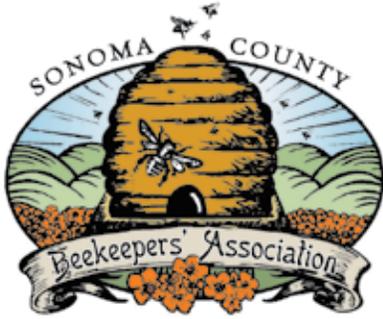


# The Monthly Extractor

Volume 40, Issue 12

December 2015



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

## This Month's Calendar:

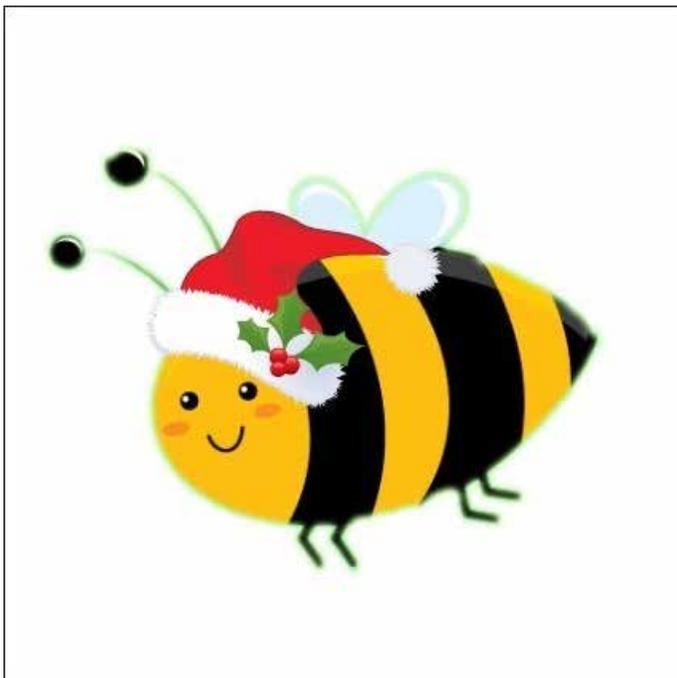
**Monthly Meeting: Monday, Dec. 14th, 6:00PM**

Come early because this is our annual silent auction and fabulous potluck dinner.

Angelo Ibleto will be bringing the tri-tip and polenta we purchased and we will also have turkey. You and your family should come with a dish to share and your own dinnerware so we do not use throwaway eating equipment.

The auction items will be a wonderful massive array of all things to fit all budgets. Checks, cash and charge cards are accepted.

This year we will also have a Bingo Game with prizes just for fun!



## 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, thereby 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).

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# My December

## Beekeeping To-Do List by Serge Labesque

© 2015

### Counting colony losses – What the numbers tell us

At the end of the tour of my Oak Hill farm apiary, I was talking to a well-known Northern California beekeeper. "My overwintering colony losses are probably too low to be good for the bees." I said.

That was during the 2009 Western Apicultural Society (WAS) Convention. At that time, the average winter losses in my apiaries over the previous nine years stood at 5% with a maximum of 10% one year. Although I did not grasp all the implications of what I'd said, my concern was that this result indicated excessive hive pampering and apiary micromanagement. He did not respond. Maybe I had not made my thoughts clear, as in fact they were barely burgeoning back then. Or, such a concept was pure nonsense to him. And indeed, why would losing few colonies be bad for the bees?

Since then, and following the CCD scare, surveys of colony losses have multiplied. These are worthy and commendable efforts that attempt to discern what is going on in the apiaries, but the interpretation of the statistics and the recommendations that are frequently issued on the basis of the information and data that are collected are debatable.

The reports tabulate percentages of losses as they relate to their assumed causes, to the size of the beekeeping operations, to hive management practices and several other variables. They show more or less explicitly that commercial beekeepers that feed and treat their hives for pests or diseases lose fewer colonies than the practitioners who do not. And therefore the conclusion is promptly drawn that beekeepers should treat and feed their colonies, because losing colonies is a bad thing, right?

No, not quite! Consider this: The strength of a species depends on the capacity of its members to adapt to their environment, and on their *innate* resistance or tolerance to the predators, stressors and pathogens they are exposed to. The maintenance of their strength over time depends enormously on "the survival of the fittest", which implies the *necessary and, yes, beneficial elimination of the unfit*.

