

# The Monthly Extractor

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

she was interested in keeping bees herself and wanted more information. What happened was - I scheduled an "Educational" extraction with Napa guru - Rob Keller - and invited the SCBA Cluster Leaders to participate.



## From Our President

### Greetings Fellow Beekeepers!

I want to share an experience that came from educating a homeowner with bees in an old barn.

Rebecca, a young mother, emailed me at my [president@sonomabees.org](mailto:president@sonomabees.org) mail address - having gotten my name off the sonomabees.org website. She was referred to us, from one of the events SCBA participated in last year. It so happened that she is also a neighbor, just a few minutes away. They had a colony of bees inside an old chicken coop wall that was going to be taken down - she heard about the plight of the bees and wanted to save them. During the course of our conversation, she mentioned that



Rebecca, the homeowner, was overwhelmed when eight people showed up to help take the bees out of her barn. She wanted to include her young kids in the experience, Parker - 6 yrs., specifically - to learn about bees... he watched from a distance. We ended up taking two separate colonies from the barn that day, one for Rebecca and another for Ellen Sherron - Garden Group leader.

I followed up with Rebecca giving her SCBA literature and recommendations of books for both her and her children.

We did the first hive inspection the other day, and I

had a most wonderful surprise... the bees where doing great but even more so - Parker had created a wonderful 'bee' presentation for his homeschool project. He was so excited with all the information he had learned about bees, he told me everything with a passion. What an accomplishment I felt - helping to spark an interest in a young mind.

The story is to help remind you that the simple act of talking to people about bees/beekeeping can create interest and inspire change.

Laurie Smith  
Bee the Change!

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*Cheryl Veretto*  
President

## This Month's Calendar:

### Monthly Meeting: Monday, May 9- 6PM

Come and talk to bee experts, have refreshments (bring your own cup), check out our library and plant sales, meet your cluster leader.

7 pm – ZomBees - Serendipity and Citizen Science - John Hafernik, SFSU

### Upcoming Meetings

**June 13** - An Inexpensive Electronic Hive Monitor - Jerry Draper

**July 11** - NO MEETING at 4H. Cluster Picnics TBA?

### May Events

May 7. UC Davis Bee Symposium

Upcoming Meetings

June 13 - An Inexpensive Electronic Hive Monitor - Jerry Draper

August 8 - Movie Night! - "The Vanishing of the Bees"

### Upcoming Community Events

August 13-14. Gravenstein Apple Fair

September 6-8. Heirloom Expo

## Notice:

The SCBA Board of Directors recently terminated an SCBA membership and want to share the situation and reasoning.

- SCBA maintains a strict Privacy Policy, inclusive of SCBA membership. SCBA and its members may not use member email list for solicitation outside of SCBA business - of any sort.
- SCBA Business members have a benefit that allows sharing business information at one of the side tables during meetings.
- Outright business solicitation of members during meetings is prohibited, i.e. flyering, canvassing in meeting area or parking lot - anything except using the SCBA Business member table. Ask a BOD member if you have questions.

The SCBA Board of Directors have exhausted all options of recourse to find solution with this particular member over issues of invading SCBA member privacy and soliciting openly during meetings; this has been ongoing for a few years. The last incident was an open violation of hijacking a Cluster group email with business spamming. Sadly we were left with no other option but to terminate the membership.

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## Educational Committee Example

Our Educational Committee members give bee talks to all ages. This is a sample of what one member, John McGurke, offered recently.

"I did the presentation last week- it went great! I teach a 'Reading Buddies' class where I take high school students over to our neighboring elementary school. The first grade teacher had asked me to do a presentation on bees since they were studying insects. We all had a lot of fun talking about bees. About an hour after the presentation a swarm flew by the window of the first grade class. The teacher called me, I was able to locate and capture it. Prior to capturing it, the students were able to see the swarm in a tree—an incredible learning experience for all of us involved! There were approximately 30 first- and second-grade students and 12 high school students that attended the presentation."

We can't guarantee that all presentations will end with a swarm capture but it does get your name out to the public as a good beekeeper!



# My May

## Beekeeping To-Do List by Serge Labesque

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I cannot tell you how much excitement there is in the apiaries around here this spring! It's not just because of the beautiful bloom that the winter rains brought and which the bees are turning into gorgeous healthy colonies and fragrant honey. No, it's not, although every bit of this adds to the joy. It's because there is a change in the way we keep and propagate bees, all of it for the better. Through the exchange and distribution of divides, the local beekeeping community is coming together, coordinating apiary work sessions, and working in unison to make sure that everyone receives bees. And what bees! Untreated, unfed survivor stock that came out of winter with remarkable vigor. This is beekeepers' helping other beekeepers while doing a lot of good for the bees. And it's a lot of healthy fun!

