

The Monthly Extractor

Volume 41, Issue 4

April 2016



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

This Month's Calendar:

Monthly Meeting: Monday, April 11- 6PM

Rohnert Park 4-H Building

6 pm - Social (bring your own cup please), learn from others, check out books & videos, buy plants and find cluster leaders.

7 pm - SCBA in the Community: Education and Gardening Groups Learn what these groups are doing and how they are doing it.

Upcoming Meetings

May 9 - ZomBees - John Hapernik, SFSU

June 13 - An Inexpensive Electronic Hive Monitor - Jerry Draper

Other Upcoming Events

April 16 - Earth Day - QuarryHill

April 22 - Sonoma County Wine Growers Assn.- Shone Farm

April 23-24, April 30-May1 - Beekind package pick up.

April 30 - Healdsburg Garden Club (Tentative)

April 30 - El Dia del Nino - Children's Museum of Sonoma Co.

May 7 - UC Davis Bee Symposium

May 8 - Luther Burbank Gardens (Tentative)

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From Our President

Greetings Fellow Beeks!

The bee season is upon us and in full swing. I love the new South and Central Cluster Groups have created Facebook 'Group' pages and their members post multiple times throughout the day - it is bees, bees and more bees. Members are now sharing and creating community online as well and it is really exciting - it is an easy way to get some quick advice or share your bee news. If your Cluster group hasn't yet started a Facebook 'Group' page and you are interested in getting in on the action - talk to your Cluster leader - get involved... it is a great way of staying connected.



We have also started Swarm Assist lists, for the new beekeepers that want to experience a swarm collection and learn more about bees. These lists have been given to SCBA members that are on the Swarm List and will be used to call on Assistants if they get a swarm call. I implemented the list last week, I got a call and texted out to 7 'Assistants' in West County - 1 showed up and she got to experience a swarm capture. It works! I encourage member swarm collectors to utilize the list and call an assistant or two when you go on a swarm call... you can always use extra hands.

Bee Well,

Cheryl Veretta
President

My April

Beekeeping To-Do List by Serge Labesque

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Following reports of large colony losses, the bees have been in the news quite frequently in recent years. Concerned, many people who heard the alarm decided to help. In their minds, having a beehive was the way to do this. And after all, keeping bees sounded like an intriguing undertaking. They could even have their own honey!

Of course they heard that pesticides, mites and viruses were killing bees. Maybe they also understood that the loss of habitat and malnutrition, too, were hurting pollinators. However, they promptly set these concerns aside, as they were sure that none of this would happen to their hives. They would plant a few flowers in their gardens, and their bees would certainly be healthy, gentle and productive. So they thought.

The well-intentioned new converts did not know that beekeepers can be the worst enemies of the bees; that conventional beekeeping practices are in fact the untold chief cause of their demise. You read me well: The varroa mites, malnutrition and the pesticides are not destroying the honey bee, although they are hard blows to the species. The main culprits are ironically known as “beekeepers”. All but a small proportion of the country’s beehives are ruthlessly exploited or under uncouth hive management practices. Worse yet: The species is manipulated right down to its genetic make-up, and this on a global scale! Indeed, one of the most damaging factors is the mass production by commercial operations of millions of queen bees while relying on very few breeder queens. Those young bulk-produced queens are mated with drones, which are issued from a few colonies that are genetically similar, if not actually related to each other. Therefore, these queens carry essentially the same sets of genes, and they are shipped to new and not-so-new beekeepers, all over the country and beyond, in queen cages, in packages and in nucs. These commercially produced queens and bees are not adapted to the conditions, pests and pathogens found in any particular locale. How could they be, since they came from stocks that were kept alive artificially with treatments for pests and diseases, and with feedings? Natural selection was not at work on them. Instead, bee producers and breeders controlled their lives and how they were bred and mated.

