and breeds queens.

The CSBA's 2 main focuses are on legislation and public relations to help bees and beekeepers. They have funded

\$100,000 for research projects using their dues from members. They aren't just helping commercials, but ALL beekeepers.

Another focus is educating the Ag community to help keep bees healthy, examples: spray crops at night; don't mix several chemicals in one tank spray. His job is to try to get farmers and beekeepers communicating about what they need. Many problems can be solved just by honest communication. There is a lot more agriculture now than 30 years ago. Much less foraging and wild areas left in California.

Ask your County Ag Dept. to start a program of notifying registered beekeepers when spraying will take place within a 5-mile radius of your hives. Nadia Clark says Sonoma County won't do it or register bees. Maybe we need to speak up!

Ken Espinoza asked his opinion on Bayer sponsorships and grants. Brad said don't be hesitant to take their money and use it for bee education! It's better if the big chemical companies are "at the table" at bee conventions so our concerns can be heard.

Chris Conrad asked about mite treatments and stated that most of us in SCBA want treatment free bees. Brad said he uses treatments, and without it, the commercials couldn't provide the sheer number of colonies for pollination. Letting hives die by not treating means no FOOD pollination.

Chemicals have been approved without proper research before putting them on the market. IGR's (insect growth regulators) are systemic and target a certain pest's reproductive cycle. Then IGR's and fungicides are mixed, which is harming bees. They work by inhibiting keratin (hardening of the exoskeleton). They were only tested on adult bees, not larvae. But they can't prove it. His organization is asking to see more research done.

Project AphisM will give anyone who asks—free seeds to plant forage in fallow areas or between trees or by roads. Brad has not yet dealt with grape growers. I guess there haven't been enough complaints yet! Cheryl Veretto will call Christy of Pam to get seeds to offer to local grape growers.

Bill #AB1259 is a Fish & Wildlife program to give you permission to put your bees on public land with a lease. It's now a law that they have to consider letting you, if you ask. Find lands by asking to see their maps. Brad says if they decline your request, CSBA wants to know! Look around your area; approach Land Trusts, PG&E yards, etc. You have to carry liability insurance.

Small Hive Beetles prey on wet supers in storage. Use Oil traps within the hive to control them. European Foulbrood is controlled by Terramycin. American Foulbrood is only killed by Tylosan or Tylan, not Terramycin anymore.

The CSBA Convention is in Sacramento in November—the week before Thanksgiving. Everyone is encouraged to register and COME.

Meeting adjourned at 9:50 pm.

Link to the October Board Meeting Minutes:  
<http://sonomabees.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/10-SCBA-Oct-2015-Board-Minutes.pdf>



Brad Pankratz

Submitted,

*Becky  
Jackson*

# Regional Clusters

By Thea Vierling

Hi all, well what a year this has been. Your cluster leaders have truly done an incredible job. They left “no stone unturned” or should we say: “NO HIVE UNOPNED”!! This is what folks have requested: hands on experience! And this is what you all received. I can honestly say: NO OTHER BEEKEEPING ASSOCIATION OFFERS THIS KIND OF SERVICE TO ITS MEMBERS!

We will have a turn-over of three cluster leaders and are looking for replacements. If you want to learn more about beekeeping and really help the bees, become a cluster leader. The only expectation of a cluster leader is to have 3 events a year and believe me there have been many more than 15 events (5 clusters x 3 events = 15). Also you really don't need to be a great beekeeper but your computer skills would be very helpful!

We are still looking for a North Cluster Leader and an East Cluster leader. Please let me know if you are interested: [regionalcoordinator@sonomabees.org](mailto:regionalcoordinator@sonomabees.org) as soon as possible. Also Christine Kurtz will be taking over the Regional Coordinator position effective January 2016. She has been helping me so much and of course I will continue to help her as well.

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## East Cluster News

By Thea Vierling

### Hive Dive

October 25th 2015

A few highlights from the East cluster hive dive this past month are worth mentioning. Serge Labesque has been so awesome to lead many of our hive dives. The topic: “Winterizing your hives” is so critical but you have to be careful of the time of year. There are topics that can still be discussed without going into the hive so don't think the bee season is over. Here are some questions to consider without going into your hive.

