President’s Message

Dear fellow SCBA members,

Happy February,

The bees are a buzzing, and the thrill of watching them as the sun peeks through the clouds and warms the day can be mesmerizing.

Springtime is quickly approaching. Are you ready?

To those of you who have lost all or some of your hives don’t despair. Prepare your apiary and get involved with your cluster group. They are there to help and support you as you rebuild your apiary.

While watching the bee activity increase and the start of incoming pollen, it’s a reminder to start cleaning, building or buying your equipment and assessing hive space. Swarm season will be upon us before we know it! Be ready!

A special thanks to our presenters Jim Spencer (Warre hives), Susan Kegley (Top Bar hives), John McGinnis (Double deep hives), and Mickel Thiele (Vertical Log hives) at last month’s general meeting. They gave a terrific presentation on alternative hives. As always, so many interesting bee things to learn!

Be sure not to miss February’s General meeting presenter, Christine Casey, PhD from UC Davis. She will be speaking to us about the truly special Haagen-Daz Honey Bee Haven garden. See more about this in the membership section.

Did you know that Beekind was just featured (last Sunday) in the Press Democrat? Congratulations to Doug and Katia Vincent! I hope you have the opportunity to read the wonderful article about them.

Our association is also a buzz with activity. The following Membership, Community Education and Gardening pages have important information about what’s up with the bees, gardening, kids’ education and upcoming meetings and events.

Also watch for important email notices from your cluster groups and the association. Don’t miss out!

May your flowers and bees be well,

Ann Jereb
2020 SCBA President

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This Month’s Calendar

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Membership Program

General Membership Meeting

Monthly Meeting:
Monday, February 10, 2020

6:00 p.m. - Come in, check out the library; browse & buy at the plant table; talk about bees with experts and your cluster leaders and have refreshments (bring your own cup please).

7:00 p.m. Häagen-Dazs Honey Bee Haven - Talk by Christine Casey, Ph.D., Academic Program Management Officer Häagen-Dazs Honey Bee Haven Department of Entomology and Nematology, University of California

Location - 4H Center, 6445 Commerce Blvd, Rohnert Park, CA, 94928

Special Presentation:
Sunday, February 16, 2020

1:00-3:00 p.m. - “Coming Out of Winter” presented by Serge Labesque

Location - 4H Center, 6445 Commerce Blvd, Rohnert Park, CA, 94928

All SCBA members are invited to attend a special presentation by Serge Labesque. He will be discussing how we can help our bees as the hive population begins to grow.

The bees prepare for Spring before Spring. This educational presentation will give you an understanding of what happens in the hive during Winter and how you can begin to configure your hive for Spring. The colony will need space to increase the brood nest as well as for pollen and nectar storage.

SCBA General Monthly Meeting Minutes, January 13, 2020

Location: 4H Building, Rohnert Park
Meeting started: 7:02 p.m.
Approximate attendance: 97

Items covered:
- Central Cluster Coordinator needed. Send email to centralcluster@sonomabees.org
- New members introduced

- Miles talked about membership renewal. Needs to happen by Jan 31 if you want to get emails about swarm.
- Kelli talked about volunteering for events. A volunteer handbook is being put together and Kelli is having people sign up as interested in general, with specific assignments to happen in the future.
  - Scion Exchange
  - Earth Day at Quarry Hill
  - Gravenstein Apple Fair
- Thea Vierling gave a presentation on the intertwining of the honey bee and the Varroa mite.
- Program was a panel discussion on Alternative Hives, from SCBA members
  - Jim Spencer, Warré hives
  - Susan Kegley, Top-Bar hives
  - John McGinnis, Double-Deep hives
  - Michael Thiele, tree hives
- Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Regional Cluster Coordinator

News

Cluster Activities 2020

February cluster activities are approaching! Watch your e-mail for your cluster-specific Café or workshop. You MUST be an active SCBA member to attend cluster-specific events. Don’t miss out on your awesome Cluster activities. Get your equipment cleaned and ready for Spring! We are seeing some warmer dry days ahead in between the wet ones. Our hives are on the GROW!

Urgent need request remains in place for the Central Cluster. We are still in need of 2 coordinators to join this fun team. Central Cluster Café and workshop events will not be scheduled without volunteers to make them happen. Bee Share/Swarm coordination can’t happen without volunteers.

If you are interested in helping Central Cluster with 2020 coordination of business please reach out to centralcluster@sonomabees.org.

