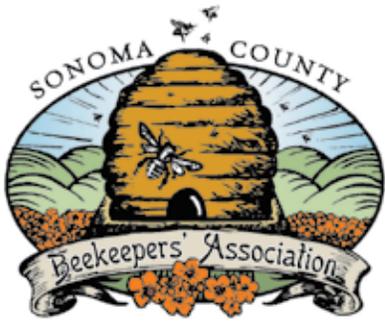


The Monthly Extractor



Volume 43, Issue 5

May 2018

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

President's Message

Fellow Beeks,

April/May and June is one of the most exciting times of the year for me for so many reasons, the biggest is seeing the wonder and awe and pure joy on a new beekeepers face when they get their first bees. Or watching a swarm in progress and then catching it and then hiving it! Or listening to a group of folks sharing their experience of splitting a hive. Or talking to the public about the bees and hearing their oohhs and aahhs about our industrious little pollinators.

Our Cluster groups are buzzing! Bee buddies are helping each other and all the hard work of our wonderful Cluster Coordinators, Mentors, Consultants, Swarm Catchers, and members is paying off in spades! The size of some of the swarms caught is daunting. This year is no different than the last year(s). Our bees are challenging us to think and rethink what we've learned. Weather of course plays a huge part and so we, the humble beekeeper(s) have to ask questions, try to follow our teachings and ask more questions. This is a great problem to have and that is why it's so important to work together (with your bee buddies).

Our organization is unique and I am so proud to be a part of it. We bring together people from all walks of life around one tiny thing we care about: the BEE. This is what I love about our association. It almost forces us to share experiences with others we generally would never meet as we share the common goal of caring for the bees and, even though we are diverse in our practices, we stand united in our opposition to environmental threats and are always looking for new, better ways to practice beekeeping.

What's coming:

The **Volunteer of Events** committee is starting to gather names for our up coming fairs! Make sure you peruse the tables to sign up. It's a great way to use your volunteer hours! And, something new this year.. We are going back to having our Annual SCBA picnic together as an association rather than in separate clusters!

Susan Kegley, 2nd VP, who owns Bees and Blooms has offered her beautiful farm to host our picnic. It's going to be on **July 21st** so please mark your calendars, as it will be an event not to miss. Details to follow.

The **Gardening Group** has been busy propagating bee friendly plants for your gardens; I was

fortunate to attend their propagation workshop last week and was so impressed by the wonderful gardeners helping Ellen in her nursery. They have unearthed some fab plants for you to pick up at the general meeting so make sure you go to the gardening table.

Hope to see you at the general meeting.

Kelli Cox
President

This Month's Calendar

Monthly Meeting: Monday, MAY 14

6PM Check out books and videos from our library, buy plants at our fabulous plant table, talk to expert beekeepers willing to share their knowledge with you and help with any problems, socialize with refreshments and meet your cluster leaders. Bring your own cup, please. If you like to bake we also would appreciate donations of your cooking skills!

7PM Bernardo Niño from UC Davis will speak about the CA Master Beekeeper program, as well as providing perspectives on methods of Varroa mite control.

Upcoming Meetings/Events

- July 21 Annual Picnic at Bees and Blooms

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Beek Of The Month

Our Beek of the Month for May is **George Herrmann**.

George saw a fundraising opportunity and was instrumental in helping the SCBA acquire \$2930.50 from Oliver's Market. He approached Oliver's last year because they are local and supported by many of our members and are nationally recognized as a market that sources from local producers. George, who is a consultant and tutor and is married to Maggie Weaver, our Education Coordinator and Central Cluster coordinator, and is very supportive and participatory in all things SCBA saw this as an opportunity to reach out to our corporate community. He heard back from them in February and along with the "Volunteer of Events Committee", they supplied materials and bee facts and commandeered tables at 4 stores educating folks about bees.

A GREAT team to be sure!

Thank you George for having the foresight and perseverance for acquiring this new partnership with Oliver's and getting more funds for the SCBA to further our efforts in Bee education.



SCBA table in Windsor

My May

Beekeeping To-Do List by Serge Labesque

© 2018

Long live the queens!