As a matter of fact, the bees that will fill packages and nucs this spring are being brought back from the California almond groves as I write these lines (March). There, in the toxic landscape of a money-spinning monocrop, they mixed with more bees, bee pests and pathogens that came in semi-truck loads from all over the country. They are arriving in our backyards as a huge mass of boxed inept bees, as a huge tide of genetic pollution that will overwhelm and damage irreparably our vanishing populations of locally adapted bees*. And since this commerce is widespread, it’s nearly the entire species that is affected. Making this sad situation worse, there are beekeepers’ associations that facilitate the procurement of packages and nucs!

No, the new beekeepers didn’t know that beekeepers can be the most harmful enemies the bees have to face! They didn’t know that their new backyard hives, too, were going to erode further the health of bee populations. They are not to be blamed.

But this does not need to continue unchanged. All of us together can really help the bees and ourselves. We can maintain the genetic diversity and strength of our local bee populations, by propagating our own hives. The division of colonies is a simple and effective technique that every beekeeper can use to produce large numbers of new hives and young queens that can help to rebuild, expand or create apiaries**. By multiplying our hives and sharing our bees, we can stop the introgression of foreign bees into our areas. It is heartening to see that more and more beekeepers are assembling to make this happen successfully.

Now, we know that conventional beekeeping practices are really harming the bees. We also know that beekeepers can really help by becoming stewards of the bees instead of contributing to their exploitation. Now that we know all this, we no longer have excuses. We must cancel our orders for bee packages, nucs or queens. If our deposits won’t be refunded, let’s forget about the money and leave those bees where they are. We made a mistake; let’s not make it worse by bringing the bees; it would be unpardonable. Whether we have bees or we want bees, we can connect with neighbor beekeepers, and help to organize the production and distribution of new colonies and queens that will be obtained from truly local survivor hives. It’s what will preserve the genetic diversity of the species, and it will be a gigantic step towards saving the bees.

And, yes, let’s plant flowers for pollinators, because this, too, can help.

(*) In these lines, “local” means from within only a few miles, as far as the flight range of foragers extends.

This does NOT mean “from anywhere in the county or the state”!

(**) See the February and March installment of this column.

April in the apiaries

Whether it’s for the beekeepers or for the bees, this is the busiest time of the beekeeping year in the apiaries. The honey flow is copious this spring, and the colonies are growing rapidly. What a difference a year and a little rain make!

Thanks to the timely and generous addition of supers and to the volume increases of the brood chambers, the colonies could reach remarkable sizes without swarming. The presence of clustering space between the brood nests and the hive entrances also helped delay the onset of the preparations for swarming by the colonies. But no matter what we do now, the urge to reproduce could compel them to swarm very soon. When they finally reach that

point it will be the best time to divide them.

However, the hives that were not judiciously expanded at the end of winter swarmed early. We could help them by capturing and hiving their swarms.

As an expression of the abundance of nectar, white wax is blooming inside the hives and young bees are amassing to build comb everywhere they can. It's an opportunity to get new combs built that is not to be missed. The foragers feed and support this in-hive activity. The density of their traffic in front of the hives can be astonishing, and this warrants opening of the hive entrances to accommodate them.

As the hive bees process and store the incoming nectar, they fill and ripen the frames that are in the center of the supers first, and they gradually extend their work toward the sides of the supers. To obtain fully harvestable supers, the centermost frames may be swapped with the lateral ones, but I no longer practice this method of managing the honey supers. Instead of harvesting full supers only a few times, I prefer collecting the surplus honey in more modest and more frequent microharvests along the year. So, I pluck frames of ripe surplus honey from the center of the supers and I add or return empty frames to the sides. By doing this it is possible to enjoy the shift in the flavor of the honey along the year and with the different hives. Since there is no plant around here that can fill supers, this pleasure would be lost in the blend of honeys that results from harvesting full supers.

Hives inspections are performed more frequently in the spring than at any other time of the year. This is in order to keep up with the rapidly evolving needs of the colonies. Not only do we have to provide them with more space, but we also monitor their brood nests for their health condition and for the signs that justify their division.

Unfortunately, there are instances of health problems that may have to be addressed. At this time of year chalkbrood and European foulbrood are the most common of these issues. The combs of the affected brood chambers should be safely discarded at once to eliminate the fungal spores and the bacteria that caused the problems and to avoid contaminating other colonies. The volume of these hives should be reduced to allow the bees to cover the comb that will be left to them.

