President's Message

Fellow Beeks,

Spring is my favorite time of year and by far the busiest for our pollinating friends and me! It is extraordinary how fast things start to happen.

Of course with all the rain and intermittent weather it feels like were a little behind but make no mistake there's plenty of activity in the hive(s)!

Having said that, make sure you are following the biology of our bees. Remember, they can change gears without you knowing so be patient and look for the signs, don't rush ahead! We are getting reports of colonies culling drones, possibly because there isn't enough food. Utilize your clusters for questions and try not to rush into something without thinking the situation through.

Our Cluster Coordinators have been busy coordinating cafes and presentations to help you all prepare for this year. The Bee Share program in your clusters is doing it's very best to gather information for their list(s) to help get you bees. Thank you so much for filling out the 2019 SCBA Cluster member surveys. We had 271 responses :) By far the most responses of any survey in our Association! Well done!

We have had a few swarm reports as the rain is keeping them at bay but the sun will soon be out and swarm season will be upon us so make sure you're ready....

You should have received the General SCBA Survey. We have had to date 99 responses!
I urge you to answer it if you haven't already and thank you if you have. We will be announcing results in the May Extractor.

Your input is valuable and we want to make sure we are meeting the needs of all our members; this survey will help shape our direction. Click here to take the survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZQH8PKK

Thank you,

Kelli Cox
2019 President
Overdue thanks

My March Hive Divisions presentation and the preceding Coming Out of Winter slides benefitted from Lizzanne Pastore and Christine Kurtz’s comments and excellent suggestions. Many thanks to both for their time and patience. Their dedication to the bees and the competent help they provide to all of us beekeepers are outstanding.

I would also be remiss in not mentioning my wife’s decades-long contribution to these lines. It’s wonderful to have Cheryl’s relentless support and her thorough reviews of my beekeeping texts and slide shows. Her persistent and rigorous help is truly invaluable.

Strong colonies deserve to be divided

For eons, honey bees have multiplied by swarming, but presently the vast majority of swarms perish. In areas ruled by humans, the bees’ spring ritual no longer is the fairly safe renewal of life it used to be. In these circumstances, letting colonies swarm without at least attempting to make their reproduction less dangerous for them is just neglect. There are several well-known ways of doing this, the practice of dividing hives being most effective and fulfilling for the bees and the beekeeper.

By actively managing our hives during the latter part of winter and in early spring, we facilitate their development into strong units and we can avoid their premature swarming. This is achieved by increasing the volume of the hives, which is performed in order to accommodate growing clusters, swelling brood nests, the accumulation of nectar, and the new wax constructions well-fed young bees inevitably produce. The presence of forager clustering space between the hive entrances and the brood nest is also quite helpful, as it helps to reduce the congestion of the brood chambers and therefore delays the onset of swarm preparations.

The division of a hive is best done when the colony indicates that it is readying itself for swarming. At that point, the in-hive conditions are optimal for producing queens of excellent quality. So, during the spring, rounds of hive inspections are performed once a week to ten days to make sure that the bees have all the space they need and to find out if they are preparing to swarm. Large amounts of nearly solid sealed brood along with sparse open brood are early warnings. This signals that the queens, which had been laying eggs without interference days earlier, have now suddenly slowed down. They are losing weight and will soon be able to fly out with the swarms. The construction of swarm cells will follow during the last phase of the preparations of the hives for swarming.

The procedure of dividing hives is actually rather simple and rapidly executed. Each of the divides is provided with the means to raise queens, including very young brood, young bees and adequate amounts of stores. However, it is effective only when more than fifty percent of the original hive population is removed from it. For this reason, I prefer dividing colonies in three or less equal parts.

Just as important as the management of the hives was before their division, it is crucial to ensure that the divides develop well. There are two steps in this follow-up. The first one, which needs to occur between four and seven days after the manipulation, allows us to figure out where the original queen is, if she was not located earlier, and to verify that the queenless divides are raising young queens. Eggs indicate that the queen is present in the divide. It is preferable to move this split to a location that is different from the original hive’s site and to manage it like a swarm. If no eggs are found, queen cells should promise future queens. Sometimes it is possible to produce additional divides from the splits that are rearing queens. After these inspections the divides that are raising queens need to be left undisturbed until the queen-rearing process is completed, four to six weeks later.

The sight of young brood produced by the new queens will be one of the most rewarding events a beekeeper can hope for: It’s the promise of colonies headed by young queens issued from your own locally adapted and successful colonies, the very best bees.

April in the apiaries

Spring has arrived. The season of colony reproduction and of queen renewal is on. At this time of year, the propagation and rejuvenation of the hives promise strong, healthy and productive apiaries.