Everything else being equal, you have to expect that hives that are kept alive with all sorts of treatments and feedings, not to mention frequent requeening, will appear to fare better *in those spreadsheets* than colonies that depend solely on their innate strength. You also have to expect that the proportion of intensively managed colonies that will survive winter or other hurdles will be greater than that of feral or unassisted backyard colonies. But that does not demonstrate that the more intrusive methods are right *for the bees*.

What commercial beekeepers are concerned about is not so much the long-term wellbeing of the bee species, as it is the immediate and very short-term income-generating capability of their livestock. Consequently, they keep

their colonies going by all means. Tallying the losses that occur in these conventional beekeeping operations is of little value, if not entirely meaningless, except from the business operators' standpoint. On the other hand, quantifying the losses of hives that are not sustained artificially by beekeepers provides a measure of the relative health or weakness of bee populations compared to the harshness and toxicity of their environment. Here, the message is clear: Bees have an increasingly hard time offsetting the impact of humans on their habitat, on their lives.

There is no doubt that beekeepers can reduce their colony losses with all sorts of interventions. But how can this be good for the bees, when the means and methods result in the weakening the species? If this is what makes "good beekeepers", don't count me in. I'd rather be a good servant of the bees and one of nature's respectful and obliging assistants, even if this means losing hives. Regardless of what the surveys imply, the beekeepers who do not treat or feed their colonies and lose high proportions of them are better stewards of the bees than those who do everything possible to keep their holdings productive.

Yes, it's hard to lose bees, but this has become necessary in order to purge our surroundings of ill-suited, mass-propagated genetics that should not have been brought in or around our apiaries in the first place.

### December in the apiaries

Even in this season of short days, frequent detours away from my evening commute take me to the apiaries to check on the hives and the bees. The bees are inside the hives then, gathered in tight clusters. So, unlike during sunny weekends, when bees may be seen flying, I must satisfy my curiosity by placing an ear against the sides of the supers and by inspecting the monitoring trays. Reassured by the soft hum that comes from the clusters, I can focus my attention on the debris that is scattered on these terrific communication boards, which the trays are. It only takes a few seconds per hive to gauge how the colonies are doing. The size and location of the cluster is clearly indicated by the extent of the area of denser debris. A few mites, almost no chewed up cappings, and only a few pollen pellets here and there: This is good! It's a period of rest for the bees, when no brood is produced and when they can rid themselves of the varroa mites. I worry more about the colonies that maintain relatively large brood nests at this time of year, not only because they consume their stores rapidly, but also because they may hold large mite populations. I make notes of my observations when something seems abnormal, and, occasionally, I take pictures of the trays.

Back in the warmth of home, the photos can be enlarged on the computer screen. This brings additional clues about the colonies' wellbeing, and sometimes prompts questions that I want to answer.

There could not be a better time than this to review the apiary notes, and to look back at the past year, which was most challenging around my apiaries. The extreme lack of ground moisture prevented the plants from producing nectar, and the nutritional quality of the pollen the bees could collect was questionable. There was no spring flow here, and the dry conditions made it very hard for the bees to collect adequate stores in preparation for winter. The season of colony reproduction happened early, in March, and it was very brief. Most colonies initiated their preparations for swarming well before reaching full development and without congestion of the brood chambers. Seeing this and anticipating a long nectar dearth, I decided to keep the number of my colonies very low. I produced only a few but strong splits and just enough queens to maintain the hives. At this point in time, I'm glad I did so, because, it's now evident that the area around my apiaries could not have supported more colonies, especially considering the growing numbers of hives that are brought into this area. Other locations, under the influence of the Bay or the ocean, and near cities and towns, offered strikingly different scenarios. There, supers of honey could be harvested, thanks to a honey flow that was sustained through the entire spring, summer and fall. Overall, colony health was good.

It's time to start planning next year. Although we do not know what the weather and the flows will do for our bees, we can set goals and prepare what we may need to achieve them. So, we can purchase or fabricate new equipment and refurbish the old. Most importantly, we need to help set up "bee exchanges" where beekeepers can obtain local bees. Our beekeepers' associations can play a huge role in doing so, if only by educating new beekeepers about the value of well-adapted local bees and in helping setting up contacts between their members.