At this time of year, everything is in place to ensure that we obtain excellent queens: There are lots of well-fed nurse bees and the weather is mild. Our best colonies can provide brood to produce a few queens, which, issued from good stocks, may be used to replace failed queens, and improve the quality of our hives. The only dark cloud in this situation is the mass of undesirable drones that came from packages and nucs, as they are not adapted to our local conditions. These drones will unfortunately mate with the virgin queens that will come from our good survivor stock. The result is an irreversible loss of fitness in our bee populations.

More on [microharvesting](#) – Once we have several hives in our apiaries, harvesting honey “by the supers” becomes grueling and tedious work. At this point, I no longer covet the backbreaking pick-up truckloads of honey supers

that lead to long nights spent uncapping and extracting. Been there, done that. So, instead of harvesting full supers two or three times a year, I prefer harvesting only one or a few frames per hive, but more often all along the season; that is, as long as there is surplus honey to harvest!

For the bees, the withdrawal of one or a few frames of honey from the hive is not traumatic at all, as few bees need to be removed from frames of capped honey. They do not even seem to realize what is happening. The same cannot be said about the removal of bees from entire supers that may still contain uncapped honey. Unlike when supers are removed, there is no risk of triggering robbing during these furtive and swift intrusions, and the bees carry on with their normal activities. It's a gentler approach that helps keep the hives within manageable dimensions, because the honey supers are not piling up until it's time for the big harvest. There are no heavy honey supers to haul either, because the frames of honey can be transferred to light nuc boxes, which also make it easy to track where the frames came from. This way, the frames may be returned to their original hives after removing the honey. The use of the extractor and the associated tedious cleaning work are also reduced. They simply are not needed unless enough frames have been harvested to somehow justify loading the device. In the cases of the smaller harvests, the combs are simply crushed. Well, I think that the day when the potato masher will have completely supplanted my extractor is not too far away for me.

Occasionally, a particularly nice frame of honey is placed in a stand that adorns our dining room table, and we can eat the comb honey directly from it. That's honey at its best! Coated with beeswax, this frame stand displays some of the gifts we receive from the bees.

Enough propolis is collected from the end bars of the frames of honey to cover our needs. The frames can then be returned to their hives without the propolis build-up that could affect their self-spacing feature.

In summary, this month:

- Inspect the hives regularly.
- Ensure unimpeded development of the brood nests. Add frames to provide egg-laying space and comb-building opportunities, as necessary.
- Add supers to provide nectar storage space.
- Ensure the presence of clustering space between the brood nests and the hive entrances.
- Observe the monitoring trays, particularly for signs of brood diseases, possibly chalkbrood mummies, EFB-affected larvae, or other health-related problems.
- Gradually open the entrances of the hives to match the increasing forager activity.
- Monitor the swarm traps that were set out.
- Perform divisions when the hives are initiating their preparations for swarming.
- Keep some equipment at the ready to catch the occasional swarm.
- Rear a few queens from good stock.
- Requeen or combine hives that are not performing satisfactorily, and those that have failing queens.

- Maintain sources of water for the bees.
- Pull weeds from in front of the hives.
- Discard old and misshapen combs.
- Render wax from discarded frames.
- Routinely clean and scorch tools and equipment.
- Harvest only surplus early spring honey (in moderation!).
- Make sure you leave enough food in the hives.

Serge's Hive Splitting Notes

There has been a request for the handout given at Serge's presentation on hive splitting last month so he has given permission to post it to this link for your use. Please be sure Serge is given credit for this wonderful paper! <http://sonomabees.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Hive-division-Handout-1603-3-2016-Serge.pdf>

Serge Labesque
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BEE WISE: "A SWARM IN THE BAG!" by Emery Dann

A swarm came to my front door and the doorbell rang! Before you think I lost the few "marbles" I had left... Well, the swarm was inside two black plastic trash bags. A friend I knew for many years had caught the swarm about 15 minutes earlier and brought it to me in the bags. It was tied with string to prevent any from escaping. I could almost hear bees saying to each other, "Why did this happen to us—what were we thinking?"