So many beekeepers have decided to share their bees with neighbors that the influx of non-local bees, packages, nucs and queens has been reduced. In fact, there was a surplus of divides. The day will come when the use and commerce of non-local bees will be a despicable aberration of the past. We are finally taking care of our local bee populations, together.

### **No doubt it was a botched procedure. But why?**

One afternoon, in late March at a fellow beekeeper's apiary – Having decided to produce a few queens, I went about preparing a cell-starter nuc, which is essentially a small queenless hive filled with young bees and stores. A hive bottom and a super with a few frames that I had withdrawn from the brood chamber of a strong colony were placed on a bench. The bees had been removed from these combs to make sure that the queen was not inadvertently placed in the cell-starter. A queen excluder and an empty super were placed on top of the super that held the combs. The next step was to shake bees from the brood nest of the colony into this super. Whereas the young nurse bees could move through the queen excluder and down to their combs below it, the queen and the drones would be stopped by the excluder screen.

The bees that covered a first frame were dropped into this set-up. I grabbed a second frame from the hive and, as I was about to shake more bees onto the excluder, I noticed that the bees I had just placed there were climbing out of the super! Although my instinct was to stop at once, I continued to add more bees to stock the cell-starter. A few puffs of smoke would certainly get them back inside and down through the excluder screen.

Within minutes, the bees I had placed in the super were all moving out of it, climbing down the legs of the bench, and crawling away on the ground in all directions in a disorganized exodus.

The smoker? Well, it was completely ineffective. Actually, the bees seemed to prefer going into the smoke rather than toward their combs.

It took a while to gather the bees. Quite a few of

them were inevitably crushed, as they were everywhere. A sobering carnage...

For a minute I thought that something in the set-up I had prepared was strongly repulsive to the bees. Maybe the equipment had acquired an intolerable odor by being stored next to some weird product, for example. But I promptly dismissed that thought because the bees refused to climb from the ground onto their own combs, which I tried to use to gather them. In fact, the unexpected behavior of the bees became even more mystifying when I later found out that their queen, who was right there among them, did not cause them to assemble.

A semblance of a nuc was finally put together, but with no longer much hope of producing queen cells with it. This point had become unimportant as the evening was approaching, and I wanted the bees to have a shelter before the cold arrived.

Although it seemed to be a catastrophic evening for the beautiful donor colony, I am happy to report that it produced five nice divides one week later and that its queen is now laying beautiful brood inside the nuc. Thankfully, honey bees are remarkably resilient and forgiving animals. But why did they behave as they did on that March evening? Why did they reject their own combs, walk into the smoke and away from their queen? Why did they disperse? I still do not know the answer to these questions.

If anyone thinks they might have a clue, please let me know, as I want to learn as much as possible from this experience and avoid repeating it.

One thing I learned from the failed procedure is that I should have heeded the bees and followed my instinct: I should have stopped as soon as I saw that the procedure was not going right.

### **May in the apiaries**

During the past two months, we have increased the volume of the brood chambers to permit the development of the colonies and to avoid honey bound conditions. We added nectar storage and comb-building space, and we regularly monitored the growth and health of the colonies. The monitoring trays have been cleaned. By mid-spring, the colonies that had shown signs of preparing for swarming had been divided. The most intense and arduous part of the spring apiary work is done.

Yet, the intense forager activity we see in front of the hives reminds us that this is still the busy time of the year in the apiaries. We have to keep up with our bees' productivity. The entrances of the hives are opened as wide as necessary to facilitate the bee traffic, but not to the point of causing a risk of robbing for the developing colonies. The foragers are turning this spring's honey flow into a potential harvest that will help us forget the dismal crops of recent years. They need enough nectar storage space in their comb to unload the nectar that is gathered in abun-

dance. At this time of year, additional supers are placed as soon as the previous ones are half full. Alternatively or in combination with the addition of empty frames, we can harvest some of the early spring honey that is capped.

The brood chambers of the colonies that have not yet been divided still require the same sustained attention we provided during the past weeks, as they are approaching their maximum size for the year.

Because young bees produce much wax under these conditions, they can build new combs to replace the old ones. Be sure to give the empty frames to work on. New frames may be placed directly in the center of the brood nests of the mature colonies. Doing this routinely pushes the older frames to the sides of the brood chambers, and they will be removed at the first opportunity, most likely in the fall.