### In summary, this month:

- Inspect the exterior condition of the hives:
  - Hive tops should be properly set and secured.
  - Observe the hive entrances and the ground in front of the hives.
  - Verify that the hive entrances remain unobstructed.
  - On nice days, observe the flight paths and the bee activity.
- Examine monitoring trays.
- Verify that mice have not entered hives (telltale clues of their presence are visible on the monitoring trays, as coarse pieces of comb, mouse feces, etc.).
- Ensure that the hives are adequately ventilated.
- Clean and torch tools and equipment.
- Scrub your smoker.
- Repair and build beekeeping equipment.
- Review notes from the year.
- Plan next season (evaluate the need for equipment and bees).
- Read and learn more about bees and beekeeping.
- Enjoy some honey

Happy Holidays to all of you from the Labesques!

Serge Labesque © 2015

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## Beekeeping Classes

### at Santa Rosa Junior College by Serge Labesque

NOTE: This spring there will be a series of three classes because the JC asked Serge to present an Introduction to Beekeeping class in Sonoma. So, below is how it comes out of the JC class confirmation. Additional information should be available very soon at [www.srjce.augusoft.net](http://www.srjce.augusoft.net).

Class: **Introduction to Beekeeping for Winter & Spring**  
Weekly - Wed 6:30 PM - 9:00 PM;  
4 sessions starting 2/3/2016, ending 2/24/2016  
Lark Hall, 2004, Santa Rosa Campus

Class: **Introduction to Beekeeping for Winter & Spring**  
Weekly - Tues 6:30 PM - 9:00 PM;  
4 sessions starting 3/1/2016, ending 3/22/2016  
Hanna Boys Center, Admissions Building, Conference Room

**Introduction to Beekeeping Description:** This short course will introduce students to beekeeping with a strong emphasis on beehive management techniques as practiced in Sonoma County without reliance on any treatment whatsoever for pests or diseases. Topics include: overview of the honey bee colony; beekeeping tools and equipment; how to start with honey bees; swarming; honey flow and harvesting of hive products; diseases, pests and enemies; hive and queen management; and beekeeping throughout the year.

Class: **Intermediate Beekeeping for Winter & Spring**  
Weekly - Wed 6:30 PM - 9:00 PM;  
2 sessions starting 3/2/2016, ending 3/9/2016  
Lark Hall, 2004, Santa Rosa Campus

**Intermediate Beekeeping Description:** This class will expand on the beehive management techniques that were explored during the Introduction to Beekeeping course. The focus of the class will be spring and summer management of beehives in Sonoma County. Detailed explanations of techniques that are used in apiary expansion, swarm prevention and capture, queen management, and hive division will be given.

# December 14 Silent Auction

By Christine Kurtz

This is it, our next meeting, Monday, December 14 is our Pot Luck Silent Auction (to stay green bring your own plate, cup and cutlery and fancy drinks).

**Note:** Auction bidding starts at 6 and ends at 7:30. Make sure to get your secret number. From 7:30 to 8:30 to keep you busy while we sort and add your winnings we will be playing Bingo, everyone gets a free card and additional ones can be purchased for \$5. We have 3 huge baskets full of goodies for each Bingo winner (see photos). Auction items can be picked up starting at 8:30.

## Silent Auction Marvels!

So did you know that we have an observation hive for bid?  
Full Hive set ups and beekeeping gizmos  
Stuff for the garden, bee bling bling and worms  
in a box too

We have wine, olive oil and honey  
Themed baskets, Serge's hive awnings and  
clever wedges

If you don't know what I'm talking about  
Then you'll just have to come and see  
We have Coffees and Teas and Homemade  
goods

Succulent gardens, t-shirts and hats  
Massages, quilts and smokers  
Grafting tools, cheese tasting and Serge style  
follower boards

Beeswax candles, painted supers and vintage  
books

Lavender, bookkeeping, and time with mentors  
Bees, bags and acupuncture  
Hive tools, honey buckets and an extractor  
Stuff for the birds and the bees and a fishing  
trip too

We have 8hrs of handyman work, ride alongs  
with masters and swarm traps  
Feeder boxes, art and a hooded ventilated bee jacket

Phew I am out of breath and can I say we have much  
more? You just gonna have to come and see!

Eat and play and win!

Your last minute holiday shopping opportunity is awaiting!