The set of genes any female bee carries is a random combination of one half of her mother's genes and of the genes of only one of the many drones her mother mated with. In addition, queens are the custodians and dispensers of sperm they received from multiple drones during their mating flights. As for the males, they are endowed with an unpredictable assortment of only one half of their mother's genes. Therefore, under normal circumstances queen bees that are sisters are different from each other and from their mother. Sister queens may actually have very few or, possibly not even a single gene in common! This means that any change of queen in a hive results in a change in the genetic make-up of the colony and in essence, in a different colony. We might as well accept this fact and work with it.

While the progenies of queens are genetically complex and diversified populations, bee colonies blend the differences that exist among their tens of thousands of members into coordinated work forces that become clear expressions of some of the traits their respective queens possess. Still, this genetic variability, which is pervasive throughout the brood of the colonies, is a real challenge for beekeepers that wish to retain desirable hive characteristics in the queens they raise.

Because queen quality cannot be taken for granted, most hive management routines include the regular evaluation of colonies and the replacement of unsatisfactory or failing queens. There are beekeepers that do not pay much attention to the quality of their hives though. They simply maintain the vigor of their colonies by ensuring that their queens are young. They re-queen their hives systematically; some as often as twice a year. I do not. Actually, I leave my queens in place as long as they do not compromise the health of their colonies. Sometimes, I even take more chances with the very best queens, hoping to preserve some of their superior traits by raising a few additional daughter queens from their brood.

In my apiaries, most of the queen renewal is accomplished by letting the divides of the colonies raise their own queens. When the conditions are favorable in the spring, I also raise a few queens from the brood of one or two of my preferred hives. These queens may be used to re-queen colonies that are inherently weak or to replace failing queens before the end of summer.

Although trying to replicate good queens is futile, raising queens from their brood can nonetheless be a valid way of improving apiaries. This is because some of the mothers' desirable genes may be transferred to their daughters. So, it's good to know how to produce queens. Actually, the bees do the work; the beekeeper only needs to provide the means and initiate the process. Unless one intends to produce hundreds or thousands of queens, there

is no need or good reason to adhere to the rigmarole of setting up cell-starter, builder, and finisher hives, or to learn how to graft, or what have you. Queen management may be kept simple, too: Divide colonies when they prepare for swarming, let the splits produce young queens, and perhaps, raise a few additional queens from good stock with any simple, low-tech queen-rearing method. Monitor the hives, and re-queen them when necessary.

Long live the queens!

May in the apiaries

We're certainly having an odd spring here this year. The March and early April cool and wet weather seems to have slowed the vegetation down by at least a week to ten days. The same delay applies to the season of colony reproduction. But unlike last year, when similar conditions negatively affected the colonies, this year there is a generous nectar flow in spite of the weather. The bees are foraging intensely during the favorable weather and at times even in low temperatures or in the rain. Overall, the colonies have developed large populations early and they've kept growing beautifully into very strong units that demand ever more nectar, pollen and water. The foragers evidently have found ways to deliver.

Just as striking is that the colonies produced abnormally large amounts of drone comb and drone brood all of a sudden in early spring, and they are maintaining large drone populations. This is exactly the opposite of what we had seen in recent years, when early drone culling was rampant. Of course, the production of drones is to be expected in the spring, but this year, the drone brood is often located close to the heart of brood nests, which is an odd location for it. Because this is widespread, the explanation might be found in the environment. But what is it? How are we to read what the bees are writing in their combs? And how can we best manage our colonies under these circumstances?

So, we are looking at two consecutive years with seemingly similar spring weather patterns, but the colonies are responding extremely differently. This shows how important it is to be flexible in our beekeeping practices. Two points come to mind immediately: One is that the season of colony reproduction is likely going to be compressed into a short few weeks span, the most intense part of which will probably be in late April or in the early part of May. The second is that all this drone brood is going to give an early and powerful boost to the varroa mite populations.

In view of this, it would be tempting to cull a lot of this abundant drone brood. But I think that doing this would be a big mistake, because it would be interfering with the selective pressure that these conditions will be applying on the colonies. The bees that have good defense

mechanisms, such as grooming, or hygienic behavior will make it, whereas the inept colonies will be eliminated. As we divide our colonies, which is what is happening right now or what is about to happen, it is beneficial to allow a period of broodlessness to occur in the splits while the young queens are being raised. Then, the bees can use their grooming behavior against the mites. This is a healthy mechanism swarming colonies use spontaneously. Also, this is the time of year when the conditions will be optimal to produce additional queens from our best hives. We will be able to requeen any failing hives with them later. It's an unusual spring alright, but the challenge it presents us and our bees could very well be a great opportunity to strengthen our local bee populations.