The new colonies, divides or swarms we captured, are growing and gaining more strength by the day, led by their young and prolific queens. Their management, which is sheer pleasure, cannot be neglected. We give them more space, a few frames or occasionally a super. Baiting the bees into the new supers with some of the combs they are already working on is a very effective invitation to expand into the additional space.

Although this spring is a beautiful one, the usual dangers of the season still exist. Chalkbrood and European foulbrood are among them. When they occur, the brood combs need to be removed from the hives, as they will certainly become sources of recurrent contamination. As long as the affected colonies still have enough strength, the bees will replace them with fresh comb in no time, thanks to the honey flow. By the end of the month, California buckeye trees will be blooming. The pollen they produce is toxic to bees. Where these trees abound, they can present a real danger for the colonies that do not have access to other pollen sources, such as blackberry bushes, for example. When alternate sources of pollen are not available, there is nothing more effective than moving the hives to different locations.

In spite of the rain we received this winter and in early spring, the ground moisture is still low, and summer dearth is looming. So, we may enjoy some spring honey, but harvesting should be done cautiously in anticipation of the needs of the bees.

My hives are now in double-deep brood chambers, a hive configuration that I have occasionally mentioned here and recently in beekeeping classes. I consider that this move benefits the bees as much as I enjoy it, which is greatly. The observation of the bees on these tall combs reveals bee biology facts that I find fascinating. Freed from the constraints that are imposed by our standard equipment, the bees organize their brood nests and their stores in these large combs differently than what we normally see. So, I am inclined to think that it must be a liberating change for the bees.

## In summary, this month:

- Inspect hives regularly, when foragers are out in large numbers.
- Open the entrances of hives to match the forager activity.
- Avoid congestion of the brood nests.
- Offer comb-building opportunities.
- Add supers to provide nectar storage space.
- Maintain adequate clustering space between the brood nests and the entrances.
- Watch for signs of spring diseases.
- Ensure adequate air circulation through the hives.
- Perform hive divisions.
- Follow up on earlier hive divisions.
- Maintain sources of water for the bees.
- Monitor swarm traps.
- Keep some equipment at the ready to catch the occasional swarm.
- Rear queens.
- Pull weeds from around the hives.
- Harvest only surplus early spring honey.
- Discard old and misshapen combs.
- Render wax from discarded frames.
- Routinely clean and scorch tools and equipment.

*Serge Labesque*  
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## BEE WISE:

### “A SWARM IN THE BAG!” by Emery Dann

Huge swarms the size of a basketball or larger are unique challenges. Swarm scouts from a huge swarm cluster look everywhere they can to find enough space for all the bees in the swarm, at least the size of one deep + a medium, three mediums or more. We need lots of bee equipment to hive swarms of this size. Beehives become harder to move when we work to collect huge swarms. It is work, you know?!!!

First of April this year, Nick Gloyd, a S.C.B.A. member who lives close to me and I hived a huge swarm on the West side of Santa Rosa that was hanging from a persimmon tree branch 7 feet above the ground. We put the swarm into 3 mediums. We did not have to see the queen—there were 20,000 bees—but the bees kept streamed into our swarm hive—crawling, flying with lots of fanning—letting us know the queen was inside! The next day I moved the entire hive to a better location.

A few days later, another huge swarm clustered about 2 miles away on a branch impossible for me to reach, 35 feet up in a redwood tree. I was called immediately when they swarmed. The only way for me to retrieve this big of a swarm was to quickly put a bait hive nearby. I started putting together 3 mediums with drawn comb frames and empty frames they could draw out. Numerous bee scouts immediately found it even before I was fin-

ished setting it up! The scouts checked the location and approved. The bee swarm stayed in their redwood tree cluster overnight and the next morning they all swarmed into my bait hive I had prepared for them. I put a few drops of Lemon Grass Essential Oil inside the top cover of the hive. I bring Lemon Grass Oil with me to use on swarm calls. The scent is similar to a queen's pheromone and can sometimes help attract bee swarms into the swarm boxes.

For my swarm hive entrance I drill a 1 1/2" (3.81 cm) hole in the lower middle of the first wooden box the exact size of a cardboard nuc box. I pick up the swarm at night or early in the morning and move it when all the bees are clustered inside. I pop the yellow plastic cap plug in place so no bees escape! It takes two seconds to securely close the hole. I have attached a screen in a frame (used for top ventilation) with screws to the bottom of the first box and strap the hive boxes together. No telescoping cover—only with the light duty inner cover, being sure to attach shade cloth to the center oblong hole so the bees stay inside the boxes. This lets hot air out, but the bees cannot chew through it. I want the swarm boxes to be lightweight for easy moving. U-Haul has 2 lifting straps I buy (for moving furniture). I put my forearms through to lift and carefully move hives by myself or with help from another person.