Bingo Baskets Prizes Marvelously put Together by Board  
Members Kelli Cox and Cathy Kopshever

[PS Will the lady who donated the nice cork board and 2  
painted bee rocks please e-mail Christine Kurtz so she can  
thank her? E-mail is [petalumabeelady@yahoo.com](mailto:petalumabeelady@yahoo.com)]



## **BEE WISE: “BEE SPACE”**

by Emery Dann

There are 2 ways I look at “BEE SPACE”...

The first way is that “BEE SPACE” is the correct “bee measurement” that humans create in and between frames and space bees build between wax comb. When I forget and leave too wide a gap between frames, or leave 6 or 7 frames instead of 8 frames and two follower boards in the hive, the bees will fill the space with natural comb or crazy comb to teach me a lesson! “BEE SPACE” in comb is generally the same distance apart except for “short-cut holes” bees make to travel through to the other side without taking the long way around.

The second way I look at “BEE SPACE” is: The number of bees in the hive where the cluster or brood is located. We know that the number of bees expand greatly in the spring and summer to bring in available stores. As the summer bees continually die toward fall, the hive shrinks to a much smaller size. Here are the questions I ask in the fall: “How many bees are in the hive?” “Is there too much space for the number of bees?” “Are there enough stores located in and above the brood nest area?” “Where is the valuable pollen stored in the hive for use later as the brood starts to expand?” Do not remove it! “Can I leave some empty comb below the brood nest for clustering?” “If there is brood, does the laying pattern look weak and scattered or strong and close together?” “Is there a queen?”

Doug and Katia Vincent are the owners of Beekind (Local Honey and Beekeeping Equipment Store) in Sebastopol and the Ferry Building in San Francisco. I had a conversation with Doug about this. He said, “Trying to keep a

small number of bees going through the winter will often be the cause of hive failure.” Fall and winter is when the “BEE SPACE RATIO” (number of bees compared to the space in the hive) is critical! Doug likes his hives to be crowded and as full of bees as possible. He has success wintering a number of small wooden nuc box hives by re-queening with splits he makes in the summer. Reducing the hive size makes it easier for bees to create the heat they need during the winter. Leaving too much honey or boxes with empty comb above or below the hive cluster can be fatal for the hive with heat loss. Langstroth boxes are not as secure as many feral hives in tree cavities or in between the studs inside a wall of a shed or building. Hive space reduction can save more of our beehives through the winter.

“Declining Hive Syndrome” is when there are fewer and fewer bees in the hive, the bees cannot generate enough heat or take care of each other even if they have enough stores. It becomes a hive death spiral with fewer and fewer bees. Then the queen may die. Having too much space and too few bees allows hive beetles and wax moths to enter the hive when these pests fly and enter hives just before dusk and during the night.

Opening hive boxes in the winter is can be deadly! It can chill any brood and break the propolis seal letting cold air in between the cracks between boxes creating heat loss. If I do break the propolis seal, I use painter’s tape or duct tape to keep the cold air from going inside. Never open hives or pull frames when it is too cold or windy for obvious reasons.

During the spring and summer the need for hive expansion is not easy to keep ahead of our bees giving them enough space and equipment when the nectar is flowing. Our beekeeper challenge in the winter is just the opposite. Avoid keeping too few bees in too much “BEE SPACE”!

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## **The Bumble Bee is Threatened Too!**

By Thea Vierling

Do you want to help the Bumble Bee survive the winter? Bumble Bees are very important pollinators especially for the tomato because they use “buzz pollination” which is required to break open that tough skin around the anther, which holds the pollen. Here is a very easy way to help them and save yourself a little time as well.

Because of how bumble bees overwinter, it is important to leave some areas of your garden covered in leaf litter throughout the winter. This provides important insulation and nutrients for your garden while also creating shelter for bumble bees. Downed pine needles have a similar effect; leaving them on the ground will also provide soil nutrients and shelter. If you want to rake up this leaf litter in the spring, wait until you see several bumble bee species flying about. Waking them up from their winter’s nap early will likely not bode well for a successful buzz next summer! So don’t rake all those leaves in your yard until late spring!

Editor’s note: Greatest excuse ever for not raking leaves! Might even mention it to people that hire or use leaf blowers!