The spring honey flow leads us to adding still more supers and frames. At this time of year, we can safely super early, before there is an urgent need for more nectar space, especially when we use empty frames with no comb. Baiting the bees into the new supers with a few frames and follower boards that are already in the hives helps attract the bees into the new supers. By harvesting some of the early spring honey, we can help prevent the hives from becoming too tall or congested. Thanks to warmer and sunnier weather, the beeswax can be processed rapidly, as the solar wax melters are working well again.

Looking at the entrances of the hives, we see that they can be safely widened to facilitate the flow of the foragers.

The monitoring trays deserve to be examined for possible hive health problems. They may also be cleaned or swapped for clean trays, as hive debris accumulates rapidly on them at this season.

Toward the end of the month, the California buckeye trees will start blooming. They are beautiful trees indeed, but their offerings are toxic to the bees. Hopefully, bees will find alternative sources of nectar and pollen at that time, such as brambles.

This may be an odd spring, but it keeps us on our toes!

In summary, this month:

- Inspect hives regularly, when foragers are out in large numbers.
- Open the entrances of the hives to match their 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. Remove infected brood combs when they occur.
- 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.
- Harvest only surplus early spring honey.
- Discard old and misshapen combs.
- Render wax from discarded frames.
- Routinely clean and scorch tools and equipment.
- Pull weeds from around the hives.

Serge Labesque
© 2018

Let's Learn Each Other's Names!

Due to a number of asks for SCBA member name badges one of our Central Cluster members, Paul Quistgard, graciously took on the task of finding a way to make this possible. At the next general meeting Paul will have order forms located at the lobby table for members to fill out. The badges will be handed out at the general meeting(s) and will be the responsibility of the member. Please contact Paul with any questions or concerns. Paul Quistgard, paulquistgard@aol.com cell: 425-877-5123

East Cluster Bee Sharing Update

By Lizanne Pastore, East Cluster Bee Share Gal

As of this writing, April 23, East Cluster has shared 23 (reported) swarms and 19 (reported) splits with other East Cluster members who were in need or wanting bees. We had 22 people on our "Needs Bees" list, and each of those members has received either a swarm or split (or are waiting for a member's bees to make swarm prep.) Many members have received more than 1 colony. We have also given bees away to other members not on the list. A priority was given to those members who lost their bees in the October fires.

We are not done yet. There are still hives waiting to be split, and I'll bet money we'll have more swarms. As of now, East Cluster has more bees to give away than recipients to take them.

Let me repeat that, East Cluster has more bees to give away than recipients to take them.

This is a testament to how well Bee Sharing works. There are many beekeepers now in Sonoma County. There are MORE than enough bees to share. Thank you to all East Cluster members who cancelled packages to instead receive bees from local beekeeper friends! This will help ensure our Sonoma honeybee population stays local, strong and healthy.

An additional bonus of being part of the Bee Share family is meeting and bee-friending other beekeepers, making bee buddies, and gaining experience from actually PARTICIPATING in the swarm catching and hive splitting process. You don't get that from paying for and picking up a package at the store or post office.

You know the old saying: A Langstroth super: 20 bucks. A bee veil and smoker: 45 bucks. A hive of local bees: Priceless!

The photos below are of an Easter (not East, but actually Easter, the holiday) Swarm capture in the Sonoma Square headed by our wonderful Kenwood bee-charmer, Susan Simmons, who happens to always carry a spare adult-sized bee suit for a willing participant to use during a swarm catch. In this case, it was donned by a young boy, who guarded the swarm until help arrived. See little boy in huge bee suit. His grandmother tells us that taking part in this swarm rescue has been a highlight of his life. Future SCBA member for sure!!



Both photos taken by Cynthia Potter.

Bee Plants of the Month

By Alice Ford-Sala

Tulsi (Sacred Basil, Holy Basil) *Ocimum tenuiflorum* (*Ocimum sanctum*)

Family: Mint (Lamiaceae)

Tulsi used to be hard to find, but now you can often find one or more varieties in good local nurseries. It is easy to grow from seed, and some online specialty growers offer a nice choice of several tulsi variations.