Our world is not bee friendly! Bee swarms are vulnerable! We need to help them! Bees need to find enough space to expand after swarming. As Serge Labesque often mentions, in urban areas only 10 to 20% of swarms may actually find a suitable home. Bee habitat is scarce! It makes me very sad when I get calls from the City of Santa Rosa for me to take bee hives out of water meter boxes in the ground. The bees never want to build their colony in or close to the ground due to ants and wet conditions! They do best higher in a tree! Sometimes water meters can be the only place bees can find to build their new hive in an urban area. Not all bee swarms can find suitable housing. If they have no other option, I have seen them even build exposed comb on a tree limb! As beekeepers we are passionate about our responsibility to protect, assist and collect homeless bee swarms from harm or death by providing bee swarms a home and safe location to thrive!

Doug and Katia Vincent's Beekind Bumper Sticker says: "GIVE BEES A CHANCE!" The Sonoma County Beekeepers Association Swarm List "GIVES BEE SWARMS A CHANCE!" MANY BEE SWARMS MAY NOT HAVE AS GOOD A CHANCE WITHOUT YOU AND ME!

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## Sonoma County Farm Trails

By Bill MacElroy

On April 30 and May 1, we hosted an open house at the Monte-Bellaria farm on Bloomfield Road (located within the West Cluster.)

As a part of the Sonoma County Farm Trails event, we set up a Sonoma County Beekeepers' Association exhibit and discussed beekeeping, bee health and handed out "planting for bees" flyers and other membership literature. Many visitors wanted to see all the components for the educational hive photo kit, which beautifully shows many of the aspects of the lives of bees within the hive.

The attendance was very strong, most saying that they very much wanted to see the bees in person. Over the two days, I took 110 people through the lavender fields to see the hives in action.

As one particular group was entering the area, we had the rare opportunity to see a mating flight occur. The tornado of drones was spectacular and they put on quite an aerial show for the 10 folks in that group.

We also collected \$36 in donations, with many best wishes to the association for all that we do for the bees.

Thanks to everyone who helped get this set up!



Mating Flight

# Bee Plants of the Month

By Alice Ford-Sala

## Beneficial Tree of the Month

**Robinia Locust**

**Family Papilionaceae**

Locusts grow and flower in a wide range of conditions, poor, even alkaline or salty soil, heat, needing well-drained soil and disliking soggy places. *R. neomexicana* is native to southern California deserts as well as Arizona and New Mexico. This is a thorny shrub; it can be pruned to a small tree shape- about 6 feet high.

*R. pseudoacacia*, or Black Locust is native to the eastern United States. It is sometimes planted as a street tree, but it also has thorns and brittle branches, so I don't think that's a good choice. 'Frisia' is often planted in road medians, and I think it is pretty ugly- yellowish sickly-looking leaves don't do it any favors.

*R. 'Purple Robe'* on the other hand is quite pretty, with green, divided leaves that look like they belong in the pea family. The flowers are a pretty dark purple and quite fragrant. Bees really love locust blossoms. I would not plant this tree in an area where it can run wild, as it sends out numerous suckers and can be invasive.

So- a rather half-hearted endorsement of an attractive-to-bees but potentially difficult plant. Oh, did I mention the bark, leaves and seeds are poisonous? Maybe it's best to enjoy it if it grows in your neighborhood but be very cautious about planting it in your garden.

## Native Plant of the Month

**Fragaria Wild Strawberry**

**Family Rosaceae**

Here's a plant we can all love. Who doesn't like strawberries? *F. californica*, or Beach Strawberry can grow quite nicely as a ground cover, spreading out under trees or in a garden border, with those pretty ruffled green leaves and small white flowers that bees seek out. The tiny fruit is edible, sweeter and more flavorful than commercial strawberries. *F. californica* 'Green Pastures' is very pretty, with larger white flowers, however it doesn't set fruit.

*Fragaria alpina*, fraise de bois doesn't send out runners, has very tasty fruit and does quite well in a strawberry pot or other container.

They all appreciate well-drained, regular soil and need little water.



**Robinia Locust**



**Fragaria**

# Regional Groups

By Christine Kurtz Co-Regional Coordinator



This month I have asked Cluster leaders to each write a paragraph with some news in their respective clusters. No easy feat as so much has been happening. This year the groups have really starting to jell. For new members these cluster groups are three years in the making and endless hours were spent to make this come to fruition. There was a definite need there for beekeepers to connect, to learn together and a realization that we really are all in this together. The initial apprehension has completely vanished and the groups are becoming really dynamic. We are here, in Sonoma County, at the forefront of opportunities to do things differently. Everywhere I go from classes to conventions, everything I read from blogs, books, and articles the common theme is beekeeping is not sustainable. By helping each other become better beekeepers and sharing our surviving bees is one way to move toward more sustainable beekeeping and doing things differently.