I have never heard such a loud bee roar from inside the bag! The bees were desperate to get out of the bag as fast as possible! They easily could have suffocated. Besides, bees are extremely sensitive by instinct to be sure their entrances are always open, day or night!

My predicament was similar to having a bag with a cat inside! How do I get the cat out of the bag? My pick-up with a canopy was the obvious choice—not inside my house or garage! I put a medium swarm box inside the pick-up and then carefully laid the bag of bees on top of several frames with drawn comb. It was after dark. I gently cut and tore open the bags leaving the bees to rest on top of the frames through the night.

I came back the next morning and got them deeper into the box with a turkey feather. I put a top cover on the top of the bees' new home to make them feel secure. A wooden bottom had been screwed under the medium swarm box to make the swarm easy to move later on.

Since some forager bees were flying all around in confusion trying to orient to their new location, I opened the back doors of my pickup and moved the box outside. Almost all of the bees in the swarm were saved, including the queen. This was life threatening because the queen could have been easily crushed and killed as the bag was moved around and laid down.

Moral to the story: Michael Bush said to the Sonoma County Beekeepers:

"Sometimes doing nothing is better than doing something. The most common mistake is to feel we have to do something, even if it is wrong. Stop and make sure it is the right thing! Ask what the bees are trying to do and then help them do it by giving them the resources the bees need. What is the evidence that what we are doing will actually help our bees?"

Doing nothing (or less than we think we have to do) may be the best alternative to helping our bees. At other times, we must act fast to get bees "out of the bag they are in"!

Links to Association Reports:

March Board Minutes - <http://sonomabees.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/03.2016-BOD-Minutes.pdf>

Bee Plants of the Month

By Alice Ford-Sala

Beneficial Tree of the Month

Tilia Linden

Family Malvaceae

I wish my little cul de sac were lined with Tilia instead of the Chinese Pistache that the city of Santa Rosa has planted. *T. cordata* or Little-Leaf Linden would make a nice street tree, as it grows 30-50 feet tall, and only 15-30 feet wide. *T. americana* or Basswood is also an upright tree that grows up to 60 feet tall and 25 feet wide. Tilia would be a good choice for providing shade in a front or back yard, and is tolerant of regular watering. The pretty heart shaped leaves that flutter in the breeze make Tilia a very handsome tree, and it is often planted to green and glorious effect in parks across the country. In fall the leaves turn yellow, providing autumnal color.

The flowers are borne in hanging clusters of yellow fragrant blossoms that are attractive to bees during the summer. The leaves and flowers are used in herbal medicine. I have heard that the nectar is so bountiful that 800 to 1000 lbs. of honey per acre have been recorded.

Plant your Tilia in sun, with deep good soil and your bees will thank you.

Note: I read that *T. tomentosa*, Silver Linden nectar is mildly toxic to bees I would not recommend that variety.



Tilia Linden

Native Plant of the Month

Evergreen Huckleberry *Vaccinium ovatum*

Family Ericaceae

Our lovely huckleberry, growing in the cool red-wood forest, blooming with tiny rosy white fairy bellflowers in spring, providing sweet blue-black berries that are a treat to collect on a summer's day. We can enjoy this gorgeous native plant on hikes, but also in our yards. The shiny green leaves that last all year round are attractively reddish when spring growth appears. Huckleberry can grow up to 10 feet tall and wide in deep shade, is more compact- 3 to 4 feet tall and wide in sun. Though they are a forest plant, they can take pruning and can even be trimmed into a hedge.

Given moderate summer water, huckleberries can provide beauty and fruit for years of enjoyment.