Inside the hives, the brood nests are growing rapidly and white wax deposits appear on most of the exposed surfaces. Light nectar shines in the cells of freshly built combs. Vigorous forager populations, favorable weather and glorious blooms can combine to bring about a generous honey flow. Not surprisingly, the beekeepers have reasons to be hopeful. They see that they will recover from winter losses, possibly expand their apiaries, and even share some bees with other beekeepers.

From one week to the next, the hives evolve quite rapidly. The bees need more space. So, additional frames and supers are promptly provided; preferably before the bees need them. At this time of year, the brood nests are inspected frequently, not only to augment the volume of the hives, but also in order to determine when the colonies initiate their preparations for swarming, as this is the best time to divide them and also to raise queens.

One of the benefits of the division of the hives is that swarming can be minimized, if not entirely avoided. Although capturing swarms can be fun, having to run after swarms that have departed from our hives is not as amus-
ing. We occasionally check the swarm traps or unused equipment we’ve set out to invite passing swarms, and we keep our swarm-catching gear at hand.

A few frames of honey may be ready to be harvested. They can be collected after assessing the brood nests. The honey should be ripe, thoroughly capped and not dripping out of the combs when the frames are shaken. If available, a refractometer is a good tool for measuring the moisture content of the honey. Instead of removing entire supers, which might take a few more weeks, removing a few frames presents several advantages: the bees are not overly disturbed by the brief and modest withdrawals; we can enjoy a greater variety of honeys throughout the season; and the harvest is spread out over more time. Nowadays, the harvested honeycombs have to be processed rapidly, though, because small hive beetles overwinter successfully in this area. They are present in all the hives I see, and their numbers are rising. The frames that are withdrawn are immediately replaced by empty frames to supply the bees with more comb-building and nectar-storage space. Should the placement of additional supers be warranted, these are inserted directly between the brood chambers and the previous supers. It’s a practice that is called "bottom supering". I always entice the bees to move into the new supers by placing a few of the frames they are already working on and follower boards from the hives into the new supers. This "baiting" of the bees transfers the odor of the colonies and the bees immediately accept the new space.

While we peek into the brood nests, it’s always important to detect signs of disease or the presence of parasites. Early removal of combs contaminated by chalkbrood or European foulbrood gives the colonies a chance to recover. The colonies that are affected will not be divided. Queen-related issues can easily be corrected during the spring, thanks to the frequent availability of queen cells or young queens, or to the conditions that are conducive to good queen rearing.

Because I remove a large proportion of the combs from my hives every year, I find it quite important to have the bees build fresh combs during the spring honey flows. It just will not happen later in this area.

The brood nests have started to extend downwards into the hives. Within a few weeks they’ll occupy the forager clustering spaces and reach the hive floors. But presently, there is still enough space to offer shelter to the foragers at night or during days of inclement weather.

Thanks to the winter rain, the vegetation is growing vigorously. So, the visits to the apiaries have to include some grass cutting to keep the hives accessible.

For sure, there is a lot to do in the apiaries at this time of year. It may seem overwhelming at times, but it is all a lot of fun. Among all the tasks we have to perform at this season, two define fairly well this period: colony reproduction and supering. To be enjoyed while it lasts!

In summary, this month:

- I highly encourage all beekeepers NOT to order, buy or bring in package bees, nucs or queens from outside our immediate area! Instead, arrange to obtain bees from neighbor beekeepers in close proximity.
- Inspect the hives regularly. Focus your attention on the open brood (eggs and young larvae) for signs of health issues and of colony preparation for swarming.
- Ensure unimpeded development of the brood nests. Add frames to provide egg-laying space and comb-building opportunities.
- Add frames and supers to provide nectar storage space.
- Ensure the presence of clustering space between the brood nests and the hive entrances.
- Perform hive divisions when the colonies are initiating their preparations for swarming.
- Rear a few queens from your best stock.
- Observe the monitoring trays, particularly for signs of brood diseases, chalkbrood mummies, EFB-affected larvae or other health-related problems.
- Gradually open the entrances of the hives to match the increasing forager activity.
- Harvest only surplus early spring honey.
- Make sure you leave enough honey in the hives, 20 lb. being adequate for a mature colony at this time of year.
- Monitor the swarm traps that were set out.
- Requeen or combine overwintered hives that are not performing satisfactorily, and those that have failing queens.
- Keep some equipment at the ready to catch the occasional swarm.
- Maintain sources of water for the bees.
- Remove weeds from in front of the hives.
- Discard old and misshapen combs.
- Render wax from discarded frames.
- Routinely clean and scorch tools and equipment.