# Sonoma County Beekeepers' Association

## General Meeting Minutes November 9, 2015

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

President, Laura Baker opened the meeting at 7:00 pm with a welcome to everyone.

Thea announced the SILENT AUCTION coming up next month. Items are needed now to make it even better than last year's. Email Christine at [auction@sonomabees.org](mailto:auction@sonomabees.org)

Kelli Cox announced the Holiday Potluck next month. There will not be volunteer awards, but there will be bingo games during the auction results tallying. You get 1 free card and can purchase additional for \$5 each. There will be prizes!

The Society will provide Tri tip turkey and beverages. Bring a potluck dish for 8 people. Also bring your own plates and utensils, cups. You can bring your own alcohol if desired.

There will not be a membership table, so sign up before then to get the current rates, they go up on January 1st.

Librarian, Nadya said if you check out a book tonight, keep it until the January meeting.

Laura opened nominations for 2016 officers. The ballot will be sent out via email in a few weeks. Or vote at the December meeting by paper ballot by 7:00 pm.

President position: Cheryl Veretto was nominated by Chris C, Ettamarie seconded and all approved.

1st VP/Membership position: Ann Jared was nominated by Chris C, it was seconded and all approved.

2nd VP/Speakers position: Ettamarie Peterson was nominated by Laura Baker, Chris C seconded and all approved.

Regional Coordinator position: Christine Kurtz was nominated by Thea, Cheryl seconded, but it was explained that that position is Board-appointed.

Treasurer position: Lou Spengler was nominated by Denise Wright, Chris Dicker seconded and all approved.

Secretary position: Becky Jackson was nominated by Laura Baker, Cheryl seconded and all approved.

No additional nominations were voiced by the assembly.

The 50/50 raffle earned \$103 to a lucky ticket holder. Second prize was a bottle of wine that Laura Baker won.

Ettamarie Peterson is the speaker on the Beekeeping School she attended in Ireland at Gormanston College. The Federation of Irish Beekeepers have held it there for 69 years and about 400 people attend. They have speakers from all over the world. Robert Paxton, from England was the keynote speaker this year. Ettamarie's granddaughter Jessie went with her.

The course included a written exam including a hive inspection at the end of the week. Irish black bees fly in the drizzle! The beekeepers there are trying to keep their strain pure. She took a class on microscopy, since she purchased a new digital Microscope earlier this year. She was learning how to look at pollen in honey, among other things.



Ettamarie with an Irish black bee.

A class on queen breeding included mini nucs called Apideas. Polystyrene was used a lot on hive bodies, but it can't be torched to sterilize (it would melt). The Irish set the apideas 3 feet up on poles to keep them safe from predators, and work without bending over.

They had a honey show with lots of perpetual trophies. They are highly coveted. A musical night at the local pub was one of Ettamarie's highlights!

Ettamarie and Jessie earned their certificates of completion of the course. They did a little more traveling including visiting the Galtee Bee Breeders (trying to save the black bees).

The Irish beekeepers fear the arrival of the Asian hornet (in France now) and the Small Hive Beetle. The hive inspectors are volunteers; there is no paid official.

Meeting ended at 8:40 pm.

Submitted,

*Becky Jackson*

Link to the November Board Meeting Minutes:  
<http://sonomabees.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/a11-November-General-Meeting.pdf>

## The Small Hive Beetle

by Ettamarie Peterson

The last time Rob Keller spoke to our association he said he has seen more and more small hive beetles in his Napa County Apiaries. Christine Kurtz and I live very close, as the bee flies, to each other. We have both spotted just a few small hive beetles a very few times. In mid-November I was taking apart a hive that had died and discovered two of the little critters in this hive. The colony had left a lot of honey behind so I am sure it was very attractive to the pests. Luckily I was able to find them and also process the honey so it would not be a welcoming habitat for more. If you see them and think they will be a problem, there are traps available to lure them into. The Vincent's sell the traps at their beekind store. All the bee supply catalogs carry various traps as well.

I have a camera with a macro lens and a digital microscope so I made up close pictures of some of it.