1. If it is not warm enough, discuss why temperature is important! How warm is warm enough? And how long to stay in the hive!
2. Hive location? Hive stand? Closeness to other hives?
3. Look at monitoring board: Is cluster centered? Evidence of Pollen or robbing? Mite count?
4. Look at the hive from the outside: entrance, population, and behavior at the entrance. Evidence of robbing, yellow jackets? Ants?
5. Discuss where hives came from: How old are they? Did they requeen? And what may be expected if we did go in.
6. Take a look at your hive notes. Discuss the importance of good notes. Redo them so you can easily read them come springtime.

Here are some photos from the hive dive! Serge stayed in the hives only 5 minutes in one hive and 7 minutes in the other! He was incredible to watch.

Photos by Thea Vierling



## Why Being an Active Cluster Member is Good for the Bees

-or-

### “How to Host a Hive Dive”

By Lizanne Pastore, East County Cluster Coordinator

East County Cluster has had 2 recent hive dives to review fall management and winter preparations for our colonies. Our local expert and East Cluster resident, Serge Labesque was present for both, and those East Cluster members lucky enough to attend got an up close and personal look at 4 hives at each dive and received invaluable information and advice from Sonoma County's Godfather of Bees. How lucky are we? Every single time I hear Serge talk I learn something new.

Attending hive dives, cluster café gatherings and cluster workshops are wonderful ways to improve your skills, meet your neighbors, get a bee buddy, ask all your important bee questions, and, most importantly it's good for the bees (you'll learn why at the end of this article, so read on!). Hosting a hive dive, while a little nerve wracking for some—sure, there will be an audience watching you inspect your hives (but what a great way to show off your hive tool skills!)—is an incredible way to learn and have an expert there to help you navigate decision making in your hives. Imagine opening your hives and having a Bee Whisperer right there over your shoulder? Let me tell you, it's awesome.

What do you need to do to host a hive dive, café or workshop? Easy. Contact your cluster coordinator and let him or her know you have the desire and/or space to do so. For a hive dive, it's nice to have at least 2 or 3 hives. I've been to dives at homes that could be on the cover of Sunset Magazine—stunning views with gorgeous accommodations, like cushioned chairs to comfortably discuss the task at hand—to places like mine, where we gather under the oaks in the middle of a dusty, old vineyard with only the benches I lugged over beforehand, skirting the poison oak, and requiring some folks stand or sit on the ground! (It's tough love over here!)

Some dives have snacks, some don't. It's up to the host and the coordinator. It's really about the bees, right? Just make sure that the timing of the inspection is appropriate; for example, you wouldn't inspect your hives one weekend then open them back up for a hive dive a week later...unless something was really wrong. Be prepared to give a brief history of the hives you open so attendees and the expert have a sense of what might be expected when opening (although we all know that

these insects love to surprise us!) Have a plan of action and reason for opening the hives... Springtime space management for example, or assessing for a possible split in March/April; Winter preparation dives occur mid-September thru October. For any dive, have all equipment cleaned and ready at hand: smoker, tools, extra frames, supers etc. Your cluster coordinator will be there to help!

For a café or a workshop, it's about space. Think both about the hosting space itself as well as parking. I'd say that most workshops get anywhere from 15 to 25 attendees. I've hosted myriad workshops because we have a nice sized barn available. If you have a porch, a barn, a shop or some such space and are willing to be “on call” for such an event, again, let your cluster coordinator know.

Now, if you feel like coordinating things, that gives you even more perks! Cluster coordinators attend as many of these events as possible. That drives up your learning curve big time. (I can attest.) You get to meet the more experienced beekeepers and the friendly SCBA folks and it is a lot of fun. All you need is the desire to help out, a few computer skills, and a little bit of time. You don't need to be an experienced beekeeper, but you should consider yourself a Bee-Advocate, meaning you help folks get the help they need when in a bee-crisis, and put the bees'

needs at the top of your priority list. If anyone is interested in this position for East County, let me know and I'll be happy to talk with you about what it takes.

