

# The Monthly Extractor

Volume 41, Issue 6

June 2016



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

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## From Our President

### Greetings Fellow Beeks and Bee Enthusiasts!

We are full into the season of beekeeping, many are still catching swarms, doing extractions, creating splits from strong hives, building equipment and planting pollinator gardens. This is also the time we, SCBA, do most of our community education at fairs and events. You probably get where I am going with this... time to Volunteer! As promised, we are facilitating a "SCBA Volunteer workshop/orientation". This is an invitation to join us to learn more about what we do in public. Come learn to be a Bee Advocate and share your beek knowledge with others. There will be opportunity to sign up for many of the great events planned for the summer.

### Logistics:

SCBA Volunteer Workshop/Orientation  
Sonoma County Children's Museum  
Thursday; June 30, 2016  
6 pm - 9 pm

On another note... Last month some bad beekeeping got into the news. I won't recap the whole story, but it was enough to call together a task force to advise and create Best Management Practices for our membership.

The following is what we came up with:

### **SCBA - ACTION TO ADDRESS DEFENSIVE BEES**

Monday; May 23, 2016 Meeting - Rita Maloney, Cheryl Veretto, Ettamarie Peterson, Serge Labesque, Chris Conrad, Chris Dicker, Christine Kurtz, Rich DiTommaso

### **Public Relations**

- Write an Association Statement (for use as a general press release and ongoing) SCBA who we are and what we do in the community - numbers - beekeepers practices - swarms - experience and resources of beeks; special "Defensive Bee" recommendations

- Reach out and do some PR work - proactively; share our stories with the public - The Extractor editorials republished - local newspapers
- Share factual information, best practices
- All members and public have direct resource with current information on SCBA website - [sonomabees.org](http://sonomabees.org) <<< coming soon:
- Beekeeping BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
- Africanized honey bees - what are they and how did they get here?
- Testing bees for AHB
- The differences between AHB and EHB
- Precautions and Cautions
- What to do if stung or attacked
- Other stinging insects - is it a honey bee?
- Who to contact

### **Membership Awareness**

Beekeeping BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES << look for soon at [sonomabees.org](http://sonomabees.org)

- Education - EHB vs. AHB - the differences
- What to do if you have a "hot" hive
- List of best practices - education to share with neighbors or concerned citizens

Questions, concerns, or want to volunteer - contact me at [president@sonomabees.org](mailto:president@sonomabees.org)

Bee Well!

*Cheryl Veretto*  
President

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# This Month's Calendar

## Monthly Meeting: Monday, June 13

6 pm – 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 – An Inexpensive Electronic Hive Monitor - Jerry Draper, Long time Organic Beekeeper from Marin County.

## Upcoming Meetings

July 11 - NO MEETING. Cluster Picnics are being planned.

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

September 12 - What's In Your Hives? - Christine Kurtz

October 10 - Gardening for Bees - Kate Frey

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

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

Upcoming Community Events

July 22-August 7. Sonoma County Fair

August 13-14. Gravenstein Apple Fair

September 6-8. Heirloom Expo

September 18. Blooming Backyards

## Other Events

June 25th, 2016 - Mount Diablo Beekeepers Association

Randy Oliver Lecture

This 6-hour lecture at the Church of the Resurrection Community Room in Pleasant Hill. The fee for the lecture is \$40.00 for MDBA members and \$50.00 for non-members. A box lunch is included. For more information or to register, contact Nancy Burke [vpmembered@diablobees.org](mailto:vpmembered@diablobees.org).

# El Dia Del Nino Celebration

By Natalie Henderson

At the end of April, the Children's Museum of Sonoma County celebrated with El Dia Del Nino by inviting our group and Bee Planet to their party. Since our booth was located in a grassy area out in back, it was a nice place for parents to bring much younger kids while their older siblings played and explored within the museum. The event was sweet and low pressure for everyone.

The day was picture perfect, warm and gentle, a calm Saturday between showers. The bees inside the Museum were humming along with the crowds of children, and later in the day, one of our volunteers, Jennifer, was there to witness the large swarm depart from the live hive exhibit maintained there.

We had several volunteers there to man our booth, which made it easy and fun for us to have hosts at our booth and to mingle with the kids and see the displays at Planet Bee and within the Museum. Our volunteers are a great group, and our crew had some highly qualified educators there. They were buzzing with excitement with some new ways of applying geometry lessons to the hexagons found in a hive. I really enjoyed myself, and I hope to meet more of you at our events in the future!