Serge Labesque
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FOR SALE

Dadant 12-frame radial extractor for sale, with Baldor motor and drive, stainless-steel stand, uncapping knife and uncapping fork: $550.

Serge Labesque 707-996-3149
Hedgerow Bee Plant
Pineapple Guava Feijoa sellowiana,
aka Acca sellowiana
Family Myrtaceae

How about some edibles in our hedgerow? A handsome, evergreen native of South America, the pineapple guava makes a delightful addition to a hedgerow, or you could plant an entire hedge of them alone. You could also shape them into a small tree. Planting more than one is a good idea, as they seem to fruit better when there is cross-pollination.

Give them plenty of sun but not blazing hot sun, where they might burn. Partial shade is ok, especially if they get full sun in the morning and early to mid afternoon.

They do well in Northern California climates, needing cool winters and moderately warm summers. They can take frost, down into the high teens (Fahrenheit) and actually need some winter chill to flower well.

They can grow up to 15 feet high and wide though pruning can keep them smaller. They can be espaliered, or lightly pruned to a pleasing shape, usually after fruiting. A light application of a balanced fertilizer can help with growth and flower production. They appreciate deep regular water rather than more frequent and lighter irrigation.

Pineapple guavas are quite attractive, with shiny green leaves with greyish undersides. The flowers are spectacular! The white petals are edible, often being compared to marshmallows or bubble gum in texture and flavor, though I think they are much more delicious than either of those. The red stamens contrast nicely and are born like big puffs above the petals. Bees absolutely adore the blossoms, along with hummingbirds.

The fruit is small, about 1-3 inches long, smelling sweetly of pineapple or strawberry. The fruit can be eaten as is, sliced into salads, or made into jams or jellies.

Some popular varieties are:
• ‘Coolidge’ which is self-fertile. Very widely planted
• ‘Nazemetz’ has large, very tasty fruit.
• ‘Trask’ reported to be a good pollinator for Nazemetz
• ‘Edenvale Supreme’ good fruit production and quality

Alice Ford-Sala
Gardening 4 Bees Fieldtrip
By Angela Nowicki and Miles Sarvis-Wilburn

On Thursday, March 14, members of the Gardening for Bees group met at SCBA member Nick Freedman’s Bee’s Rock Ranch in Petaluma. The purpose of the visit was to observe a coordinated habitat installation and creek restoration project involving Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), Students and Teachers Restoring a Watershed (STRAW), and Blue Point Conservation Service.

With a $30,000 grant, NRCS, STRAW, and Blue Point biologists invited elementary school kids to plant soil stabilizing trees, flowering plants, and bee habitat friendly grasses. All the plants involved are forage for native bees, honey bees and other pollinators. The plants will stabilize and rehabilitate a seasonal creek bed from erosion, thereby insuring future habitat and watershed health.

G4B members were inspired watching these kids and nonprofits work together, and learned much in the process. We are still a burgeoning community organization, but it would be wonderful to see SCBA involved in future projects like these.

Jade Plants can be covered in pretty yellow flowers in March and April.
Photos by Ettamarie Peterson
SCBA’s BEE SHARE PROGRAM

What is it?

By Lizanne Pastore

With help from the team: Christine Kurtz, Joy Wesley, & Bruce Harris

The Bee Share Team has compiled our 2019 array of spreadsheets, (thanks to Bruce Harris for his mad computer skills,) and now we are patiently waiting for the bees to swarm and for beekeepers to split those hives that decide to make swarm prep! We imagine that April is going to be a busy month! We have a record number of SCBA members who have requested to be matched with a local hive of bees from wonderful local beekeepers who generously share their splits and swarms.

For those of you who are new to the SCBA, the Bee Share Program developed in a “grassroots” manner because of many association members’ preference to breed our strong survivor stock bees and share our healthy splits with friends and neighboring beekeepers rather than having folks buy packages of unknown genetic traits and questionable adaptability to our own unique microclimates. I received my first colony of bees from a neighbor beekeeper in 2011, and I’ve tried to “pay it forward” ever since!!

Sonoma County is enormous! It encompasses over 1700 square miles and stretches north to coastal Mendocino County and south to warmer Marin County, then east to Napa and Lake counties. On the west we are boarded by ocean. Each region of Sonoma has different climates, so our bees on the coast vs. inland will forage and grow their colonies, and prepare for winter quite differently. This year, it was the East County beekeepers that first saw drones flying. Living in East County myself, I rarely ever harvest spring honey due to the dearth of forage, especially nectar that we see in summer. I make sure that my bees’ hard-earned spring honey sticks around for summer, then, if I’m lucky, I take a little honey in summer or fall. This isn’t often the case with my buddies in Petaluma and more urban Santa Rosa, who have better forage all year round. Our Glen Ellen bees have to be really adept at water retrieval and air conditioning, too, in summer. Bees up in North County and those on the coast have other issues, keeping their hives at proper moisture levels for example.