Many are named for Hindu deities.

Krishna tulsi is a tender perennial, very attractive with purple leaves and flowers. It has a sweet flavor that can be used in teas by itself or blended with other tulsi varieties.

Vana tulsi is a larger plant it can grow up to 5 feet tall if you live in a frost-free area. Large bright green leaves with flower spikes of yellowish white. Also called Clove Basil or Wild Holy Basil, it has a strong flavor with abundant aromatic oils.

Rama tulsi is very commonly grown in India. Green leaves contrast nicely with purple stems. The deep purple flowers are also quite attractive.

Amrita tulsi has pretty green-purple leaves and lacey spikes of pinkish-purple flowers. Said to make a very delicious tea.

Temperate tulsi is an annual, but mine lasted until the really cold nights when it got down to the 20s at night. Bees came to it until then. It looks a lot like culinary basil, with deep green leaves, the sun-exposed ones tinged with purple and nice blue-purple flowers. Very aromatic, it is nice to brush up against it in the garden and smell the sweet herbal fragrance.

Tulsi enjoys the same garden conditions as culinary (sweet) basil. Good garden soil, full sun and moderate water. She can grow alongside tomatoes and peppers, seeming to boost their growth as well. Tulsi also does well in a container, and you can bring the plants in over winter if you want, as they are frost tender. Or plant new ones every spring like you would do with regular basil.

A tea garden large container could hold several tulsi types, and if you have room, plant some anise hyssop and chamomile alongside.

You would want to harvest before she flowers, yet let some bloom so the bees can enjoy one of their favorite plants. One method is to harvest the first leaves before the plant flowers, then let the flowers develop for the bees, or cut one half of the plant and let the other half bloom, then repeat the process in reverse.

Culinary, or sweet basil, *O.basilicum* is also a medicinal plant, also very attractive to bees.

Much beloved in Indian medicinal practice and throughout Southeast Asia, in folk tradition tulsi is a gift from the goddesses, or Earth, to benefit humanity and promote longevity. Tulsi is not toxic in any dosage, so is beneficial to anyone, by report. Said to be good for calming, heart healthy and even good for treating diabetes and dementia.

The medicinal uses are mentioned here for interest only and are not recommendations.

Alice Ford-Sala



Vana tulsi



Swarm Season 2018

By John McGinnis

Well swarm season got a slow start but came back strong. I think it could be due to our very unusual weather pattern this year. I believe our warm spell in February got the queens into laying mode, and then with all the rain the hive populations started BOOMING.

I haven't had a whole lot of swarm calls this year, at least not directly from the swarm list, but I'll tell you this it pays to let all the people you know that you are into bees and that you are the person to call.

On Monday the 23rd we had two swarm calls, both through SCBA. I say we because now days both my wife Darlene and I not only work together, but also capture swarms together. The first one the bees took my shake of the branch as a sendoff to where to wherever they had already decided to go. The second one was high in a really bushy tree and no matter how hard we tried with the pole and bucket method, no luck! Struck out twice.

The next day Tuesday early in the morning we got a swarm call again through SCBA from a local nursery that they had a swarm. While on our way to the nursery my phone messenger thing went off. I had a message from a friend and brother in the motorcycle club I belong to that he had a friend that had reported on Facebook that she had a huge swarm in her yard. After obtaining her phone number we gave her a call and got her address. I had her send me a picture and we scurried over to her house after containing the first swarm. After arriving I took one look at the swarm and stated, "we need a bigger box" WOW!! On the way back home, I contacted my bee buddy and neighbor, Nick Freedman, and sent him the picture to make sure he got a good case of swarm envy. I also invited him to join us and he promptly accepted. The following pictures are of that swarm and the capture. I weighed the box when we got back with it that night and again after installing it the next morning and came up with 18.3 lbs. of bees at 4,000 bees per lb. that's roughly 73,000 bees Oh My!!

P.S. All in all swarm season has been pretty successful I have heard that nearly everyone on the needs bees list has received bees. What a great organization with so many people helping each other I'm so proud to be part of it.

John McGinnis

2018 Swarm Commander SCBA



Swarm Reporting Reminder

We're asking your help in keeping track of the swarms caught within our cluster(s). We'll use this information in two ways: (1) to keep track of the survival rate over time of all swarms caught and hived within our cluster(s), and (2) to identify swarms that might be available for cluster members on our Needs Bees List.

