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

If you are one of those, please email me at President@sonomabees.org to discuss what you are interested in doing.

Thank you,

Kelli Cox
2019 President

President's Message

Well, spring has sprung and we are quickly moving into summer. Hive dives, Bee Cafes and workshops are in full swing and swarms and splits are being shared. This is the best time of the year! I hope you are all taking advantage of your Cluster events and the perks that go with your involvement. I heard from a few of our Cluster coordinators that last months Bee Cafes on Bee Math was very well received and many of our beekeepers are feeling more confident about managing their hives! Great job to all of you and a huge shout out to our Cluster Coordinators and Christine Kurtz for supporting the Bee-share program! Many folks have bees and the program is going strong!

Thanks to many of you who completed our General Member survey. There were a lot of great suggestions that we'll be discussing and implementing over this next year. It takes a village and based on the survey results we are all pretty much in agreement! Out of 145 members that took the survey, 80% are satisfied with our Association! That is a number I can live with!

You will be getting full results next month but I wanted to share now (so you can calendar) based on your votes:

~ Our summer picnic is going to be an ALL CLUSTER picnic (at Bees N Blooms on July 20th)
~ Our Holiday party will be at the 4H Building, will not be pot luck (SCBA will provide dinner) and is going to have a different format than the last few years. You will hear more at our June meeting! :)

There were a number of responses asking for programs/classes/discussions that we already provide to our members, mostly at our Bee Cafes. It makes me wonder if we need to promote our Clusters in different ways, something the Board and Cluster groups will be discussing. ~How do we get more of you to engage in our programs?

We have an extraordinary group of folks that support the efforts of the SCBA and our mission. Volunteers who educate both internally (our membership) and our public about the importance of honeybees, pollinators and everything that goes with that.

We need more volunteers to step up to support those already helping so they don't burn out.

Based on the comments from our survey it looks to me that there are many of you willing to help in both leadership and support roles move this association forward.

This Month's Calendar

Monthly Meeting: Monday May 13
• 4-H Foundation Bldg. Rohnert Park
• 6 pm – Meet your cluster members; ask questions; bring your own cup and fill it with tea or coffee and have some goodies.
• 7 pm – General meeting starts. Our speakers for the May meeting will be Mike Turner and Dr. Thea Vierling. Mike will be talking about the many questions he has been asked by beekeepers over the last months as well as specific information about queens. Thea will continue the discussion of Temporal Polyethism, all about the Drone and then specifics on the varroa mite life cycle. They will try to tie the content of their talks together so that everything fits in a nice package for all, beginners and experienced.

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**SCBA Float Wins Second**

SCBA Float Wins Second Place Out of 120 Entries in Butter and Eggs Day Parade! Kelli Cox announced that she hoped we would find a volunteer to organize a float in the Butter and Eggs Day Parade. This had never been done in the history of our organization. Well we pulled it off with the creative genius of Dianna Holmes and her organizing many beekeepers from the South Cluster! John McGinnis had his great truck in top shape to pull the float on the trailer Christos Pantazes let us use. The theme was puns and the judges loved our giant “Air Bee-n-Bee” aka a skep made from boat rope. The group made life-like huge flowers and many signs to educate the public about bee facts. If you come to the May meeting you will see a collection of photos taken of this grand production.

Assembling the float.

Showing off signs that were on the float and carried by members.

View of the float from the rear.

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**Cover Crops**

By Thea Vierling

The other day I was driving to Santa Rosa and I hit a backup and had cause to look into the vineyards and open fields in the Valley of the Moon. I was astonished at the forage available for the bees and other pollinators. So exciting. I also was impressed with the amount of wild radish plants that are left in full flower, without those terrible weed-eaters destroying the Honey-bee grocery store!
How are your queens doing?

Spring is in full swing. Most colonies have been divided. While some of the young queens are preparing to perform their mating flights, others are already laying eggs. Quite often, dividing our hives is all we need to do to sustain our apiaries and rejuvenate our hives. But if we want to invigorate them, we need to pay particular attention to the quality of every one of our queens.

On occasion, we find queens that do not perform well, even to the point of endangering their colonies. It may be, for example, that they were inadequately mated. Maybe they are becoming drone layers, or they impart undesirable characteristics to their colonies. Possibly, they are lacking in traits that could keep their hives healthy. Aging queens, too, may be showing signs of impending failure. Ignoring problem queens brings the near certitude of losing their hives next winter, if not sooner. If only for these reasons, it’s good to be prepared to replace unsatisfactory queens during the summer.