Thanks go to Thea Vierling and Jen Espinoza for coordinating SCBA's participation in this event.

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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.

**Bee Conscious- Bee Removal**  
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480 Uniland Drive  
Santa Rosa, ca. 95401

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cell (415) 350-5700  
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[www.beeconsciousremoval.com](http://www.beeconsciousremoval.com)

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

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# My June

## Beekeeping To-Do List by Serge Labesque

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### For bees' sake, we must talk.

There are markedly diverging views among beekeepers and bee scientists on how to take care of the bees.

True, we all have the right to express our opinions. When the health and survival of important natural resources such as the honey bee are at stake, we even have the moral obligation to speak up, argue, and debate. But while we are at it, we would also do well to listen and be ready to change our ways. We might learn something we did not know, and we, as well as the bees, would be better off for it!

Certainly, I, among many others, have not shied away from this responsibility in regard to the wellbeing of the honey bee... ad nauseam for both you and me! However, I can say that my opinions are not inflexible. Indeed, they have evolved over the years; to the point that I now object to many of the beekeeping practices that I had used in my own apiaries, some for several years. I have also abandoned beliefs that I had firmly held. This shift is the result of reflection and apiary trials that I ran when other beekeepers suggested that I was erring. It's a process that can be disorienting. Fortunately, I adhere to fundamental principles and values that help me sift through the information I am exposed to, the predominant one of these being to not interfere with natural selection.

Although I frequently expose my thoughts in these lines, I want them to be challenged. If they are not strong enough to withstand the rebuke, I search for alternatives. In this never-ending quest, the bees themselves are some of the best and most honest critics. Aren't they ultimately the referees as well as the beneficiaries or the victims of all our choices and decisions? So, please do not hesitate to criticize what I say or write, because the discussion will benefit us all. Whether we are beginning beekeepers or long-time practitioners, we owe it to the bees to question the validity of each other's ways.

Routines, traditions, beliefs and habits are only pale excuses that maintain the status quo and prevent us for making progress. They are not wisdom. At best, they may be temporary crutches we can use while we look for better ways. Progress requires that let go of ineffective or damaging ways, and that we seek real improvements. So, let's talk about what these might be... open-mindedly.

### June in the apiaries

The spring honey flow ended quite suddenly in early May around my home. As soon as the purple vetch bloom was over, there was no good bee forage in this area besides the short-lived flowers of a few catalpa trees and a derisory patch of blackberry bushes. The California buckeye trees bloomed profusely though. It did not take more than a few days for the effects of this noxious combination of dearth and toxic pollen to become noticeable. Signs of robbing behavior could be seen at the hive entrances. I promptly narrowed them. The bees became more defensive, too, but the brood chambers of the hives were even more dramatically affected: The brood, surrounded by diminishing stores, became spotty. The signs of a honey flow had vanished and comb building had stopped. Altogether it was a harbinger of a tough summer.

During those spring months, I had the chance to visit several apiaries that offered an extremely contrasting picture. Particularly in urbanized areas, the colonies were flourishing. The feverish activity of the foragers was unabated and their supers were filling with light and fragrant spring honey. The brood nests were bursting, demanding ever more space. What a striking difference, sometimes only a few miles away! Beekeeping may not all be about location, but it certainly counts hugely.

As we saw last year, this wide range of conditions will undoubtedly persist into early summer and beyond. The enduring drought will penalize the colonies that are located in areas of non-irrigated vegetation, whereas hives will be overflowing with bees and honey elsewhere. Bees and beekeepers have to adjust to their own microenvironments. In view of this, I consider that I may have allowed my apiaries to hold too many hives this spring. So, my current plan is to reduce their numbers quite soon in order to allow those that I will keep to build their stores and strength up during the summer.

Colony propagation and the production of young queens were quite successful this spring. However, the inspections that followed revealed that the mostly cool weather we experienced in April and May had delayed the mating flights of many young queens. A few actually did not mate successfully or in a timely manner, and therefore they became drone layers. This underscores the importance of not turning our backs on the young colonies we created, as they may be given a second chance, a queen, a queen cell, or simply combined with another colony that is queenright.

In general colony health is very good, although signs of European foulbrood show up occasionally in places where colony nutrition is questionable.