Nothing really happens without your amazing cluster leaders who volunteer to organize the workshops, hive dives and bee cafes. Support them as much as you can. They are amazing volunteers and deserve all the kudos. I am so proud of our cluster leaders for holding their groups with such embrace, dedication and enthusiasm. Next we are concentrating on hive dives and bee cafes for the next few months. Here is what they wrote and a snippet of what is going on in each cluster.

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## South Cluster News

by Kelli Cox

What an exciting spring it has been so far and we're still going strong. As a fairly newbie (of 4 years) I think I have learned more in the past 4 months than the entire 4 years! Mostly it's because I gathered a lot of the dots but was struggling to connect them. This spring, with the rain (and therefore increased nectar flow), our girls have been mighty active, forcing us to "be on the ready".

Sally and I feel the best way to help the bees in our community is by strengthening our community (South Cluster). As Co-cluster leaders we've focused our efforts on making regular Bee Cafés an integral part of our learning curve, helping people make "Bee Buddies," and sharing our local survivor bees. So far, it seems to be working "beautifully!"

I made a promise that if I were able to (If my hives were strong) I'd donate as many splits as I could to anyone without bees. Many of our South Cluster members have been madly collecting swarms and have been donating them to those without bees. Others have donated splits. We started off with about 9 people needing bees and are down to 1 and I have no doubt everyone who needs bees will have them by the end of May! Our cluster is committed to keeping our bees local and to helping each other in the process.

Last week at our Bee Cafe we split into geographical sub groups and exchanged email addresses and phone numbers. Following our 2 hr. bee cafe 13 people stayed to help me go into a very large hive. From that hive we were able to provide a split and give a needed frame of brood to 2 of our members. While that was happening Christine assisted in another hive dive at the Campbell's and when finished got a swarm call. A newbie on our list who happened to be with her at the Campbell's hive dive, and was patiently waiting for bees, got them that day.

Two days later I got a call from Suzi whose much loved 3 yr. hive was queen-less so she came over and we went into another of my hives, found a frame with capped queen cells (yes, I know what that means!) split, and with any luck has saved her bees.

I have so far been able to give away 3 splits and a deep frame of brood. My hives are still thriving and I don't think I'm done splitting!

I am a happy beekeeper and I have made a good many friends by being an active part of our Cluster.

I'm convinced to make the needed changes in our bee communities, we need to also support each other and go out of the way a little for our bee buddies. We all have the same objective and it's so much more fun (and less scary) to learn with each other.



Kelli Cox doing a hive dive after the Bee Café, which ended up with a split going to a south cluster member.

## Central News

by Joy

As of the middle of May I will have been keeping bees for one year. Yep. That's it. One year. Actually, I'm fudging a bit as I didn't have any bees from December through March, but that statement isn't entirely true either because I was part of the ongoing discovery and learning process with the hives of my bee buddies. Bee buddies, in my mind, are the most valuable beekeeping tool I know of. They listen to your nonstop yammering about bees and never get bored of it. They are just as excited the 50th time you tell them that the girls are bringing in the most amazing colored pollen you've ever seen! They are quick to jump in when you need a fresh pair of eyes to look in your hive. They will be the first to give you advice, consoling, tools, a good laugh or cry, and bees! On April 2nd I was gifted a split from Ann Jereb and on April 19 I was gifted a split from Maggie Weaver! Believe it or not on April 19 I also caught a swarm of bees in my backyard with the swarm trap that I made at the central cluster swarm workshop! In less than an hour after the swarm arrived, with the help of my bee buddies, I was able to give that swarm to a fellow central cluster member who was on our needs bees list. He came by with his three children and everyone learned something. The excitement surrounding receiving this swarm was amazing but the joy and pleasure of giving it to another beekeeper and seeing him and his family all smiles and so appreciative was even better!

Molly Kuhl adds:

We have given away 8 swarms or splits so far, to deserving new or not-so-new beekeepers! What a way to keep it local and keep our survivor stock strong! It has been and continues to be a thrill to see all of this community building come together, friendships made, bees shared, and so on. It is such a pleasure. We've had some really wonderful events thus far, and have two more hive dives and a bee cafe on the schedule. Central cluster is absolutely thriving!