Raising queens from the brood of our best performing colonies is a good way to improve the toughness and quality of our hives with known and locally adapted bees, and there is no better time to produce queens than during the spring honey flow. Thanks to the abundance of nectar and pollen and to the large numbers of available nurse bees at this time of year, the nutrition of the developing queen larvae can be excellent. Favorable weather conditions and an ample supply of drones also permit safe and successful mating flights. All these factors are crucially important during queen production.

As a rule of thumb, to maintain a stable number of colonies, I keep one or two additional young queens for every ten hives. Most often, these queens come from spring divides. At times, they are raised specifically from the brood produced by my favorite queens. Kept in nuc-size hives, the new queens will be easy to observe and evaluate during the summer, and they will be available to revitalize colonies that have mediocre queens before the fall. Spare queens can also be overwintered with their smaller colonies. Frequently, they come out of winter beautifully, helping give resilience to the apiaries after that unforgiving season.

Beekeepers do not actually “raise queens”. The bees do. But we may provide the set-up and initiate the process. Knowing how to get bees to raise good queens is a valuable skill that can save colonies. Since most of us only need a few queens during the year, we do not need any of the specialized paraphernalia, the larvae-grafting skills and the strict rigmarole that queen mass-producers employ. Basically, all we need to do to obtain one or a few queens is to give a few cells of very young brood to well-fed nurse bees that have no queen.

However, obtaining new queens is only a new beginning in the hive and queen management cycles. During the summer we will have to find out how these newcomers are performing. We will keep them at the ready to bring new life and vigor to declining colonies.

May in the apiaries

With the help of good weather and generous spring honey flows, the brood nests are reaching their maximum size for the year. Healthy colonies are displaying vigorous activity at all levels, inside and outside the hives, and much is happening in the apiaries. Some events, such as swarming or massive orientation flights can be very spectacular at times, while other activities, comb construction included, are more discretely executed within the confines of the nests. Everything is at its best to facilitate colony multiplication and the production of young queens, as well as to help the foragers fill honeycombs.

Having done much work in anticipation of this spring bustle, the beekeeper can enjoy the show and delight at the sights hive inspections reveal. The combs are turning white, as young bees produce wax in abundance. Pollen pellets in a multitude of colors and shades line the brood nests, while shiny blond nectar fills new combs. Less evident, the eggs produced by young queens, can be the source of much joy, as well. Can beekeeping really get more exhilarating than it is during a good spring?

Still, there is not much time for complacency. We have to make sure that the bees are provided what they need to carry on with their tasks. A simple and easy way to facilitate the work of the foragers is to enlarge the hives entrances. Maybe they need more nectar storage space, a few more frames, or another super. Or, could they use more space to build comb, which will replace old constructions. The few colonies that may still be found preparing to swarm can be divided. Recent splits may have to be examined, and young queens can be produced from our best colonies in anticipation of possible summer and fall needs.

Unfortunately, there are also some colonies that are not well. Spring can bring bouts of chalkbrood or European foulbrood. This cannot be ignored. The contaminated combs have to be removed, safely discarded and the affected hives reduced to allow these bees to bounce back. In the spring, the division of hives offers a good opportunity for the colonies to clean their brood nests and to regain control over the mite populations; just like swarming does. Indeed, the period of broodlessness that occurs during the development of the young queens is probably one of the most effective means the colonies have to stay healthy.

The solar wax melters function well now. They can process the combs we have removed from the hives and some that we possibly have accumulated since the fall.

Harvesting a few frames of honey helps keep the hives from becoming too tall. This fresh early-spring honey is delicious and not to be missed, but only as long as the bees can spare it. It is important to make sure that it is ready to be harvested. Although we can see that the comb
is capped, the only safe way of harvesting honey that is really ripe, that will keep, is to use a refractometer.

This is the most intense part of the season of colony reproduction. Keep an eye on the trees for any swarm that might be on the search for a nest cavity.

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.

About Our May Speakers

Thea Vierling has been a beekeeper for 11 years and started the cluster group program with Christine Kurtz many years ago. She has a Bachelors degree in Biology with an emphasis in Ecology and Plant taxonomy and a doctorate in education and curriculum development. She taught high school Biology for many years and was a docent for the Conservatory of Flowers in San Francisco for 10 years. She works closely with the education group making presentations with the schools and other Community groups throughout the County.