At this time of year, and with swarming becoming less of a concern, we switch from spring hive management to summer beekeeping practices. This includes continuing to ensure that water is available to the bees without any interruption. Begin by adjusting the entrances of the hives.

This is a very easy way to facilitate the work of the foragers and to ensure that the colonies can defend themselves against robber bees: At the daily peak of foraging activity, the foragers should be able to enter and exit the hives without struggling. Otherwise, they will be wasting time and energy, and the hives will be less productive. Inside, the bees might also have difficulty in regulating temperature and humidity. However, the entrances should remain defensible by the guard bees, particularly in the case of young and small colonies.

Our open-hive inspections are less frequent now than they were up to the division of the colonies and, although the brood nests are to be checked for health and queen conditions, we pay a little more attention to the management of the honey supers. When we perform these inspections, we need to be careful not to create robbing situations. We may harvest surplus honey as it becomes ripe. This is a good way to keep the hives under a reasonable height. Wet, harvested frames will be returned to the hives in the evenings to avoid triggering robbing.

It is beneficial to make sure that the hives receive the early morning sun during the summer, so that the foragers fly out early to collect nectar before the sun and the breeze dry it. On the other hand, providing some shade in the afternoon can spare the bees' unnecessary water foraging to control heat.

Empty frames may still be left in the hives either to give the bees the option to expand in the space they provide or to build comb, should the conditions allow. They also facilitate air circulation when the weather warms up.

Of course, we must be careful with the hot smoker in areas of dry grass!

### In summary, this month:

- Inspect hives when the foragers are out in large numbers.
- Keep an eye on the health of the colonies.
- Provide adequate air circulation through the hives.
- Be aware of situations and manipulations that can trigger robbing.
- Make sure the components of the hives fit tightly to prevent secondary entrances that might allow robber bees to enter.
- Ensure that sources of water are continuously available to the bees.
- Provide filtered afternoon shade, if at all possible.
- Adjust the size of the hive entrances to match the forager activity and reduce the risk of robbing.
- Follow-up on the development of young colonies.
- Evaluate the quality of young queens. Replace failing or undesirable queens.
- Combine or requeen inherently weak colonies or those that are not developing properly.
- Perform hive divisions and raise queens, where and when conditions are favorable.
- Monitor swarm traps.
- Keep some equipment at the ready to catch the occasional swarm.
- Manage honey supers (less space is needed as the nectar flow decreases).
- Harvest surplus spring honey.
- Discard old and misshapen combs.
- Render wax from discarded frames and from cappings (separately).
- Routinely clean and scorch tools and equipment.

## BEE WISE:

### “The Problem with Treatments”

by Emery Dann

*Serge Labesque*  
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Treatments are problematic for at least 4 reasons:

1. Treatments often treat symptoms rather than the cause.
2. Treatments create biological confusion and resistance.
3. Stronger treatments are then needed for biological adaptations or hive disruptions.
4. New treatments become more toxic and expensive!

The results over time produce “super weeds” and “super pests” that develop immunity to the chemicals that once killed the original weeds or pests. More powerful treatments become necessary. Poisons and toxic chemicals do not disappear but build up in our bodies, in our food, our hives, and the environment. Sterile, toxic soils grow our food along with polluting our water resources. Beneficial insects and pollinators are drastically reduced or eliminated by chemical warfare in both the country and in cities. Honey bees are affected by both lethal and sub-lethal damage any time they contact insecticides, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and pollution to various degrees.

Honey bees are warning us there are limitations we cannot cross without serious consequences.

I have found wanting a quick fix disrupts bee ecology in the hive can create weaker bees. Feeding corn syrup, sugar or pollen substitutes are treatments I have found creates a hive imbalance that is not always good for my bees. There may be rare exceptions, or in the case of hive starvation.

My point in saying this is that we need strong LOCAL, untreated bees. It is unscientific for me to think I know better than the wisdom of the hive! We need healthy bee habitats that are free of chemicals and poisons. We need sustainable thinking that is non-bee exploitative! Honey bees know what to do...and what they need. The strong bees can survive on their own. Weak ones will not. We may or may not always know why hives die off. But are treatments more for us than for the good of our bees?

I want to assist my bees to be stronger and healthier. I do not want to keep weak beehives artificially alive with treatments I think my bees need. Bees need to be self-sustaining, as good feral hives around us who experience no beekeeper treatments.