Now I want to praise my wonderful East County Cluster and tell you **why being an active cluster member is as good for the bees as it is for you.**

We are a notoriously close-knit group of folks here in East County. It's a pretty small region, and it's easy to get to know each other and each other's bees. This has made for a wonderful give-and-take and share mentality

here. We call each other and ask for help (well, I sure do!) And most of us in East County are committed to keeping our bees local and not buying packages or foreign Queens. We want to help each other out because we care about the bees. In Spring, that might mean one of my friends down the road who just saw 8 Q cells in one of her hives might spare one for a hive of someone else's that is suddenly Queenless. Or my bee buddy in town who lost all his hives over winter, but who's been there for me...well, I'd happily give him a split from one of my hives in Spring in an effort to keep our bee population local. Thea and I got a swarm call in April and happened to know of a nearby bee-less beekeeper...we gave this gal the swarm and the bees got stay in the 'hood. When we give away a split from a survivor colony or a swarm we are ensuring that good, local



Serge showing a frame of brood at Susan Luber's hive dive in Kenwood” (photo taken by Lizanne Pastore)



genetics are flourishing in our area! It's a huge win for the bees and the beekeepers.

I'd like to see even more of this give-and-take, and given our small size, I think East County could lead the SCBA in promoting the philosophy of keeping our bee population local. But we need to do it together! I can't say this enough: If I lose my hives this winter, I'll wait it out for a local split from a friend rather than rushing out to buy a package from out of town. The SCBA chose to call our regional groups "clusters" after the bees, which cluster as a whole around the brood and work together for the good of the entire colony, not the individual bee. Let's follow the bees' lead!

**Finally, here's a message to all you new beekeepers out there...** I know you are anxious to get started. But be patient. Learn some skills, read up on bee biology, take some classes, learn who keeps bees near you, learn what the bees' forage is in your area, and attend your cluster events to get to know your neighbors before you order that package! Good, locally adapted, survivor bees obtained from a neighbor are going to be so much better for you, for us, but mainly for the bees than a purchased nuc from out of the area. Given the increasing climate challenges we face, we need our local bees to adapt to the ever-changing requirements it takes for survival. If we all get to know each other through cluster events, are willing to share resources, and are committed to put the bees' needs ahead of our own, our local bee population will thrive! So, on that note, I hope to see you at the next hive dive!



Susan and Serge inspecting one of Susan Lubert's hives in Kenwood  
(photo taken by George Bradley)



Lizanne in her Grandfather's vintage veil at her hive dive in Glen Ellen  
(photo taken by Susan Lubert)

# On Pondering about... Bees and Hive Beetles

By Christine Kurtz

Beekeeping is ever moving, never constant. That is why it's not the easiest thing to teach. The factors at play for colony survival are so many and through all the adversities that the bees are facing, it boggles the mind that they are still here. To try to understand bee genetics I came to study queen breeding this past year. I even contemplated raising queens in earnest until I realized what was involved. Impeccable scheduling, resources in equipment and bees (you need a lot of bees), selecting the stock, isolated yards, flooding your mating yards with selected drone colonies, the responsibility to deliver, letting go of your "babies" to any beekeeper with some cash, sad and irate costumers if the queens don't perform or perish. I scared myself out of it, but it did give me new knowledge, understanding and perceptive. Not to say that we cannot help nature along as backyard beekeepers by propagating our strong surviving bees on a small scale and sharing, but we will always be at the mercy of drones emanating from stock that has been bred for entirely different purposes like commercial bees for fast build up and honey production for example. Whenever you breed for certain traits you inadvertently give up another. Fast building up bees could be great to show a farmer a nice pollinating crew but also heaven for Varroa and consequent revolving door of treatments. Hygienic behavior can lend to smaller colonies and no surplus honey. Then there are the genes that piggy back on each other that cannot be separated, you get one with the other like those more aggressive bees that make a lot of honey. Genetics is simple and incredibly complex at the same time and I'm still wrapping my brain around it but...