Mike Turner is the owner of Marin Coastal Bee Co., a small-scale family bee company that has provided beekeeping services for customers in Sonoma and Marin Counties since 2011. He has also been keeping bees for honey sales in both counties and providing bee re-location services. Mike has participated in the SCBA education program for local schools and enjoys helping community organizations with presentations about honey bees. Guiding new beekeepers towards improving their beekeeping skills is one his goals and he is a regular participant in the North Cluster (SCBA) meetings and discussions regarding how to solve beekeeping problems.
Bee Plants of the Month
By Alice Ford-Sala

Hedgerow Bee Plant
Huckleberry, California Huckleberry Vaccinium ovatum
Family Ericaceae (Heath)

Let’s continue with some edible plants in the hedgerow. Huckleberry is very closely related to the more widely known blueberry – V. corymbosum. However, V. ovatum is native to California and the Pacific Northwest. It is well adapted to shade or partial sun. You have likely seen it while hiking in cool redwood forests. It sometimes grows from stumps of redwoods or on top of fallen logs.

Blueberries are usually deciduous, but California huckleberries are evergreen. They are attractive year-round with glossy leaves that are coppery red-green in the spring with new growth, turning to bright deep green in the summer, and showing fall colors towards the end of the year.

The flowers are pink hanging bells borne on the tips of the branches, and offer generous nectar to bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. The honey made from huckleberries is said to be quite delicious.

The berries have a deep blue-black color and tasty, tart flavor that is alluring to humans, birds and bears! If you grow them to harvest for yourself, you may want to use some netting to keep the critters out. They are supposed to be very nutritious, high in antioxidants, iron, vitamins B and C and potassium.

Huckleberry can tolerate clay if it is well drained but usually grows in somewhat sandy soil. If the plant is in deep shade, it will be attractive but may not flower. They usually reach 3 to 4 feet high, and can be as wide as 7 to 8 feet. They can grow taller in deeper shade. Moderate water is all that is needed.

Huckleberries are said to be deer-resistant and fire-resistant.

Alice Ford-Sala
SCBA Name Badges
By Angy Nowicki

Those of you that are interested in ordering an SCBA name badge, it is not too late. We have two options to choose from, the SCBA name badge with a pin backing $8.00 or magnetic backing $10.00. You can also personalize the badge by ordering a swinger for just $2.50. Most people would list their Cluster, other list Gardening for Bees, or even your board member position. I still have a few badges that have not yet been picked up.

Please see me, Angy Nowicki, at the next board meeting or email me with what you would like me to do with it fernfeeler397@gmail.com. Shipping is an option, for $4.00.

Check this list to see if your name is here: Carolyn DeTierra, Denise Feldman, Suki Ferrari, Michele Groshong, Patty Hickey, Donna Kempner, Josefa Molina, Patrick Moore, David Ore, Denny Pedersen, Steve An, Carole Shelton, Melissa Weaver.

New Documentary at the Sonoma Film Festival
By Thea Vierling

The Sonoma Film Festival feathered a new documentary about the honeybees called “The Pollinators”. It is basically a cinematic journey around the USA following migratory beekeepers as they pollinate crops we all eat. The film reveals the flaws and challenges the beekeepers and their bees face along the way with an emphasis on our simplified chemically dependent agriculture system and how we might fix it.

Our SCBA member Mato Herceg, hosted the film producers/director and director of photography at his house for the weekend. He also opened his house so many SCBA members could meet the producers/directors over a glass of wine, yes his famous “Brows and Stash”. Also “Blooms N Bees” is one of the featured sites in the film. Susan Kegley, our VP of programs, should be very proud. Her incredibly beautiful gardens with the lavender labyrinth is in the film as it should be! We sure are proud of her and the work she and Geoff have put into the gardens and the bees. Here are a couple of pictures of the wine and cheese celebration with East cluster members and the producers.
GARDEN FOR THE BEES
YOU DON’T HAVE TO HAVE A GREEN THUMB
By Kitty Baker

Two recent Propagation Workshops, March 30 and April 14, focused on dividing and potting bee-friendly plants to produce lots of forage for the season ahead. As these new starter plants develop roots, you’ll find them for sale at the Gardening for Bees table before and after SCBA General Meetings.

Ellen Sherron leads the Plant Materials Group and hosted the workshops at her home. With a shovel in hand, she set to the task, alongside a dozen or so volunteers, who discovered how easy it can be to propagate many types of forage plants.

The SCBA members will be the beneficiaries of inexpensive plants to feed bees and, at the same time, help raise funds for the club. The plant sales ahead will include thyme, mullein, lamb’s ears, germander, coyote mint, aster, Hummingbird Sage, bulbine, oregano, bee balm, salvias, rosemary, perennial sunflowers, hyssop, raspberry, fuchsia, honeysuckle, goldenrod, spurge and more.