# Bee Plants of the Month

By Alice Ford-Sala

## Herb of the Month

**Oregano, marjoram (*Origanum*)**

**Family Lamiaceae (Labiatae)**

Oregano is another aromatic herb that bees flock to. It is relatively easy to grow, needing sun to partial sun, moderate to little water and well-drained soil. Once established, she will wander around the garden, if you let her bloom—and you should, as bees adore the blossoms. I have oregano and marjoram coming up at the base of raised beds, along walkways and between flagstones. If it comes up where you don't want it, pull it out and use it in pasta sauce!

There are many varieties; the culinary ones are Mexican oregano, Greek oregano, Italian or Sicilian marjoram, as well as Dittany of Crete, and those native to Lebanon and Turkey. Ornamental varieties include O.'Betty Rollins' a ground cover that forms a tight mat of bright green leaves. The blossoms are pink and highly attractive to bees and butterflies. O. rotundifolium 'Kent Beauty' has blossoms that are pink bracts, cascading over the side of a retaining wall or container. I have one that I occasionally take out of its pot, knock off some of the old soil, lightly prune the roots and then replace it in the same pot with some fresh soil.

Beside being used in Mediterranean dishes, a good pinch of oregano gives tomato salsa a nice depth, and my Mexican friends say that a tea of a handful of oregano, an onion and cinnamon stick, simmered together, strained and sweetened with honey or piloncillo (brown sugar) is good for coughs and congestion. They claim that it makes you sleepy, so if you try it, take it at night.

When you harvest, if you are torn between wanting to cut the herb before it blooms for best flavor, or leaving it to bloom for the bees, cut back half of the plant, let the other half bloom, then when it is finished blooming, do the reverse.



Oregano

## Native Plant of the Month

**Coffeberry-*Rhamnus californica***

**Family Buckthorn (*Rhamnaceae*)**

Coffeberry is a pretty evergreen shrub that is common in many parts of California. It has small, yellowish flowers that are not showy but are highly attractive to bees and other pollinators. It later sets berries that turn from green to red to black and are enjoyed by birds and small mammals.

It is very adaptable in the garden, able to thrive in either partial shade or full sun. Leaves will be bigger in the shade and narrower in the sun. It can take some water or, once established, will be drought tolerant. It doesn't like standing water, though. The bright green of Coffeberry contrasts nicely with grey-green sages. It can make a nice hedge, informal fence or background plant, and responds well to pruning.

'Eve Case' is a well-know cultivar, with wide leaves and large berries. It grows 8 to 10 feet tall, and can be fast growing. 'Mound San Bruno' has narrower leaves, and grows to 5 feet tall and wide. In my experience, they are slow growing (I have two 'Mound San Brunos') and well behaved. 'Leatherleaf' has very dark green leaves and grows to 5 feet in height and more in width.

Plant a native and sit back and see how many honey bees and native bees buzz in!



Coffeberry

Flowers We Can Count on For Nectar and/or Pollen in June



Nigella, aka Love-in-a-mist



Wild Mustard



Lavender



Wild Mustard



Blackberry, note grey pollen

# Regional Groups

By Christine Kurtz Co-Regional Coordinator



On Sunday May 29 the cluster coordinators met at my house and apiary for a much needed meeting and huddle. Note the change from cluster leaders to coordinators. This gives a much better description of what your cluster coordinators do, they coordinate events in each regional areas. Leader seemed to have implied that they are beekeeping leaders and some have seen this as a way to get free mentorship, leaning

on them for free beekeeping help and endless e-mails with questions. The group felt that calling themselves coordinators would alleviate this misconception. The coordinators work hard to create and manage events and support programs to give members opportunities for group mentoring, bee buddies, bee cafes, hive dives and some workshops. They are not there to be your personal beekeeper. Many are beginning beekeepers themselves and got involved to help create these communities so we can all learn beekeeping together and get needs met best as possible. We still have a very large influx of new beekeepers and mentors are scarce. You, too, can get more of your needs met by getting involved. All the coordinators are volunteers, with jobs and families. Most often private mentorship is gotten for hire. Meanwhile by getting involved with your regional groups, volunteering to help or host events, finding others to beekeep with, attending workshops when they are offered is a great way to get ahead. Hive dives are excellent learning opportunities to learn hands on.