*Note the knobbed antenna. That is a definite sign of the SHB.*



*Closeup of foot.*



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## Another Pest Not Here Yet

By Ettamarie Peterson and Serge Labesque

A few years ago we had a beekeeper from France speak to our association. He showed us beautiful photos of the bees and beekeepers in his region. He also showed us photos of a new pest that had recently arrived in a shipment of pottery from Asia. This is a terrifying Asian hornet that quickly destroys bee colonies. The beekeepers of France are now asking their government for more help to get rid of this dangerous threat to bees. He has sent Serge Labesque information and asked our help. The following is what Serge has translated for us. As we learned from the Government Agricultural agency APHIS, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service)- PPQ (Plant Protection and Quarantine) in spite of their vigilance pest do arrive on our shores in shipments. So far we have not had to deal with this Asian Hornet and hopefully never will.

A French beekeeper friend of mine (the one who showed us the pictures of the Asian hornet), Jean-Paul Picco, sent me this link to a petition his beekeepers' association has initiated to obtain help from the French institutions in their fight against the devastating Asian hornet. This is an important issue, which, although may seem far away is only a cargo ship away from us.

[http://www.petitions24.net/contre\\_le\\_frelon\\_vespa\\_velutina](http://www.petitions24.net/contre_le_frelon_vespa_velutina)

I strongly encourage everyone to support the French beekeepers' effort by signing the petition. Many in Sonoma, Napa and Marin Counties and beyond have already signed the petition. Support is growing, but we need to do as much as we can to help.

Here is a little more information, which I posted previously on our Sonoma County beekeeper's site: As you probably know, the Asian hornet was introduced into southwest France about ten years ago. Since then, it has spread rapidly to most of France and is now reaching neighboring countries. It is a very destructive insect, as it preys on colonies of honey bees. To this point, the beekeepers have been doing most of the work, unsuccessfully, by destroying nests of these hornets with limited means.

The petition requests that the French government help the beekeepers in the fight against the Asian hornet by re-classifying the pest, *Vespa velutina*, as an invasive and noxious species and by providing help in trapping these pests.

The petition is in French and will ask you for your first name, surname, town, country and email address and if you wish to have your name visible on the petition. Following the registration, you will receive an email to confirm. Click on highlighted return link. [These notes by Jon Sevigny]

Here is what happened and why I think that we need to show strong support for the French beekeepers: Around 2005, Asian hornets were found in southwest France for the first time. It was found that a few of them had been introduced accidentally (one hopes) in a shipment of pottery for bonsai. The institutions in charge of controlling such pests essentially ignored them. Unfortunately, these hornets multiplied very rapidly because the predators that keep them in check in their original habitat are not present in Europe. They prey voraciously on honey bee colonies, killing them in no time by catching their foragers in flight, as they return from the fields, and by entering the hives to prey on the bees. They create huge nests that house very large colonies, high up in tall trees. Incidentally, you should know that they are also very dangerous to humans. So far, the beekeepers have been trying to control these hornets by destroying nests and capturing queens and hornets with all sorts of rudimentary means, and with little or no help from the government and other institutions.

Now, the Asian hornet has spread to most of France and is expanding its range into other countries of Europe. This petition is to pressure the relevant institutions to act appropriately in this situation. We need to show the French institutions that we are concerned by their inaction. It would be very easy to think that this is a French problem, and that we may just ignore it. But think again: What is around, comes around. All it would take is a few Asian hornets in a shipment of some goods from France to the port of Oakland, and we would have these pests in our apiaries. This is not farfetched; because that is the way they went from Southeast Asia to France. There are many examples of accidental and not-so-accidental pests and poor genetics introductions. This is how the varroa and tracheal mites, the Small Hive Beetle and many other pathogens have been spread nearly globally. The spread of the Asian hornet in Europe is not unlike that of the Africanized honey in the Americas. Bee problems such as these have global dimensions. The bees and the beekeepers are all in this together.

So, again, I think that we need to show the French institutions that are responsible for this problem that the world is watching. These pest needs to be controlled at its new point of origin, instead of when it reaches new territories. Someday, we may ask the French beekeepers for similar help (Just one possible reason might be *Tropilaelaps clareae*, which may not be very far from entering our country, if only because of the bee traffic that crosses the borders).

I hope that you will see here enough reasons to sign the petition. If you have any other questions about this, please do not hesitate to call, email or post them. Thank you.

Shouldn't this pest be controlled, if not eradicated, at its new point of origin (Europe) rather than allowed to

spread and to become a widespread problem?