Rorie Sweeney
Regional Cluster Coordinator
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: Diane Solari, (707) 322-0862  
southcluster@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  
Susanjsimmons@gmail.com

North:

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

My February Beekeeping To-Do List

by Serge Labesque ©2020

February in the apiaries – Colony build-up

Bees toil all year long to keep their colonies thriving. But mid- to late-winter brings them particularly intense workloads and taxing weather conditions. This statement holds true even without considering the dreadful conditions imposed upon the millions of colonies that are trucked from all over the country to the California almond groves. And yet, most colonies perform the remarkable feat of enlarging considerably during these testing winter weeks.

At this time of year, the queens are producing increasing quantities of eggs. Consequently, the brood nests become larger every day. The brood they hold has to be fed and kept warm. To achieve these tasks, the nurse bees consume more of the stores. In turn, this consumption of honey and bee bread frees cells that the queens use to lay even more eggs. The result is a combined escalation in brood production and stores depletion. Exacerbating the challenges presented to the colonies is that this happens when the adult bee populations of the hives have dropped to their minimum for the year and at a time when the weather can be quite unstable and harsh, sometimes precluding foraging for several days at a time.

When the needs of the developing brood for food and warmth are not satisfied, the future of the colony as a whole is threatened. During cold periods, when the cluster contracts, enough resources need to be available to the bees in the combs that are near the brood nest. Otherwise, the bees may become separated from the stores and perish from starvation. Indeed, it’s a lot of hard work for the aging winter bees as they dedicate the rest of their lives to nurturing the future generation. Fortunately, new bees that are beginning to emerge from the brood nests in large numbers join their older sisters in their effort to help the colonies build up in preparation for spring.

All this winter activity is to be expected for the hives in this area. Since it takes six weeks for an egg to become a forager, the bees that will supply the colonies with nectar and pollen during an April bloom must be nurtured in late February. The appropriate timing and rapidity of the brood nest development in mid-winter is
without any doubt one of the most important traits that denote the level of adaptation of the colonies to their local conditions.

All the beekeeper has to do is to ensure the equipment in use does not limit the development of the colonies. However, once the mid-winter hive volume increase that was discussed last month has been provided, there is usually no need to open the hives until spring arrives. The brood nests are not inspected at this time of year, as the colonies are still fragile. The risks of chilling the brood or queens would be too high. However, telltale clues of the in-hive activity may be observed at the hive entrances and in the debris that accumulates on the monitoring trays. The intense bee metabolic activity also produces water vapor that condenses on the cold surfaces of the hive. These mist-like deposits, which may also become visible on the trays, are a gauge of the vigor of the colonies.

When the weather allows the bees to fly we can take great pleasure in observing some of the foragers returning with brightly colored pollen pellets on their hind legs. Others are coming back to the hives with visibly heavy loads, too, their abdomen low and somewhat translucent as their honey crops are distended by nectar or water. “Water collection in winter?” you may ask. Certainly, yes, but at this time of year it is not to cool the nests. It’s to dilute honey for the larvae and to maintain adequate levels of relative humidity in the brood nest areas. These fresh supplies further stimulate brood rearing.

If there are still some pieces of equipment to purchase, fabricate, clean or repair, there is no time to waste, as spring may be only a few weeks away. It’s time to start moving equipment to the yards, too. I stack mine in look-alike hives in order to have it at the ready for hive expansion and divisions. On occasion, swarms have moved into these inviting nesting cavities. They were welcome distractions from the planned routine apiary work. I also set up a few swarm traps as additional open invitations to bees in search of a new home. These are assembled from unused and older pieces of equipment, and they are placed further away from the apiaries.

This year, I continued monitoring my colonies for mites through the fall and winter on a monthly basis. As with anything we do to track the lives of our bees, these tests contributed additional information about the colonies and helped in my selection of which ones will be used preferentially for multiple splits or to produce additional queens during the spring.

By the end of the month, the colonies will be ready for spring, which for the beekeeper is arguably the most interesting and busiest time of the year in the apiaries. That will be the season of colony multiplication, queen production, and hopefully, a good and nutritious first honey flow. Winter, this far, has been mild and moist enough to possibly lead to a very exciting spring in the apiaries. Rain or shine, the bees will be ready!

In summary, this month:

- I highly encourage all beekeepers NOT to order, buy or bring in package bees, nucs and queens from outside their immediate area! Instead, arrange to obtain local bees from neighbor beekeepers. Your local beekeepers’ association will be happy to put you in touch with a beekeeper in your immediate area.
- Inspect the exterior of the hives:
  - Verify that hive tops are still properly set and secured and that the hive entrances remain unobstructed.
  - Observe the landing boards and the ground in front of the hives.
  - On nice days, observe the flight paths and the bee activity. Adjust the entrance reducers, if necessary, to facilitate the forager traffic.
  - Make sure the upper ventilation slots are open to prevent the accumulation of metabolic moisture inside the hives.
- Examine the debris on the monitoring trays.
- Early in the month, on a sunny, windless day, perform cursory inspections of only the upper part of the hives.
- Provide additional hive volume: Place supers with a few frames of empty drawn comb and follower boards. Add frames alongside the clusters.
- Take care of or dispose appropriately of any equipment that held colonies that failed, as warranted.
- Build and repair beekeeping equipment.
- Plan for spring.
- Set up swarm traps.
Colony Build-up