With your help, we plan to track the 2018 splits and swarms over the 2018/2019 winter to see how many survive to next spring. This is part of an effort to capture information that will identify whether our clusters' efforts in support of local honeybees are increasing the number of colonies throughout our cluster areas over time.

When you have collected all the swarms you need, please consider making additional swarms available to your cluster's Bee Share team so that we can match your swarm up with a cluster member who needs bees. Using the Needs Bees List we created based on information from our 2018 Cluster Survey, we try to match cluster members with bees to share with cluster members who need bees, placing bees as close to their original micro-climate as possible.

Here's what we're asking from you:

Please report ***ALL*** swarms, whether from your hives or from other sources and whether you're keeping the swarm or giving it away, to swarm@sonomabees.org and "CC" your cluster coordinators at <your_cluster>cluster@sonomabees.org (eg: northcluster@sonomabees.org).

When you send the email, please put SWARM REPORT in the subject line, and in the body of the email include the following:

1. Date of swarm
2. Location of swarm (street name and city/town)
3. Size of swarm (eg: baseball, football, basketball, beachball!!!)
4. Location of recipient hive (street name and city/town)

West Cluster Bee Share

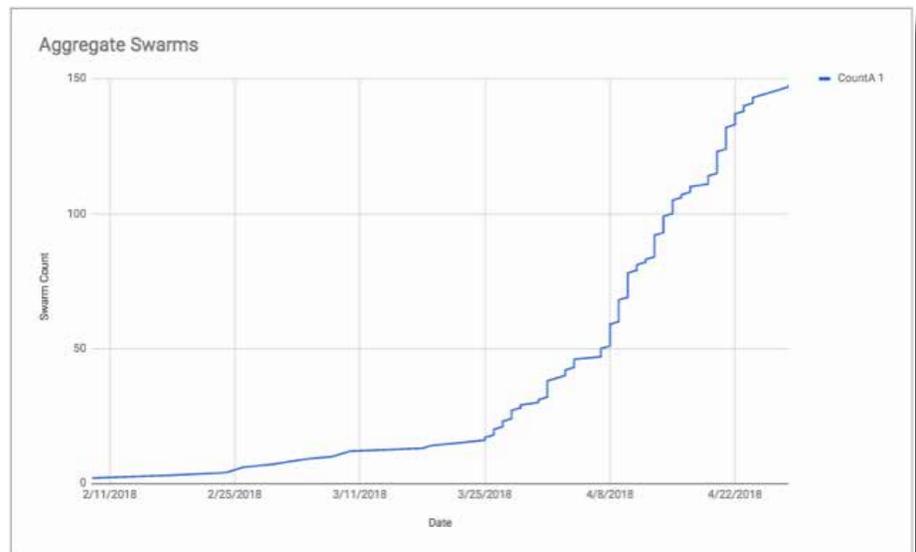
West Cluster has had a busy bee sharing season so far, beginning with our first swarms in mid February! Through 4/24 our cluster members have reported the capture of 51 swarms and the creation of 4 new colonies through splits. Swarms have been referred for capture by the SCBA public swarm list as well as through members' personal contacts in the community. Roughly half were shared via our Bee Share Program and its Needs Bees List and roughly half were kept by the person responding to the swarm. Last year the most swarms per month were in April and May so we're expecting a few more busy weeks and, fortunately, still have people on our Needs Bees List that are willing to care for bees.

Please find attached a couple of swarm images.



Images by Liz Russell
R Honey Pots.

The graph below displays the number of reported swarms county wide since the beginning of February through 4/29/2018. The total is 149.



Honey Bees: The (new) Endless Drought

By Miles Sarvis-Wilburn

Recently I thought up the idea for this article and began my research the [California Drought](#) webpage, run by the state of California. Unfortunately, I found that the last update was posted in April of 2017. That post states that Governor Jerry Brown has lifted the state of emergency and presumably this was such good news that the entire staff abandoned the site for nearly a year. On the other hand, an independent and unbiased source—[The Pacific Institute out of Oakland](#)—has ample and current resources on the topic. [A map](#) valid through April 17th shows over half the state in “abnormally dry” conditions and nearly a third in some form of drought. Nearly a third of the continental United States is undergoing some sort of shortage of water. [An official US government website](#) confirms the data found above and informs us that

“abnormal dryness or drought are currently affecting approximately 28,312,000 people in California, which is about 76% of the state's population.”