Evergreen Huckleberry

Regional Groups

By Christine Kurtz Co-Regional Coordinator

“Not my bees, not your bees, but our bees,” was so eloquently coined by Rob Keller at our last January meeting. This phrase stuck with me because this is part of the concept of the regional groups and is so well said. Not only do we create communities to reconnect with each other and to mentor each other using collective knowledge and host hands on workshops, we create them to share our bees. After all we share a vast radius of bee forage as bees forage between 2 to 5 mile radius and we share genetics through the drones from all our regional hives in drone congregation areas. So why not share bees that have survived. The ones that might have figured out our regional nectar flows, the ones that self manage pests and diseases, the ones showing resilience. Sharing local splits is probably the most ideal as you have history on the hive. Second best is sharing our local swarms, as we know they have survived at least one season, although they often come with unknown origins. I am starting to get these exciting stories from cluster members and it really warms my heart and this is what keeps me going as your regional coordinator. It’s not the hours of management for this position sitting in front of the computer that is for sure. This March has been filled with wonderful stories of sharing bees and mentoring. Here are a few stories featured, but know that there were many more and the lack of mention is only because of lack of time and space.

South cluster member John McGinnis caught his second swarm, even though he still has empty equipment from dead outs, he gave the swarm to Lew Spengler, our treasurer, who is just starting out with bees. John is taking sharing bees with his south cluster group in earnest immediately wanting to know who else needed bees in the group. He also helped get a swarm for Susan Price who was at work when she got a swarm call and also drove all the way to Novato

I got a call for help with a swarm a bit too high for any ladder and naturally the one with a pole bucket to retrieve such swarms is called. I was out of town, however, dealing with abandoned and neglected hives and could not help with my swarm catcher gizmo. To the rescue came Leonard Page and Bonnie Cromwell. They had all the parts to the bucket poll but not assembled. They assembled it on the spot and helped Paul Heavenridge get the swarm. You guys rock!

One of Louis’ split went to Ariel Gilbert a new member who was a beekeeper over 20 years ago before going blind. She has been yearning to get back into beekeeping but was afraid people would shy away around her or be simply afraid, something she experiences frequently. But she found the Sonoma County Beekeepers and was readily embraced by her South Cluster Group. Here she is giving her split from Louis with simple voice guidance. She did an amazing job! We will check it in 5 to 7 days for queen cells. The other split went to another beekeeper who lost all her hives this last winter. Louis and Ariel, you rock!



Steve Schwindt’s larger than life swarm
(Photo by John McGinnis)



Picture of Leonard, Bonnie and Paul capturing that swarm way up in a tree



Lew Spengler with his first bees, a swarm given by John McGinnis

to help Stephen Schwindt when his hive swarmed into the neighbor’s yard. Way to go, John. You rock!



Here is Louis von Arb with one of his booming hives and the two splits he gave away in March.
(Photos By Christine Kurtz)

In Central Cluster Ann and Don Jeréb, the two wonderful beekeepers that shared so generously their knowledge of how to build an inexpensive but successful swarm trap, caught their first swarm and readily gave it to Molly Kuhl. Ann and Don, you rock!

Lizanne Pastore's, east cluster coordinator, shared this story with me:

"Over the course of several days during 2 weeks in late In March, a handful of East Cluster members gathered at the apiary of Susan Luber in Kenwood to perform inspections of her 3 thriving hives with the intent to split them at some point. Serge Labesque oversaw the hive dives.



Ariel hiving her split
(Photos By Christine Kurtz)



Ann and Molly hiving the bees in the swarm trap
(Photo By Maggie Weaver)

A brief synopsis of the gatherings thus far: 2 of her hives are still in growing mode and space was added appropriately, a fabulous learning experience for all. Susan's 3rd hive did end up being split and she very generously provided booming, 7-frame splits to Deborah Rogers and George Bradley. She hopes to divide her remaining hives when the time is right. East cluster members who have been active in the cluster and showing good intent to raise local bees may be lucky enough to receive a split. It's a good reason to "bee involved!"

Here is another way cluster members are helping each other. How about hive sitting! Marilyn Pongenise was on vacation and asked Nadya to go to her house to look at her hives! There was a swarm in her yard so Nadya caught it and put in Marilyn's extra top bar hive! Isn't she awesome! Not only that, she took along another beekeeper who wanted swarm experience to show all the ropes. This is a great example of experts and assistants being put together. Nadya is none other than Nadya Clark



East Cluster members clustering around Serge at the hive dive.

our amazing librarian. Nadya, you rock as librarian, bee buddy and mentor!