In addition to fulfilling SCBA’s volunteer duty, the Gardening for Bees group offers many perks: you’ll likely leave with some great cuttings or starts for your own garden; plus you’ll learn about bloom cycle and care needs of bee forage plants. And best of all, the meetings are a chance to share a snack with some very interesting, generous gardeners and join in on conversations that meander from the garden, to local food, recipes, nutrition and more.

A big thank you to Miles Sarvis-Wilburn who has reported on Gardening for Bees Group over the past two years. I am pleased to be succeeding him, sharing news from the Group.

INTRODUCING G4Bs NEW SUPER SIMPLE STARTER PACKS
Kim Bergstrom, Angie Nowicki and Ellen, along with a few plant donors and volunteers have formed G4Bs’ new Pollinator Team. Their goal is to create Starter Packs for growing a mini forage garden that will bloom across all four seasons. According to Kim, each pack will include 12 – 18 plants, mostly perennials, all sun-loving and requiring minimal watering. The first packs, showcased at SCBA’s April meeting, sold for $25 and included 3 plants from each of 6 varieties, plus a sheet showing the plants when mature, and how to space and organize them in a garden. Starter Packs will be available initially to SCBA members, and eventually to area schools.

The Pollinator Team will continue to grow starter plants from seed or cuttings to offer various season-appropriate packs through the summer and into fall. “Our ultimate goal,” said Kim, “is to provide these packs to Sonoma county schools” to create school gardens, to increase pollinator forage across the county and to help children learn about the importance of bees.

Cont’d on next page
Gardening for Bees, cont’d.

Feature plant of the month:

Stalked Bulbine (photo from Monrovia.com website)— a versatile, dry-climate succulent that adapts well to local microclimates and blooms nearly continuously mid-spring to fall. To propagate, dig and separate each leaf sprig, clip all but the lower 2 inches of the plant’s juicy leaves, trim the root to a similar 2-inch length, plant in a 4-inch pot and water generously and continue watering every few days until roots set (2 to 4 weeks). Transplant to a permanent, sunny home.

Gina Brown from West Cluster has generously gifted a seed propagation stand to the SCBA Gardening group. This equipment holds seed trays as well as simulating daylight and heating the seeds as they grow into plants for bee food! We hope to offer these plants soon at our general meetings. All of the seeds grown are heirloom proven bee plants like bachelor buttons, sunflowers, poppies and cosmos. Many thanks to Gina for this wonderful gift to SCBA and our pollinators.
Late April Bee Share
Program Update

The Bee Share program is in full swing. With our rainy February and March, the swarm season started later this year compared to last year. Last year the first reported swarm was February 9 while this year the first reported swarm was March 1st in Healdsburg. The last reported swarm for 2018 was September 10 in Guerneville.

As of April 24 a total of 122 swarms were reported throughout Sonoma County. That compares to 165 through the same date last year or about 35% more last year. Please refer to the bar chart of 2019/2018 Reported Honey Bee Swarms by Week (below).

In terms of reported swarms by city, Petaluma is currently in the lead with 22, followed by Sebastopol with 20, Santa Rosa with 17, Sonoma 15, Kenwood 14 and Healdsburg at 13.

As of April 24 a total of 15 splits were reported throughout Sonoma County. That compares to 31 through the same date last year.

Please continue to report your swarms and splits to swarm@sonomabees.org and copy your cluster coordinator. Please put SWARM REPORT in the subject line and in the body of the email include the date, the location of the swarm, the size (eg: softball, football, basketball or beach ball!) or split size in frames, and the recipient's location (yourself or someone else). Finally, please let us know if you heard about the swarm from SCBA's public swarm list or through some other means.

Thanks for supporting the Bee Share program by reporting your swarms and splits and through your generous sharing of those extra swarms and splits that you make available!

---

![Image of Brian Martinelli installing his shared swarm in a double deep.](image1)

![Image of Dominique Bayart learning to move bees from a swarm box to her hive.](image2)
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

Education Group Teams Up With Gardening For Bees Group

Hello fellow SCBA beekeepers! Honey bee activities are buzzing along, and not to be outdone are our education efforts within the schools of Sonoma County. We did our first ever joint effort with the Gardening 4 Bees group at Monte Vista School in Rohnert Park. Prior to our classroom presentation Angy Nowicki, G4B’s education liaison/advocate went out with a bunch of bee-friendly plants and replanted the classroom plot with wonderful forage. To be noted, the weather was still VERY RAINY when she did this from-the-heart planting project. That did not stop our Angy! The plot looks beautiful and will provide nectar and pollen all year long for pollinators of all types. Thank you Angy for taking the time, making the effort, and making a difference!