Molly Kuhl and Ann Jereb hiving a swarm caught in a bait hive



At Redwood Hill Farm for the Split workshop with Mike Turner

## North Cluster News

North cluster has met for two split hive dives/workshops given by Denny Pederson because of such interest in learning the skill. Denny Pederson split two hives 50/50 to teach another way of splitting a hive. A week later he ended up splitting another big hive on his own. The queen was put in the split, this essentially swarms the hive and the mother hive then goes into full blown queen production. Since it was a large hive and so many nurse bees present they made 35 queen cells! Denny then called North Cluster member Laurie Smith who found 3 willing recipients who came and left each with a 5-frame split! This spurred a lot

of questions about the process and Denny fielded all those questions to the recipient. He is following up with them to check for mated queens. Thank you Denny for helping the folks keep track of their splits. Lots of education and understanding is still needed to take care of swarms and splits and it's through dedicated volunteers like Denny that we'll all advance to better beekeeping.

Laurie is working on a meet-and-greet café (please call or e-mail her if you would like to host) and is working on compiling the survey results especially to see who still needs bees. Hives are still swarming and some hives might still need to be split.



## West County Cluster

By Chis Dicker

We got 6 splits from one hive and have lots of equipment ready if you do a split! Lena and Herschel expanded their apiary and then generously shared 3 splits with WC members.

Serge Labesque's recap: "As I thought about it while driving back, I realized that we saw a variety of situations.

"If I remember correctly, I estimated that the hive that was at the right end of the bench (standing behind the hives) had swarmed approximately four weeks prior. So, it was not a question of dividing it. It's a strong hive that needed space and a lot of honey can be harvested from it. The second hive was not ready to be divided, as it was growing (large areas of young brood). Either it had swarmed very early in the spring, or it was still not ready to do so. For lack of notes and past inspections, I cannot tell which one of these is correct.

"Finally, the third hive was found to have at least 12 queen cells, which allowed us to assemble six splits. At this point, I am pretty certain that it had swarmed a few days earlier (possibly four or five), since all the queen cells, except for one, were sealed. The uncapped cell contained a two-day old queen larva."

The bees were pretty exasperated with us after two full hours in the hives. A few of us got stung, but overall the bees were very patient. It was a great learning experience for all of us, many thanks to the hosts for their time and generosity, and to Serge for his vast bee wisdom and vision.



George Bradley helping Nadya rescue a colony from a tree felled or fallen. Nadya called George because he wanted experience on swarm calls. Again, East Cluster members working together.

## East Cluster News

by Lizanne Pastore

East Cluster had a hive dive on a cold and drizzly Sunday in April so was forced to discuss all-things-bee with only the buzzing of Darrel's bees around us. Serge led us in a great discussion and we reviewed a lot of the basics about spring management, but it was too cold to open hives. Darrel then generously gifted 2 recent swarms to a lucky East Cluster member, Erin Grey, who is just starting out! Thea gave her a helping hand in relocating and re-hiving the bees.

We also had our first social of the year at Bo Kearns home and it was very well attended! His wife, Patric gave us a falconry show!! You just never know what will happen at a bee meeting! Thea and Nadya led lively discussions about splitting and we all put our thinking caps on and did some bee math puzzles. More importantly, however, people hooked up and made some bee buddies. Our next café meeting for East is Wed, May 11 from 5:30 to 7:30, if you didn't see the invite then email me at [eastcluster@sonomabees.org](mailto:eastcluster@sonomabees.org)

There continues to be a lot of swarm catching and gifting going around in East. I can't keep track of it all! But I know that Nadya caught her 100th swarm (seems like it) and gave it to Thea who needed to fill her new fancy top bar hive. I hear that the bees are doing well and like their new digs.

There continue to be hive divisions and possibilities of split gifts. It's been a longer spring here than normal.



George's new split from Susan's at his home!  
Photo Credit: George Bradley.

# On Pondering About Bees

By Christine Kurtz

## *I am in stitches! Please lend me a hand.*

The definition of *being in stitches* by the Phrase Finder is: "To be in stitches is to be in such a paroxysm of laughter as to be in physical pain. The allusion implicit in the phrase is to that of a sharp pain - like being pricked with a needle." or cut by a brand new sharp as a razor J hive tool!

So, yes, the rumors are true, yours truly had a trip to the emergency room due to a nasty cut by a new sharp J hive tool and sported for 10 days 5 stitches to keep her hand together. Now that things are all better I look at both my functional hands and am so thankful for them. Never will I take a hand for granted anymore. Not a lent hand and not a physical hand as they go hand in hand. In retrospect I tend to look at things with great humor, big or little tragedies, it helps in the healing process.