The French beekeepers are willing to do the work. All they want is to be given the means of doing it. We can help them now by signing the petition, or we can ignore their plight and certainly suffer the consequences of our neglect soon, as past experience has shown.

Thank you.

Serge



A half nest destroyed by a friend of Jean-Paul. Jean-Paul is on the left.



Pictures of the Asian Hornet.

# Regional Groups and How They Came to Be

By Christine Kurtz

When I first joined the SCBA in 2009 there were approximately 80 to 100 members and about 10 mentors, monthly meetings were quaint with 20 or so beekeepers. If every member needed a mentor it was totally doable, although I already had trouble getting one. By 2013 with the bee demise often in the news and a huge surge in beekeeping the association grew to 300 and now in 2015 stands 400+ with a majority being new beekeepers often in the 90% range, still out of proportion with intermediates and experts and mostly with those willing and able to mentor. Very quickly our mentors got overloaded and overwhelmed, some had health or family issues to tend to and many mentors disappeared.

The management of the association became a very different animal and the request for mentorship was staggering, but after some growing pains, which the last few boards navigated with extreme patience and perseverance, we emerged with a most dynamic association that many of us are extremely proud of. Not only did regional groups emerge from that but also an amazing educational school program, bee buddies, bee cafes, workshops and more. Let me tell you how the regional groups came to be and how significant and important they are.

I needed to connect with other beekeepers and learn more as my bees kept dying. Thea Vierling had started her own support group in Kenwood which prompted me to start one in Petaluma and we got to talking, encouraging and ended up, because of our nature, competing but always with the utmost respect and great fun. "What is your group doing?" became a frequent topic of conversation. During one of those conversations, the light bulb went on pretty much simultaneously to both of us. Everyone should have the opportunity to be part of a group like that! The opportunity of learning together whether we just get together to talk bees or help each other with our hives taught us that beekeeping is really a community thing. The bees tell us this anyway. They are in themselves the ultimate community. They also do not stay in your back yard to forage; they forage in your entire community. If you ever have the opportunity to map a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5-mile radius of where your hives reside, do it. It is eye opening!

At the same time I was dabbling with the idea of running for the 2013 SCBA Presidency and I couldn't organize this new idea and become President. So Thea told me that if I became President, she would work on conceptualizing the idea. We both picked up our flags and started running. And so the cluster group concept came to be. Finding a person willing to hold a group of willing beekeepers and organizing get together or Bee Cafes (a term coined by the first Sebastopol Cluster Leader Philip Welch) and organize hive dives (a term

coined by Thea) in the different towns of our large county became our first challenge. Note there is nothing in there about having to be an bee expert, but every cluster leader of the past will tell you how much more they have learned in return for their organizational time.

Thea was then boots on the ground, she navigated and tweaked where needed, problem solved and more than you can count jumped in where needed. She trained cluster leaders on the computer (mind you our current system is much easier now), she was hand on helping cluster leaders with bees, she encouraged, coaxed, ran workshops...she worked hard and relentlessly and I will be forever grateful to her as she made it all happen. I was in the background encouraging, helping to problem solve, became the first south cluster leader, met and e-mailed with Thea, problem solving and ever encouraging her.

Through this whole evolution both Thea and I learned more than you can image from the importance of locally adapted bees and the necessity to share our survivor stock to the amazing people this associations has. We will be ever grateful for all these folks.

In 2016 Thea and I will be switching roles, granted the new board agrees. I will be low boots on the ground and Thea will be there to encourage and help me problem solve. We will still meet and e-mail, as she is not going anywhere as she promised to be my helper. I won't let her anyway.

I wanted to tell you the story so you can see the intent of this incredible program, which is to give you this collective mentorship because there is a lack of personal mentors, to give you our community to help the bees in the best way, to meet some really great people from all walks of life. We are in this together.

In 2016 we have some seasoned cluster leaders staying and some needing to pass the baton and move on to other functions in the organization. We also have some new volunteers who are excited to jump in. Central Cluster has 3 new dynamic gals: Joy Wesley, Molly Kuhl and Maggie Weaver who call themselves the 3 beesqueeters! There is also a fourth, Ann Jared, who is sharing in the idea pool. They have already met to organize the new year; 2016 here we come! South Cluster Leader Sally McGough and West Cluster Leader Chris Dicker, two amazing gals, will continue with their great dedication. North and East Clusters are

looking for new leaders. If you want to learn more than the bees in your backyard, if you want to create community and foster a place for beekeepers to support beekeepers we need you. In turn I will open my apiary in Spring, Summer and Fall for special hive dives for cluster leaders, I will be there to support and encourage you, and help you organize the best year yet.