Afterward we did a joint classroom presentation to a very enthusiastic, yet well behaved second grade class. Jackie Mendoza and I covered all the honey bee specific information...hive make-up, bee biology, sting care, and things every student can do to help our pollinators thrive. Then Angy stepped up and covered the concept of pollination and the important part bees play in that process. She talked about how vital bees are in the food chain and our very survival. The kids sat captivated by the details!

What a fun morning! I always walk away from these presentations invigorated and anticipating our next school visit. The students become little stewards of the honey bee, playing a huge part in the grassroots efforts to spread our message.

All of our SCBA members, regardless of experience level, can be part of this most important effort. We do many school and community presentations. Join us and be a part of something so very satisfying! Email us at education@sonomabees.org and become a member of the SCBA education team today!
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
president@sonomabees.org

Central
Brian Gully
707-391-4727
svo.must@hotmail.com

West
Gina Brown
415-828-8359
Boragelane@comcast.net

East
Susan Simmons
925-408-4529
Susansimmons@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

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SCBA
Monthly Meeting Minutes

Date: April 8, 2019
Location: 4H Building, Rohnert Park
Meeting started: 7:00 PM Approx. attendance: ~ 114

Items covered

General announcements - Kelli Cox
- Newbee introductions.
- Prevalent email scams targeting sonomabees.org emails. Official emails will originate from sonomabees.org ad-
dresses.
- Butter & eggs parade - have 14 people signed up thus far. Saturday April 27, 2019.
- Apple Fair volunteer coordinator, Marcus. Thank you!
- Beekind package bee days: April 13 & 14, 20 & 21, each day 10-3 for 2-hour slots.
- Board looking for Secretary and 2nd VP positions

Education - Thea Vierling: 22+ days
- The Worker Bee, all her adult jobs
- Days 1-2 Clean cells, Days 3-5 feed old larva, Days 6-12 feed younger larva (have glands for royal jelly, Days 12-
18 produce wax, ventilation, Days 18-21 stinger develops, guard duty & guard entrance, Days 22nd - on foraging
for food, water, propolis
- Bee vocabulary cheat sheet handed out

Paper survey about future speakers - Susan Kegley
- Survey about interest in speaker topics

Speaker info
- **Doug Vincent, Beekind** - "Colony Propagation"
- Book reference: Honeybee Democracy
- Scout bees prefer cavities between 10- 40 liters of space. 1 Deep hive body is 43 liters of space. In nature, bees
typically swarm 2-3 times per year. Swarms typically survive 30% rate.
- Europe has 5-10 hives per square mile; In Sonoma county 2-3 hives per sq. mile
- Approx. 20% of mother hives become queen less due to virgin queen not mating, or not making it back
- From 1955 study, queens were observed making average of 7 mating flights
- Prevalent beekeeping books talks about spring splits based on European and East Coast weather patterns
- Observation: caught swarms supersede queen with new queen mated in summer
- Queen mated in June-July, good weather, lots of drones result in well mated queens

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Jones,
Secretary
Event at the Charles Schultz Museum for the Girls Scouts

By Thea Vierling

We had a great showing of SCBA volunteers on April 7th at the Charles Schultz. Members Stevie Lazo, Lorrinda Olson-Madsen, Peg Fitzgerald, Linda Hagel, Heather Hagel, and Thea Vierling all gave their best while 250 girl scouts tried to earn their bug patches. Several of the SCBA volunteers were girl scouts or brownies at one time so it felt like “give back time”. The girls already knew quite a bit from their Girl Scout projects. The leaders have done a great job!

One really fun activity was singing songs which girl scouts have done for some 100 plus years and which we do so well. Of course, we sang the bee anatomy song (thanks to Jen Espinoza for creating that song). But we also sang the special Girl Scout song, which has been around for ages: “Make New Friends and Keep the Old, One is Silver and the Other is Gold!”. There were about 75 folks in the audience so we tried to sing it in rounds. That was a bit more difficult but still such an amazing feeling of memories flooding in for some of us!

We had invited the queen bee to the event and she arrived in the middle of each of the large presentations. That was really special treat. Stevie wore the costume and did an extraordinary job! I actually think she makes pretty good competition for Chris Cox! (Chris, did you read that?)

Here are some pictures of the group.

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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