I was instructed not to do dishes for the next ten days after the procedure. I welcomed this news with such pleasure because attached to that was nothing about no beekeeping for ten days, even after an extensive discussion with the doctor treating me about my beekeeping profession, so I single handedly went on working bees. Well single-handed became 3 handed and sometimes 5 handed because it forced me to ask for help. Beekeepers are so nice and so handy! If you know me, you know asking for help is really hard for me. I am so darn independent, but I always say bees are the best teachers and they will teach you the lessons you need. All you need to do is be their humble student. Bees are not only self contained little Universities teaching about biology, entomology, meteorology, ecology, reproduction, botany, environmentalism, virology, mycology...but they are full of life lessons as well. Some make you laugh, some make you cry and some make you do both.

So if you are curious here is the story. I had two clients scheduled that day with a window of time in the middle. I was planning to catch up some at home, check a couple of splits quickly for queen cells or queens when I got a call from Richard and Alex Cooper. They had caught a swarm in one of those paper mache planter swarm traps so many of us built at the swarm workshops. Sounded like they needed more help than phone advice, plus they were in my cluster group and not far from my house. As we were fiddling with getting everything together to hive the swarm,

Richard working on the hive stand leveling, Alex getting hive components together and I getting frames in supers. The super I was readying was a bit warped and the frames fit in it rather snug and would not budge without the help of a hive tool. Having a shiny new hive tool was spiffy but boy are they razor sharp. I am not exactly sure why they have to be so sharp as they cut into the wood when you scrape burr comb or propolis off. Never occurred to me to dull the edge first, not so much that it becomes useless but enough not to slice. Suddenly I slipped and the incident happened, nice deep gash between my index finger and my thumb right under the knuckle, right where you bend and grasp for things. Initially I was trying to ignore it but as the doctor later told me I had nicked a blood vessel and the blood just gushed and it became hard to ignore.

Richard and Alex went into the rescue mode. Richard got the first aid kit out of his truck and Alex came with more first aid supplies from the house. They were fantastic and started bandaging me up. I was fine until the world started to spin. I asked to sit down and within a second the lights went out. According to Alex I was only out for about 3 seconds but I had the most amazing dream. I was in an Oasis with camels and palm trees; lounging eating dried dates watching belly dancers. When I awoke I was totally fine. I had the most serene feeling like I had been on a relaxing vacation. Can't remember the last time I had felt this calm. I was given some orange juice to drink and some dried fruit and nuts, the wind was blowing through the trees and it might as well have been palm trees, belly dancers, dried dates and camels there. Richard and Alex created this oasis around me. I felt loved, taken care of and totally relaxed and all I could do is get up, brush myself off and help them hive

that swarm! So we did!

I then rushed to my afternoon client. She was to leave on a trip that night and the split we did together previously and the mother hive needed checking. We had taken the queen with the split so the split now needed to be managed for space. Slowly initially by adding a couple of frames and then keep monitoring it on a regular basis and keep managing for space adding some if warranted. The mother hive then was re-queening. We saw spent queen cells. No eggs or larvae yet but the bees were calm, the cells were nice and shiny clean, and pollen was coming



Richard and Alex hiving the swarm under my watchful eye. They did great!



The Stitches!

in. The bees were expecting a queen. This hive might just need a little more time. Next visit we should see eggs and young larvae and if not and the re-queen failed then decisions will have to be made to recombine the split or add a frame of eggs and young brood to give it another try (this depends on the resources available).

Then off I drove myself to the ER. Sure enough the location and depth of the cut pointed to sutures. Had lovely conversations with the doctor, nurse and the EMT in training about honey and wound care. Finding out doctors are much more open these days about alternative treatments. It was fine with her that I would slather honey over my stitches every time I changed the bandages and thereafter lick the apparatus of application, my finger. I left the antibiotic cream for the next needy person without a beehive.

So here, too, is a valuable lesson. Beekeeping is not meant to be done alone. Who will create that oasis in time of crisis? Bee buddies come in really handy here, not only as extra pairs of hands but also to catch you if you happen to be fainting. I am so incredibly thankful for Richard and Alex Cooper. I want them in my beekeeping corner and you bet I'll go the extra mile for them. Now I have a great story to tell, I lesson well-learned and new friends to share the wonderful world of bees. I can truly laugh about it, the humor of an oasis that my mind created for a few seconds but that carries on in my life through my cluster groups and new bee buddies.

*Christine Kurtz*  
Honey Bee Consultant  
[Petalumabeelady@yahoo.com](mailto:Petalumabeelady@yahoo.com)



The Bandaged Hand



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## Please Be Safe!