Not to forget sharing resources: Another recent East Cluster hive dive occurred at the apiary of Barry and Cheryl Sirkus. This one was led by Thea Vierling and Mike Turner. Barry generously donated a frame of brood to Bo Kearns, who needed to boost a weak hive. Another great example of how we can work together.

Here a swarm on the trap instead of in the trap, donated by Susan Konanz to Morgan and Nikki Campbell who lost all their bees over winter. The bees had to be managed like a regular swarm coaxed in a swarm box first but all went well, minus a few bee stings, as it was finished in the dark and all the foragers, older bees with very developed stinger were home. Susan, you rock!

I want a special mention, yet again, to behind the scenes beekeepers who help cluster leader and me, their computer challenged coordinator, with computer issues on a daily basis sometimes. This is from invitations, glitches and the endless search for computer programs that will help us manage you all. It's been a rough road and we are not quite there yet. Thank you, Chris Dicker and Cheryl Veretto from West Cluster, Jim Spencer from East Cluster for your endless hours and dedication. We could not do it without you

I would like to remind our wonderful association that we are an all-volunteer charitable organization. It is not a service organization. We get requests often of demands after dues are paid for mentors, bees and hive care. We are primarily there to educate the public, children and our beekeepers about bees. Everything else is icing on the cake and is depended on volunteers entirely. Amazingly, but not surprisingly, the more you are involved, the more you get in return. If your needs aren't met, it's time to volunteer. How do you think the cluster concept was created? It was by a couple of volunteers with a need, ideas, volunteer hours and a sharing spirit.



Christine Kurtz
Regional Group Coordinator

PS More to come as splitting workshops will be happening in all clusters and as more become confident the more will be taught and the more bees shared. So proud of this sharing spirit and all mentioned and not mentioned.

West Cluster Cooperation

A Successful Hive Split at New Tong Farm

By Elizabeth Newton and Tong Lai Ginn

For several years, we'd buy packages of bees in the spring, and watch the colony increase and thrive throughout the summer only to see it die out in the fall or winter. We considered giving up the dream of having a sustaining colony. However, the garden seemed lonely without bees, and we kept thinking that there must be some way to find out if we could improve our practices and learn from our mistakes. We reached out to SBCA for help and guidance. Chris Dicker recommended bringing in Doug Vincent from Beekind to do a hive dive at our place. Doug recommends re-queening colonies of packaged bees. He believes that the reason packaged bees so often do not over-winter successfully is because the queens are not well mated and are thus more likely to fail later in the season.

So on a warm mid-July day, SBCA members gathered at our place, New Tong Farm in Sebastopol. Doug arrived, and after he gave the assembled group an explanation of the re-queening process, we moved to the hive. Wearing no gloves or other protective gear, Doug gently opened the hive and examined the frames. He took frames of honey, brood and pollen and placed some of each in two new boxes, with the hope that each of the new hives would create new queens. All members got a great overview of the process followed by an up-close look at how it's done.

Six weeks later, Doug returned to check on the progress of the hives. Two were queenright, and one was not. Doug incorporated the resources from the queenless hive into the two queenright hives, and assured us that the hives were good to go for the upcoming fall and winter seasons.

As the dry fall wore on, we worried about our hives, as we'd been robbed before and the long drought could only intensify competition for nectar. We watched and waited, making sure that the entrances were reduced and that the bees had continuous access to water. As the days shortened, we continued to watch and observe, cautiously hopeful, as we were still seeing intermittent activity on sunny days in November, then continuing into December.



February 2016: first hive inspection of the year
(Photo by Elizabeth Newton)

By late January, strong activity in both hives made it clear that they had made it through. Our first inspection in early February revealed that the hives were chock full of bees, brood, pollen and honey and needed more space—which we quickly provided.

Thanks to Doug's generosity, many of us now understand the mechanics of a hive split and have learned some great tools to help our own colonies thrive.