The volume of the hive has been increased early in the month by the addition of empty frames alongside the brood nest and by the placement of a super with a few frames held between two follower boards. The colony can grow and build up for spring without restrictions that might otherwise have been imposed by lack of space. Congestion in the core of the hive is therefore avoided, and the bees can be left undisturbed for several weeks. Yet, the stores are kept in close proximity to the brood nest.

During this expansion of the hive the empty frames are inserted right next to follower boards and frames that hold capped honey along their top bars. This ensures that the new combs will be built straight and within the new frames. I prefer not adding DD frames at this point in time, because the standard frames will be convenient to have during the spring for hive divisions and to form nucs or queen-rearing units.

Note that the amount of stores and new comb construction represented in these drawings may vary greatly from year to year and between hives, mainly because of the vagaries of the weather. On the contrary, the growth of the brood nests and populations during the same period of time are rather consistent among locally-adapted colonies.

The lower combs remain empty or nearly so. The bees will not move into this part of the hive until springtime.

Early February                 Late February

Serge Labesque
©2020
Community Education Program

News from Your Education Coordinator

Hello Fellow SCBA Member Beekeepers

Do you feel it too? The slightly longer days, warmer mornings, and the beginnings of new spring life seem to be all around us!

Well, the process has begun once more and, with it, new requests from schools, clubs and associations to talk about honey bees. As the schools ready themselves for insect units and new planting in their school gardens, we begin to see requests to come talk to students about honey bees. Within the Education Program at the SCBA we have everything you need to have an interactive, fun talk with students preschool age to high school. We have lesson plans, materials, and activities already done so all you have to do is grab a materials bin and off you go by yourself or, better yet, in a team of two! Those of us who have been doing this for awhile are always happy to go along to make it less scary. If you would like to give it a try, just email us at education@sonomabees.org or come talk to us at the education table prior to every general meeting.

New this year is a request from the Libraries of Sonoma County to be part of their community education series. We will be doing an hour talk using a slide show about honey bees and what the public can do to help in their survival. Ideally, we would like a team of two for each date. The material is available ahead of time so you Cloverdale. If schools aren’t your thing, maybe this will be right up your alley!

If you are a “newbee” and want to get involved, you are most welcome to come and watch. It is a great way to learn about bees as you get a better understanding of ways you can volunteer with the Association. Getting involved and finding where you can be a part of the “greater good” is both satisfying and great fun! Hope to see you at our table at the next meeting or hear from you via email.

Maggie Weaver

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Gardening Program

By Kitty Baker

Gardening for Bees Celebrates a Landmark Opportunity

Gardening for Bees (G4B) Group celebrated access to an amazing greenhouse that will increase capacity for growing bee forage plants. On January 15, the G4B group gathered for a ribbon cutting celebration at a lovely greenhouse on the southwest edge of Petaluma. The group raised a toast to all those who’ve made possible access to a resource that will expand the number and types of plants G4B volunteers can grow. This will make it easy and inexpensive for SCBA members to put more forage in the ground. Also, for the G4B Group to supply Starter Packs to schools participating in the Pollinator Garden Project.

Access to the greenhouse was a happy coincidence of good connections. Christine Kurtz noticed a greenhouse near the premises of one of her clients, Diana Holmes. The owner of the greenhouse generously offered the G4B group access. Sibyl Bugarin and Laura Baker of G4B Nurseries Committee promptly organized a team of volunteers – themselves plus Ross Randrup, Diana Holmes and Sybil Bugarin cuts the ribbon, initiating the greenhouse, while Christine Kurtz, Laura Baker, Maryle Brauer, modest greenhouse owner Marrilee Q and Diana Holmes share the moment.

Maggie Weaver
Maryle Brauer – who cleaned, set up irrigation and added thermal mass buffers to the greenhouse. Solar fans will also be added, as needed, as the season heats up. A team of nurseries volunteers will monitor plants in the greenhouse several days a week. Big thank-you’s to those who helped match unused greenhouse space with the G4B goals and to all who have made this growing resource operational.

Volunteers dug, divided and potted dozens of flats of starts. Plants chosen are proven bee favorites, prime for dividing at this time.

Call for All SCBA Members with Interest in Gardening

SCBA members can join the efforts of the G4B Group and receive G4B email updates, invites to workshops and fieldtrips, etc. Volunteer tasks include plant growing, plant exchange and community outreach:

1. Just go to the SCBA website, sonomabees.org
2. Access your profile using the password provided by the site host (Wild Apricot)
3. Scroll down to the area on interest/expertise and check Gardening.