It became clear to me that bees do not want to be domesticated and that at the crux of their survival is what nature so cleverly gave them, this ability to reshuffle their genetic make up constantly. It is very difficult or impossible to maintain traits when raising queens; the traits have to be continuously reintroduced. It's a lot work, you have to be systematic and keep track. Bees actually don't want it anyway. They want variety between all the colonies. It is not by chance the queen bees are mated in the open air and that half of the genetic make up is at the mercy of the 12 to 30 drones she mates with. Every time a hive re-queens itself or is given a new queen you have a completely different hive. With variety there will be a great likelihood that some colonies will survive with a new threat.

The traits beneficial for bees to survive today might not be the traits that will help them survive tomorrow. It will be a new combination. It's an insurance policy for the bees, as if to say: "One of us will have what it takes". If they stayed the same they could all be wiped out at once.

This brings me to the new threat in our area, the infamous small hive beetle (SHB). Over the last couple of years this beetle imported from Sub-Saharan Africa has wreaked havoc in some areas of this country preferring first the climes more like it's home, hot, moist, humid. Here in Sonoma County we have been watching carefully as the beetle has been testing our climate. It is believed that we do not have the right climate for the hive beetle to finish its reproductive cycle in the soil with great success. We are too dry and cold enough in the winter to kill off adult beetle not cozily squatting inside a cluster, but over the last couple of years we are seeing more and more of the SHB. Initially they were just adult beetles, most likely brought by commercial beekeepers parking their hives here in between pollination contracts. Not only that, SHB fly and once here they can find new hives to make their home. Even though they prefer the honey bees, they can also survive on fallen fruit so they have several surviving strategies underneath their wings. Please see below the links to two good



Small Hive Beetle (SHB)

websites with great photos and descriptions about SHB.

Recently, for the first time, I saw a "slime out". This is a stage past seeing adult beetles. I have to mention that it was in a recently perished hive that was being robbed out. This hive was easy pickings. SHB females lay an incredible amount of eggs, in the 2000's I've read. Those eggs hatch into larvae that look similar to wax moths but upon closer inspection are different. Smaller, more ridged, head more beetle like



Slime Out

(again check out those websites below). You will not see the typical webbing around SHB larvae that you see with wax moths and you will see a much larger amount of them. Several SHB larvae frolicking in one cell is common. Unlike wax moths, too, is that the SHB larvae excrements cause the stored honey to ferment. First a wet shiny look appears, then bubbling and oozing of the honey. This honey becomes inedible to bee and humans alike.

I have also seen SHB larvae on a couple of monitoring boards. What does this all mean? Is the climate changing enough that they can get hold of our area? Will they remain a minor pest or really again change beekeeping as we know it? Regardless the SHB is here and time will tell us more. Meanwhile maintaining strong healthy colonies will be more important than ever as the SHB is first of all an opportunist, if the bees are too weak or died it's like handing them the key. Dead outs need to be dismantled immediately, let's not have SHB hotels in Sonoma County. If the SHB really takes hold there will be a weeding out of the colonies that cannot manage them (See how the shuffling of genes will come in handy here?) and we will see bees come up with strategies we hear from beekeepers that are dealing with them in great quantities already, like the bees making SHB propolis jails but interestingly enough in return the jousting of the beetle to survive by massaging the bees with their paddled antennae that compels the bees to feed their enemy is a counter strategy! The battle is on.

Here are a couple of really good websites to check out that explains in more detail the SHB as I just brushed the issue:

<https://www.extension.org/pages/60425/managing-small-hive-beetles#.VhyU4cviolK>

<http://www.clemson.edu/psapublishing/Pages/Entom/EB160.pdf>



SHB Larva on Monitoring Board

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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](http://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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P.O. Box 98  
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Extractor Techs- Call Ettamarie 707-479-1613 or Janet Leisen 707- 528-2085 or Denny Pederson e-mail [denny1@sonic.net](mailto: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](mailto:deborah@olivequeen.net) She lives in Glen Ellen.

## 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](http://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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