For this reason, we have created a program that makes it easier to share bees with each other, within each cluster. We have created a structure for fair compensation, handouts for new beekeepers to help guide in post swarm or split check-ins, and because there is always a one-on-one component in receiving a hive, there is a wonderful community aspect to it. Often a member who wants to share a split or retrieve a swarm will have the recipient (and a few others) come to observe and help…a mini “hive dive!” Surveys to assess the needs of the beekeepers go out in late Winter, and the Bee Share team, with a lead from each Cluster, gets to work to try to match those with bees to share to a recipient in their cluster.

It’s not a perfect process, but the Bee Share team now has a living document that describes our mission and goals, and we have placed dozens and dozens of splits and swarms over the past few years with wonderful success. While we want our bees to have the best chance for survival in this rapidly changing climate, we also want our beekeepers to enjoy, learn, and thrive as beekeepers.

Photo is 2018 bee sharing:
Trathen Heckman picking up a swarm caught in a trap shared with him through the bee sharing program.
Membership

Thank you for renewing your 2019 SCBA membership. Your continued support, interest and involvement in our beekeeping community is valued by all and especially by the bees!

FOOD GRADE BUCKETS WITH LIDS – FREE

Hi, I’m Lisa Jack and part of the South Cluster. I have been contacted by the Oliver’s Market’s Corporate Sustainability Coordinator to see if there is any interest among the Sonoma County Beekeepers Association for food grade 4 & 5 gallon buckets with lids. These buckets are useful in so many ways around the house and yard but for beekeepers they can also be retrofitted with honey spigots for honey rendering.

I am happy to be the liaison between SCBA and Oliver’s and pick-up available buckets from Oliver’s for members. The plan would be to have the FREE buckets available at the monthly SCBA meetings for members to take, if there is enough interest. I will be rinsing the buckets after I receive them but members will need to give them a thorough washing after getting their buckets.

To determine the interest level of this new endeavor, please email me (sonomagoat@comcast.net) letting me know that you are interested and the size & number of buckets you would like. The buckets are square 4-gallon or round 5-gallon in size. Again, they are white, food grade containers and come with lids.
**Honey Extractor Rental**

Members have use of the association’s honey extracting equipment, as available. Rental fee is $5 per day. Extractors must be returned clean.

Email or call to reserve:

**South**
Kelli Cox
707 280-4376
[总统@sonomabees.org](mailto:president@sonomabees.org)

**Central**
Brian Gully
svo.must@hotmail.com

**West**
Gina Brown
415-828-8359
[Boragelane@comcast.net](mailto:Boragelane@comcast.net)

**East**
Claudine Latchaw
xxx-xxx-xxxx
[claudinelatchaw@gmail.com](mailto:claudinelatchaw@gmail.com)

The Alternative Hives (formerly Top Bar Hive) group has a fruit press available for use in honeycomb crushing. Contact Jim Spencer at: [alternativehives@sonomabees.org](mailto:alternativehives@sonomabees.org)
SCBA
Monthly Meeting Minutes

Date: March 11, 2019
Location: 4H Building, Rohnert Park
Meeting started: 7:01 PM Approx. attendance: ~ 167

Items covered

General announcements
• Kelli - Thanks to all members for your membership and support
• Save The Bees signs remain available for sale. $20 for large and $10 for small signs.
• Maggie - announcements for education
• SCBA will be in the Butter and Eggs parade this year. Interested members can follow along the float and will be
  taught the waggle dance in preparation for the parade.
• Bee math reviewed by Thea
• Please report swarms you see this year - email swarm@sonomabees.org and notify your cluster leader

Speaker info
• Serge Labesque - "Hive Division"

Respectfully submitted,
Peter Jones
Secretary

Honeysuckle has lots of pollen the bees love!
Photos by Ettamarie Peterson
---LIVE BEE REMOVAL---
We specialize in removing bees alive from walls, barns, sheds, and trees.
“Difficult” extractions are our specialty.
Beekeeping lessons offered at reasonable prices.
Wild bee colonies for sale.
We have been doing wall extractions for 10 years and have done over 450 to date.
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Santa Rosa
Free Bee Colony For Successful Referral.
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

Click Google Map for Driving Directions