It seems to me that we are led to believe that just because the drought is not as severe as it has been in the past, we should become comfortable thinking that we are not in a drought at all. But we clearly are and will likely continue to be for the foreseeable future. In fact, as the image below

shows, for the past five years at least 25% of the state has been in some form of drought, with 2017 being the only year that less than 80% of the state was affected. Was 2017 the norm that we have been deviating from, or was it the outlier in a new normal? No matter the answer to this question (though I believe it to be of paramount importance), we must understand the relationship between droughts and our honey bees.

Droughts affect honey bees in two primary ways. The first is rather obvious: prolonged droughts can reduce the number of flowering plants thereby decreasing available forage and increasing competition for existing sites. This in turn increases stress upon colonies and forces bees to seek forage from less desirable sources. Decreases in available forage also mean less diversity and more homogenous diets. It is interesting

how something so seemingly simple (less flowers) has so many complicated consequences upon colonies.

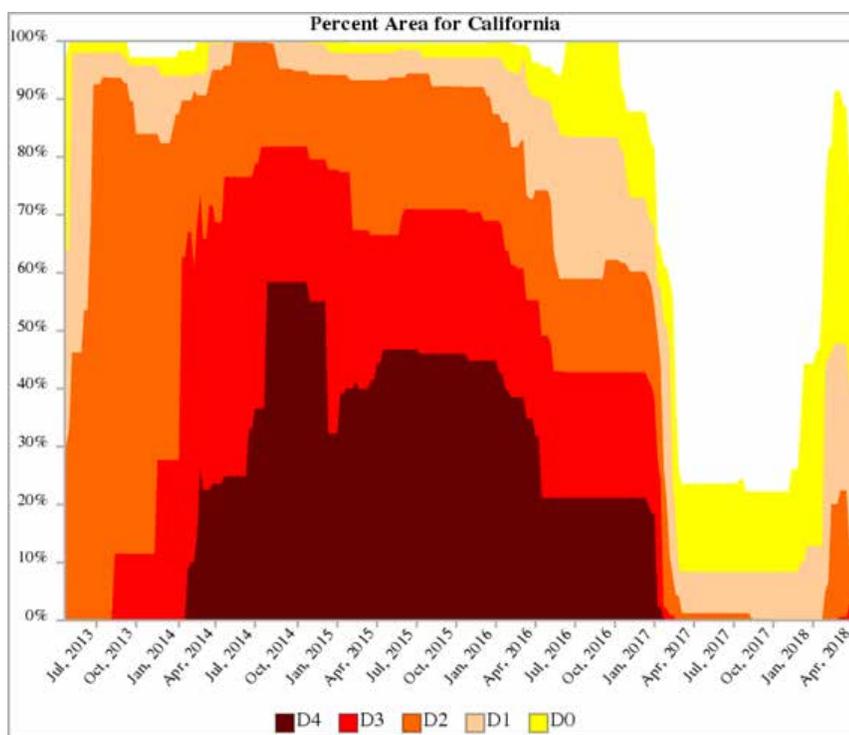
The second major impact upon honey bees revolves around a simple fact: flowers only produce nectar when they have enough water to do so. While nectar production in many plants is regulated by a particular hormone, nectar itself is nearly eighty percent water. Less water for the plant does not mean less watery nectar (or more sugary nectar) as this would create difficulties for the plants vascular system. Instead and much more logically, [the plant produces less nectar](#). The lower availability of nectar in any given flower means that pollinators must visit more often, increasing the probability of exhaustion in the foragers. Furthermore, given that the production of honeycomb moves in step with the intake of nectar, less nectar means less comb. Here we see a direct link between droughts and the size and health of a colony. Put succinctly [in another professional article](#), “drought stress negatively affects flower pollination by decreasing the amount of viable pollen grain, increasing the unattractiveness of flowers to pollinators, and decreasing the amount of nectar produced by flowers.

Consequently crop seed set is lowered.” Lower crop seed set means less crop the following year, less available pollination opportunities, and so the cycle begins a negative feedback loop.