July 2015: The three hives after the split
(Photo by Elizabeth Newton)

On Pondering About Bees

By Christine Kurtz

Don't you wish sometimes to be able to give a citizen ticket to a really bad driver? Hopefully not to me going on a swarm call! What do we do with really bad beekeepers or those who downright abandon their hives? On more than one occasion I have come across some really sad looking hives. I understand that perhaps the hobby doesn't suit someone, or the ability to get past working with stinging insects becomes wanting, but to just leave hives that were supposed to be tended, hives that were purposefully put there to house our dear honey bees, hives that another beekeeper would love to adopt, left to rot and fall I don't understand. I don't think there is a fine big enough for that kind of neglect and dare I say animal abuse? We don't have inspectors nor ways to discourage this kind of behavior. All we have is a few beekeepers willing to try to save those colonies putting hours in efforts and our own cost in equipment. Often they have thriving colonies in them, but the woodenware does not last forever, especially the hive



stands that sit in dirt and succumb to moisture first.

This abandoned Tower of Pisa hive was soon to topple over. The hive stand was made out of some sort of composite wood that absorbs moisture and was caving in. The hive had two deeps divided by a

queen excluder left there for at least two years. The bottom super was off it bottom board. The two bottom supers were askew letting the bees in between them and also the rain in sheets.

The bees were crammed in there. They had pretty much sealed the queen excluder with wax restricting access above, consequently not doing much in the two medium supers as they were filled with crystalized honey hard as a rock. Not much use for bees nor humans. Basically they were living in the two deep supers. It was very difficult to work this hive, partly because of the vast amount of propolis (not a bad thing) but the all-plastic frames were used (no wood whatsoever). Whose brilliant idea was that? People who have these "brilliant" ideas are never the one to use them. The plastic had become brittle and breaking off the ends of the frames caused many expletives while I was trying to pry the frames out. There were no follower boards either to take out and make room to work the bees. 10 frames were jammed in there. I had the hardest time pulling the first frame out in each super without rolling and smash-

ing some bees and you know what happens consequently, alarm pheromone fest! The bees get agitated because some of their brothers and sisters were damaged beyond recovery. So now I have an overcrowded angry bunch of bees and getting a good dose of medicine. The side frames were also moldy, probably because ventilating this hive in such conditions was a full time job short of enough time in a day. Elisabeth one of my mentees was with me and boy did she get a lesson in beekeeping. She thinks I'm the bees' knees but I think I'm just plain-old nuts. Moving along through the cloud of bees, ignoring the throbbing of multiple stings, trying to get the job done was my motto. We had made a makeshift hive stand right in front of the hive with some concrete blocks laying around and dug and leveled and dug and leveled best we could. When we got to the bottom deep super we realized it needed replacing and we looked around the thrown equipment on the ground in mini tornado piles to find one in better shape. The bees needed desperate room or swarming would have been fact in a matter of days. A swarm had left the second hive, which I will mention later. It entered the neighbor's house and got exterminated! Hence I was called. We have, however now, an irate neighbor ready for more blood. The owners of the bees are incommunicado traveling the world. A caretaker of the property is trying to do his best in a very tricky situation. Can he just give me the bees to find a better home? They are not his bees. It is not his property. Hearing these stories hurt. I have to leave them behind, although in much better shape.

Carrying on I decided to split the hive or incur another bad situation. This will give the bees more room to expand and think they have swarmed and stay put. At least that's the plan and as you know bees have plans of their own and may or may not follow yours. There were no frames to replace the ones we took out and luckily I had extras in my car. I had deep frames, too, which is rare for me since I only run mediums but sometimes the universe provides, although I wish it would provide for my pocket-book too. I had inherited some equipment as a trade for beekeeping help and so I was going to be out some future "trade" material. It's kinda money isn't it? Doing good for the bees was more important though and my piddly attempt to have a big ego vanished in an instant. Bees do that to you. Rear your ego in any way and watch them put it back in its place lickity split! It often comes in the form of an extra sting or two. Don't even try it. Trust me!

As we put the hive back together, the supers nicely aligned letting the rain stay outside where it belonged, we gladly omitted that horrendous queen excluder. The crystalized honey was removed and more of my donated frames went in. There was lots of room for the bees now. The hive was straight, cozier and dry and the bees settled very quickly. We had seen the queen, a beauty. We left her in. I felt ok about taking a split away but not taking a queen and letting the bees go through a queen event without regular inspections.