The other things the group is working on is to have documents to describes exactly what each program offered are. Describing what a Bee Cafe, a Hive Dive,

a Workshop and where to go with our bee-share program in the future. These are all relatively new programs and are very unique in Bee Associations and we have learned oodles leaving it to be organic, creative, open, and space for them to develop. It is time now to write up guidelines and protocols so that we are all on the same page in each group and that there are clear boundaries about what is acceptable and not (for example private personal agendas is not a precedence for what is best for the bees and to know that ahead of time by a host is very important, for the bees especially and the emotional welfare of the coordinators as well). So we are working on documents, which we will share in the near future. This will also work hand in hand with our President's plan to have a business plan by the end of the year, which will give our association bigger opportunities for getting grants to help the bees.

I have to mention that we have and amazing group of coordinators, I am so proud of them. They have volunteered endless hours for you. Take good care of them as I can't loose any of them, they are too good. East Cluster is about to have a new helper Lauri Dorman. She attended this meeting and left with an "I am in!" Shows you what a terrific group the coordinators are.



Regional Cluster Meeting Held at Christine Kurtz Home



# May General Meeting Minutes

By Secretary Becky Jackson

Held at the 4H center in Rohnert Park; May 9, 2016. About 100 people present.

President Cheryl Veretto opened at 7:00 pm by asking visitors to stand and introduce themselves. Welcome Catherine, Gina, Ryan, Pam, Jan, Jillian, Max, Jane, Mary, and maybe a few more; sorry if I missed your name, the microphone was working poorly.

Christine Kurtz, Regional Coordinator, introduced the Cluster Leaders, sitting along the sidewall at tables. Come early each month at 6:00 pm to meet with and speak to Cluster Leaders.

The 50/50 Raffle netted \$106 to SCBA and the same to a lucky winner.

Cheryl and Christine presented at the Bee Symposium last weekend at UC Davis about our association and its work in our community. The overall theme there was centered on the Varroa mite and how to treat it.

Call for Volunteers! We still need a head Coordinator. Patsy, Education Coordinator is always looking for more volunteers to come to the schools. Please help.

Membership is just over 400 people.

Rita Maloney reminds us there are monthly calls for events around the county and volunteers must come forward for them to happen. SCBA commits to 3 per year—next is the Sonoma County Fair, then the Gravenstein Apple Fair and lastly the Heirloom Expo. There are clipboards at the back table to sign up to help at those 3. There are also guidebooks to enter honey or wax in the County Fair; entries close June 11.

Ellen, head of the Gardening Group announced the group meets the 1st Saturday of the month at an old church at Stony Point and Todd Roads, 10:30-1:30. They are working on propagating and selling plants at the meetings.

Rita introduced John Hafernik, a professor of Biology at SFSU. He is speaking on ZomBees, a term he coined after discovering and studying the behavior of parasitized honeybees.

It began at Hensill Hall at SFSU when he noticed dying and dead bees on the pavement under a light. A hive of honeybees was located nearby. He collected some of the bees to feed to his captive praying mantises, but forgot a vial of them on his desk for a week or more. When he found them, he saw tiny pupae in the glass vial with the dead bees. They turned out to be Phorid flies, smaller than fruit flies. He and his students began studying them, and also sent out crowd sourcing calls to the public to find other areas where Phorid flies are parasitizing honeybees. ZomBeeWatch.org started in 2012.

The fly lays its eggs in a live bee while it's out foraging. The larvae feed within the bee, and then exit from just under the head. Meanwhile, the infected bee is attracted to bright nighttime lights, which is not normal behavior.

The ZomBeeWatch asks participants to collect bees that are attracted to nighttime lights. Contain them in a jar, and then see if anything 'hatches' out of the dead bee body. If larvae, then pupae do occur, take a picture of it and send it to the website for confirmation. John is still studying questions like:

1. Is this recent, or has it been around a long time?
2. How widespread is Phorid parasitism of honeybees?
3. Is it an emerging problem?
4. Are there other reasons why bees fly at night?
5. Does the fly affect the behavior of other hosts? (Yes, bumblebees and yellow jackets).

Infections peak in the fall and early winter.

Even school children are getting involved as citizen scientists, including Planet Bee. He asks us to partner with him, only a few individuals in Santa Rosa have been involved.

John offers this advice to beekeepers:

- There are no known predators of the phorids (except accidentally getting in spider webs).
- No treatments are known to kill them and not your bees.
- Keep your hives as healthy as possible!
- Get involved with ZomBeeWatch if you find bees at your porch lights.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

*Becky Jackson, Secretary*

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

**March Board Minutes** - <http://sonomabees.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/5-May-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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