My conclusions from this research lead me to believe that we should be planting only drought-tolerant or drought-resistant, native or naturalized flowering plants. Drought-tolerant and drought-resistant are different qualifiers and we should take away a simple conclusion: not all plants sold as being drought-resistant or drought-tolerant are so in our ecosystem. Many are merely adapted to low level drip irrigation and true drought tolerance means no extra water after the first year. These plants

should be able to survive (and flower, producing nectar and pollen for our bees) on their own with no additional watering. What are these miracle plants, you ask? [Here is a list](#) and [here is an interactive site](#) to provide recommendations based on your zip code, watering habits, sun exposure, and soil type.

I believe that we should assume that “abnormal dry” conditions are no longer abnormal and with this in mind it would be foolish to plant items that require heavy watering. Finally, I'd like to note that my argument here is not meant to shoulder the blame for water usage or droughts upon the everyday person (statistically speaking, individual households and citizens are the least responsible for such conditions), rather, it is to encourage us to put effort in now so that we can passively reap rewards in the future. Our bees will surely thank us as well.





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*Designed and endorsed by Serge Labesque
Recommended by Christine Kurtz*

John McGinnis

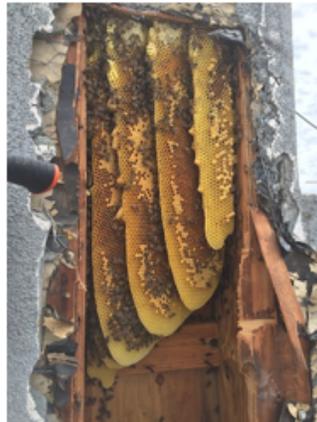
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editor@petersonsfarm.com

Central

Paul Quistgard

PaulQuistgard@aol.com

West

Cheryl Veretto

707-827-3774 (preferred)

cheryl@cbfreelance.com

East

Susan Simmons

925-408-4529

Susanjsimmons@gmail.com

The Top Bar Hive group has a fruit press available for use in honeycomb crushing. Contact Jim Spencer at topbargroup@sonomabees.org



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2018 Board Members and Other Helpful People

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Roster of SCBA Resources

Sonoma County Beekeepers Association

Monthly Meeting

February 12, 2018

Location - 4H Building , Rohnert Park
Start approximately 7:00
In Attendance approximately 100

Items covered

- Honey Tasting
- Needs Bees List Update
- Bee Share Reimbursements Guidelines
- Paul Quisgard- Contact for SCBA name badges
- Acknowledgment to Oliver's for matching funds raised by SCBA members during "Bees and Honey" Campaign
- Tasting: Presentation by Orietta Gianjorio
 - Professional honey taster
 - Everyone given three samples and instruction on how to taste and describe.

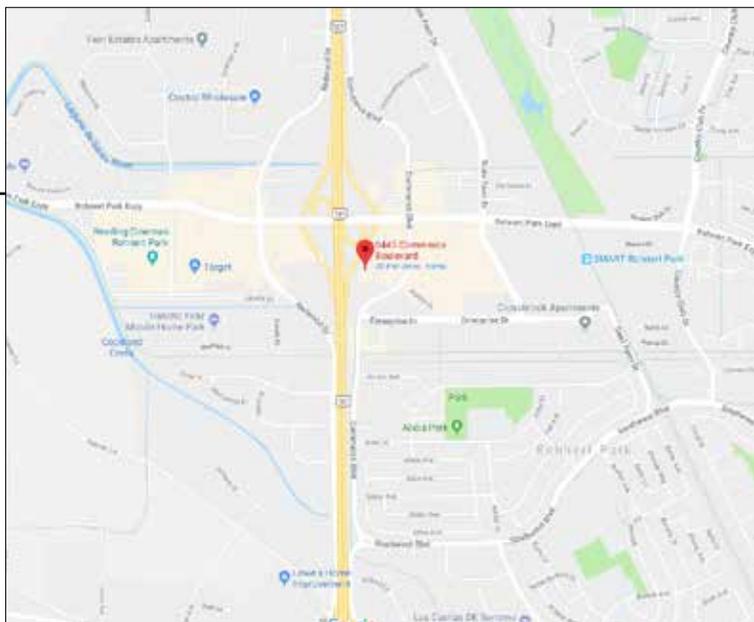
Adjourn 9:00pm

Respectfully submitted,

Maurice Bowers
Member

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

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