By Ettamarie Peterson

Many of us are having fun this swarm season catching swarms to keep or share with others. In our excitement though it is so easy to forget to be cautious. Remember no swarm is worth risking life or limb.

Don't answer that call while you are driving down the road or look at the text message to see the address! Make a message on the phone letting the callers know you will respond as soon as possible and safe! Pull into a parking space if you must but do not touch that phone while you are driving.

The other thing some of us are tempted to do is go to extreme measures to get that swarm that is way out of reach even with a long pole. Climbing onto a roof of a building and reaching way out without safety gear can mean a trip to the hospital or worse! Climbing onto a ladder that is not safe can also cost you much more than a swarm is worth. Read Emery Dann's solution this month to those too-high-to-reach swarms. Take someone with you or have an extra suit for someone to hold the ladder if you need to.

Speaking of taking someone with you, beekeeping is safer if you are not alone. Christine Kurtz cut herself badly with a sharp hive tool requiring five stitches to her hand. Luckily she was with two other beekeepers when this accident caused her to pass out for a bit! After their first aid she was able to get those stitches with no further problems except pain, of course.

# April General Meeting Minutes

By Secretary Becky Jackson

Held at the Rohnert Park 4H Building, about 120 present.

President Cheryl Veretto opened at 7:02 pm. There have been swarms galore! Dozens of people raised their hands who have collected multiple swarms so far.

Visitors were asked to stand and introduce themselves; there were 12 who spoke. Welcome Kitty, Melanie, Brenda, Sisters Switchell, Emily, Gwen, Erin, David, Angie, Natasha, and a fellow from Maine.

Rita announced upcoming events: Children's Museum, Beekind package pickup weekends, UC Davis Bee Symposium. She also listed some future speakers' topics: Zombees, hive monitors, a movie night in August "Vanishing of the Bees".

Regional Coordinator Christine pointed out the Cluster Leaders at the table along the wall. Everyone is encouraged to become active in a cluster. They all had hive splitting workshops, and are next scheduling Hive Dives. Volunteer your apiary!

The 50/50 Raffle netted \$162 to lucky winner, John McGinnis.

Melissa, Swarm Chair, talked about the swarm traps the clusters made and who had caught a swarm in them yet; and many had! She asked that if you place a trap on property that's not yours, to clearly put your name and phone number on it. Educate the people nearby to avoid confusion or panic.

The Gardening Group was our first speaker. Alice Ford-Sala and Ellen Sharon showed slides before the meeting about what was in bloom that month. The group's goals are to educate SCBA and the public about planting for bees. They will also highlight each month what plants should get into the ground, or what seeds to start. They will sell plants at each meeting too. Some schools and vineyards and garden groups have already asked them to speak. They are working on a brochure. Their group will visit bee-friendly nurseries throughout the year.

The Education Group spoke next. Jen Espinoza grew the program the past 2 years and now Patsy Young is the lead Coordinator. 2,771 students have been serviced for 2015-16 school year so far. They even teach in Spanish. Jen asked an audience member, Harrison, to come up and sang the Head-thorax-abdomen song! It was great! Ettamarie was next and teaches 3rd graders with the large laminated pictures. The pictures can lead to lots of discussion. Thea teaches 5th grade and up. She showed cardboard circles, squares, octagons and finally hexagons to show about the mathematical structure of the bee comb.

Mike Turner teaches middle school and older, and includes discussion about beekeeping as a job. Christine Kurtz teaches high school kids and tries to motivate them into caring about the environment. She shows a 1-5 mile radius from her house and shows that all those people and yards within that radius impact her bees. She shows that what they do in their yards (concerning poisons or potential forage) affects her and her bees.

Cheryl Veretto then spoke about her joining SCBA in 2010 and immediately volunteered to help at fairs. She didn't know much at first, but through LISTENING to others answering questions, she learned a lot. We educate at 3 main fairs now: Gravenstein Apple Fair, the Sonoma County Fair, and the Heirloom Expo. We can provide an observation hive, but no longer have a screened tent with a hive inspection inside (too many bee deaths). Sign up in the back with Rita to help at one of the fairs.

Meeting ended with everyone getting a Swarm Card. Ended at 8:31 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

*Becky Jackson, Secretary*

**[Links to Association Reports:](#)**

**March Board Minutes** - <http://sonomabees.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/4-April-Board-minutes.pdf>

## 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](http://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](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.

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## 2016 Board Members and Other Helpful People

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## Ads in This Newsletter

Check with Treasurer Lew Spengler 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.

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