## 2015 Board Members and Other Helpful People

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1st Vice Pres. Membership Kelli Cox— [1stVP@sonomabees.org](mailto:1stVP@sonomabees.org)  
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[centralcluster@sonomabees.org](mailto:centralcluster@sonomabees.org) Chris Conrad

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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.

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

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. 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.

Free Colony given to beekeeper that refers Chris Conrad & gets a job from that.

## Honey Better than Cough Syrup

by Simon Rees, Dublin Beekeeper

NATURAL honey is a more effective remedy for children's coughs than over-the-counter medicines, researchers say. A dose of buckwheat honey before bedtime easily outperformed a cough suppressant in a US study.

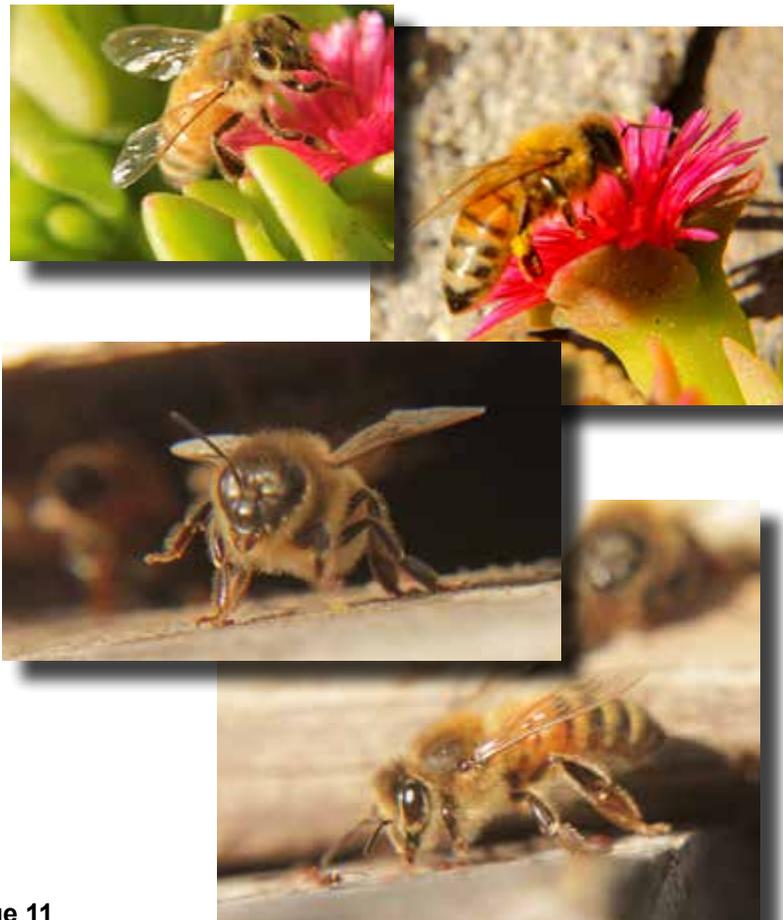
Honey did a better job of reducing the severity and frequency of nighttime coughs. It also improved sleep quality for children and their parents. Dextromethorphan (DM) -- the active ingredient in many cough mixtures sold in chemists (pharmacies) and supermarkets -- had no significant impact on symptoms. Honey has been used in medicine for centuries to treat coughs and bronchitis and also to assist the healing of wounds.

Ian Paul, who led the researchers from Penn State College of Medicine, said: "We hope that medical professionals will consider the positive potential of honey as a treatment, given the lack of proven efficacy, expense, and potential for adverse effects associated with DM."

## Macro Photos of Honey Bees

By Ettamarie Peterson

I have a 55mm macro lens for my Canon digital camera. In November I bought three filters that screw onto the lens to make it take even closer photos. Of course my favorite subjects are the honey bees. It is not easy to take these super close-ups because for one the bees don't stay put while I am adjusting the focus. I am so excited about using these new filters I want to share some of my first photos with you. The flower is a succulent called red apple. The bees love it!



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