The other hive was the one that had swarmed into the neighbors' house and its population was smaller but rebounding. The bottom super was off the bottom board as well. What was up with that? It was as if a small earthquake had shaken two houses off their foundation. Regard-



less, we put the bottom super back on the bottom board. Again prying those frames was a challenge but there were fewer bees to roll. We came across the swarm cells and saw one with the trap door open. I knew I had at least one virgin queen in there that emerged very recently. The other swarm cells were intact so she hadn't had time to dispatch her competition. Virgin queen are photo tatic meaning they are sensitive to light and can take flight when exposed to light. The reason is that she has to find the entrance of the hive to go on her mating flight and light that shines through the entrance is how she finds it. If she has not taken an orientation flight yet, and flies towards the light while the hive is open she could get lost. Once a queen is mated she

loses that light sensitivity and flight doesn't even enter her mind. I usually immediately close a hive upon spotting such trap door queen cells.

We also took the queen excluder out. I had no more frames to substitute and make more room but they had swarmed and more room was available as all that sealed brood was emerging. Then they will go through some attrition until the new queen is mated and starts laying and before they become adults to take over. Room was not

going to be an issue. Again we aligned the two bottom su-



pers so rain would not get in. The queen excluder removed, vision of starting a queen excluder cemetery flashed in my mind. Beekeepers, we do not need those horrible contraptions! The bees will or will not give you surplus honey. Whatever is above the queen excluder is not automatically yours. Let the bees grow their brood nest how they need, don't constrict that expansion, they need it to mature as a colony. Once the urge of swarming wanes and the nectar flow is still good they will fill top down with honey. Then and only then take what is more than what they will need to survive winter. Don't forget we have a long dearth in summer and I have seen colonies go through entire supers of honey to survive.

Finally note the sad state of the outer cover on that second hive, disintegrated by sun and rain. Luckily, there was, sitting there on the tornado pile, a perfectly good one. We gladly switched it.

What will happen to those hives I do not know! I hope to adopt them or be the adopting agency. I might have to take out my charm and work the situation a bit. I have no ill intention and no ego around it (bees stung it out of me) and so if it will be that I can help further, it will be. I sure hope so.

Christine Kurtz
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Bye Bye, Bees

By Ettamarie Peterson

My observation hive died out in November so I was delighted to be able to catch a swarm in mid-March. It was a bit large for a four-frame hive but I convinced myself it would shrink a bit and be fine. The queen got busy right away and laid eggs on the frame of old comb I had provided. I watched the bees bring in pollen and draw out some new comb where it was needed.

I convinced myself they were happy campers. How wrong I was! About four o'clock just eleven days after I had put them in their new home I heard the distinct sound of bees swarming. I looked up and saw the bees pouring out of the pipe they use for their entrance and exit. For a while they stayed plastered against the barn wall all around the pipe. I convinced myself they would go back in. Two other years the observation hive has showed me what I call "practice swarms" so in my heart I was hoping this was another one. How wrong I was! I went in the house for five minutes and came back to see they had all completely disappeared! They didn't even have the courtesy of hanging out in a nearby tree as all my other observation swarms have done. They didn't go into my bait hives either! Somewhere there is a colony of bees in a new home.

Interestingly enough they left capped and uncapped brood and a handful of forager bees returned from their afternoon shopping. Those bees are now trying to cover the brood area but I know they are all doomed. Now I need a new small colony before the classes arrive starting April 7th!

Lesson learned from this episode is providing the swarms you capture with the best home possible. They will tell you if you are wrong!



The sign should say, "Bees Leaving!"



Poor forager bees are now trying to be nurse bees! It is a doomed attempt!

Contact Information

Regular monthly meetings of the Sonoma County Beekeepers' Association are held on the second Monday of each month, at 7 pm at the Rohnert Park 4-H Building. 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 meetings or by mail. Please see our Website 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 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 She lives in Glen Ellen.

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