G4B is looking for 2-3 new core committee leaders or co-leaders to take on specific tasks:

- Lead educational workshops: how to make soil-enriching compost; worm farming to make fertilizer teas; new propagation techniques; etc.
- Lead special projects – making wreaths for the holidays, repurpose hive bodies as planters, and other craft projects.

To volunteer for a core post, please contact G4B Coordinator Maryle Brauer at gardening@sonomabees.org.

Please also note that the SCBA website now includes an events calendar that can help make it easy for clusters,
groups and committees to plan events without worry of scheduling conflicts.

A Shout Out to SCBA Fruit-growing Gardeners and Volunteers

Community out-reach volunteers represented SCBA sharing a table with BeeKind store. Doug Vincent’s observation hive was a big help attracting people to our information outpost at the annual scion exchange hosted by the Redwood Empire Chapter of the California Rare Fruit Growers (CRFG) January 25 in Santa Rosa. Just as the G4B Group generates bee-friendly perennials, CRFG works hard to propagate, educate and share fruit-producing pollinator forage – canes, vines, shrubs and trees. The G4B Group donated a well-labeled flat of bee friendly plants to the raffle. The SCBA added a Save the Bees to the donated plants. Lots of brochures were handed out by volunteers.

Native Bee Bulb Harvest Brodiaea Brodiaea elegans, Family: Brodiaea, Thermidaceae

The violet blue flowers of this native bulb are held in a loose umbel (I always think of an umbrella when I hear that a plant blooms in this form) of numerous nectar-rich blossoms. Honey bees as well as native bees visit frequently. The stalks can be from 6 to 18 inches tall, with the flowers continuing to open over several days.

Bloom time is late spring to early summer. Brodiaea is easy to grow, tolerant of heavy soils, partial to full sun and needing no summer water.

Queen Fabiola Ithuriel’s Spear Brodiaea Laxa (aka Triteleia laxa)

How can you resist a beautiful flower with such an unusual name? Queen Fabiola was a Spanish-born woman who married a Belgian king. Ithuriel’s Spear is a reference to an angel in “Paradise Lost”. No matter the name, you can enjoy this beauty for years with her blue and or pink flowers appearing reliable every spring. About 12 inches tall, she also tolerates heavy soil, needs little to no summer irrigation.

Other native brodiaeas are: Dwarf brodiaea, or B. terrestris, which only grows 3 inches tall, a great front of garden or rock garden plant. Then there’s California brodiaea, B. californica, which can grow up to 30 inches tall. It would do well in the back of a wildflower garden, or mixed with native perennials such as sticky monkey flower, sages, yarrows, hucheras, etc.

All brodiaeas are deer resistant and have few pests. They all put up grassy leaves that die back before the later bloom. Once you plant them you don’t have to worry about them, and they will spread across your garden, though they are not invasive. They will make a nice patch of late-spring flowers for pollinators and those who love them to enjoy.

Bee Plants for February

By Alice Ford-Sala

Let’s continue our look into bee-friendly bulbs. Tulips and daffodils are fine, but they are not bee bulbs. How about some spectacularly beautiful and easy to grow bulbs? They are both natives this month. They are technically corms, and were an important food source for Native California people and bears.
What’s the Buzz outside the Hive

Beekeeping Class Schedule

Class: Intermediate Beekeeping for Spring & Summer

This class will expand on the beehive management techniques that were explored during the Introduction to Beekeeping course. The focus of the class will be spring & summer management of beehives in Sonoma County. Detailed explanations of techniques that are used for fall, queen management, and hive management for winter will be given.

- **Class Dates:** 3/03/2020 to 3/10/2020
- **Weekly - Tuesdays 6:30 PM - 9:00 PM**
- **2 sessions**
- **Lark Hall, Room 2009**

- **Max Class Size:** 90
- **Class Fee:** $60.00
- **Materials Fee:** $8.00
- **Registration Fee:** $2.00

Contact Information

Regular monthly meetings of the Sonoma County Beekeepers’ Association are held on the 2nd Monday of each month, at 7:00 p.m. 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.

**Meeting Location:**
4-H Building
6445 Commerce Blvd.
Rohnert Park, CA 94928

[Google Directions](#)

Dues can be paid online at our website, at our monthly meetings, or by mail. Please see our website for the application and various kinds of memberships available:

**Website:** [https://sonomabees.org](https://sonomabees.org)

**Mailing address:**
Sonoma County Beekeepers’ Assoc.
P.O. Box 98
Santa Rosa, CA 95402-0098
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