President’s Message

Dear Fellow SCBA Beekeepers,

I hope this letter finds you well.

While we find ourselves in a time of uncertainty with the need to self-isolate, our need for community staying connected remains strong. We need one another. In a recent phone call from a friend, she quickly asked if we could do face time. After seeing her face during our call, I realized just how important staying personally connected is especially during these times when we can’t be together.

Please know that our board is aware of this need and is considering options and ways for us to connect with one another for a meeting or cluster café via online. This is new for most of us and may take a little time to create.

The Extractor will continue, as well as face book for clusters/groups. Remaining in touch with one another via phone and sharing about ourselves, our gardens and bees will help us stay strong as a community. While our meetings, cafés, gardening and education events have been cancelled with the shelter in place order, our bees on the other hand are busy building up in size and ready to swarm. Swarms are already happening in some areas!

Did you notice that John McGinnis was just featured in the March Sonoma Magazine? Congratulations John! I hope you have the opportunity to read this wonderful article about him.

May we take this time to observe, work with and enjoy this most exciting period in the life cycle of our bees.

I’m finding spending time in my spring garden and...
General Membership Meeting News

1. PLEASE REPORT YOUR SWARMS! By John McGinnis
   Go to the SCBA website, look for SCBA Members Only, (you may have to log in with your email address and the password you used when you signed up)
2. Click on the Members Only Info and a dropdown menu will appear.
3. Click on Members Swarm Report. An easy use form will appear. Fill out the information to the best of your ability and hit submit.
   If you are unable to report your swarm in this manner, please email your swarm information to swarm@sonomabees.org or call John McGinnis at (707) 478-9787 for help.

It is very important that we collect this information to be able to track swarm activity in Sonoma County.

Funny Swarm Stories
by Ettamarie Peterson

Do you have a funny swarm story to tell? Maybe it was a swarm in a bizarre place or the swarm drove you crazy trying to capture it or you got funny remarks from the folks watching you. I remember one beekeeper friend telling me how a bystander went in his house to get a big pan because he was sure the bees would drip honey into it! One of my favorite stories was about a little old lady that had a lovely classic swarm hanging from a branch in her backyard. When I saw it, I said, “How beautiful!” She replied, “Beautiful? It’s going to kill me!”

The funniest remark I heard a person say was when a lady noticed I was getting a swarm off her car (you saw that photo probably). She was walking past, glanced over at me and said to her friend, “I guess we will take your car.” She did not holler a thanks or anything either!

One of the craziest places I have taken bees from is a large shop vac. It had been full of bees for over a year. There was a lot of honey in it too that made it one of the messiest jobs ever!

Regional Cluster Coordinator News

Life is currently different for us in so many ways, however the bees keep on beeing! That’s GREAT news. A number of swarms have been captured and carefully shared using the “safe distance” guidelines. This, as well, is fantastic news!!

A couple of the clusters have explored having on-line meetings together using Zoom Video Call. Reminder to all SCBA members…. If you are in need of bees, please let your Cluster Leaders/Bee Share Coordinators be aware. Swarm Season is under way and you don’t want to miss out!

Rorie Sweeney
Regional Cluster Coordinator

Central Cluster Activities

Central Cluster held a very productive brainstorming session on Sat 3/3/20. We had a great turn-out and many ideas were shared. We are very grateful that 4 individuals have come forward to help coordinate the goings-on of Central Cluster. Steve Heglin, Kristen Sansing, David Chipkin & Stella Keller have volunteered to help. Unfortunately, our first planning meeting was scheduled after the “social distancing” directives were rolled out. We look forward to getting together and melding our Central Cluster Coordinator Team going forward. Thank you for your patience. In the meantime, please send e-mails to centralcluster@sonomabees.org for any questions/inquiries. We are here!
Monthly Meeting Minutes  
Sept 9, 2019

Attending: 109 people  
Ann Jereb called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.  
New members introduced

Carol Ellis, 2nd VP: Thanks for volunteering for cleanup and bringing fruits and snacks.  
Rorie Sweeney: New leadership at Central Cluster is getting organized. Equipment workshop in April—Roger Simpson hosting.  
John McGinnis: Reporting swarms. Reviewed data from last year. This year’s peak is likely to be in March, not April. Report all swarms at the sonomabees.org website, within the Members Only section of the website. Report name, date, location of swarm, street address, swarm source if known, how big was the swarm, where did swarm end up, how did you find out about the swarm, who caught it, and follow-up notes.  
Maryle Brauer for Gardening group- Thanks to Doug Vincent for donating 55-gallon drums for the greenhouse. Gardening group has signs that say Help the Bees, No Pesticides Please! Propagation workshop coming up. A Field trip is also coming up.  
Maggie Weaver, for Education group- They created a brochure, to help with publicity and have had lots of new requests for classroom presentations. New signs for gardens have been created for bees. Volunteers are needed for classroom presentations.  
Thea Vierling, with a mini-lesson.  
Thea is doing a presentation to Santa Rosa Central library on Friday, March 13 at 11 a.m.  
Quiz: How many days does it take for a queen to mature from an egg to an adult? 16  
How many days for a worker bee from an egg to an adult? 21  
Drone? 24  
How many days can you use a larva for making a queen? 3  
When is the worker bee cell sealed? 9  
Drone? 10  
How many days does the egg stay an egg? 3  
What is the primary goal of the SCBA Clusters? To teach beginners to learn how to keep bees and to find a bee buddy.  

Speaker was Kate Frey, Pollinator-friendly Gardens.  
Kate Frey, our March speaker, strives to create gardens that are adapted to, express, and are appropriate for the locality, the spirit, as well as climate, soils and biodiversity that lives in each area. She believes that each garden should have a goal of giving to the environment through compositions of flower filled spaces, shrubs, trees for shade and development of healthy soils - that together provide habitat for insects and birds and are vital, vibrant spaces that express joy to the viewer.  

Kate currently works as a consultant, designer, educator, and writer. She writes two columns for The Press Democrat newspaper and is the author of The Bee-friendly Garden, co-written with professor Gretchen LeBuhn. Their book, published February 2016 won The American Horticultural Society’s Best Gardening Book of 2017. How to Design Bee-Friendly Flower Gardens is the title. Flower-filled gardens make us happy, support many species of bees and much other biodiversity beneficial to our gardens and our lives. We all desire our gardens to be full of color and interest for many months of the year, yet what flowers appeal to bees and why? How can we put them together in compositions that work well with the parameters of our site, in combinations that suit us, and cater to bee's needs? This talk will show you how to look at your garden with new eyes, and how to create beautiful and inspirational landscapes that will forever transform your relationship with your yard.  

Meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.  

Submitted,  
Susan Kegley,  
2nd Vice President
East Cluster Goes High Tech
by Lauri Dorman

As we all shelter in place, we are still beekeepers who need social interaction, just like the bees who certainly haven't gotten the shelter in place message. Our in-house “techie” who is a curious researcher, Thea Vierling, organized a Zoom call with some of the East Cluster. Our first call went well and they will improve as we become more accustomed to communicating through Zoom. We plan to have regularly scheduled calls with East Cluster and perhaps having a different “expert” facilitate the call. We will encourage participants to come with questions related to what is happening in their hives. During yesterday’s call we reviewed splits and swarms. It was wonderful to see and visit with friends. Here is some of what we learned about Zoom calls.

1. Meeting organizer should add 15 minutes on the front end to allow everyone to “arrive” at the meeting. This is particularly important in the beginning as we all learn about Zoom. There are a few technical pieces around the video and the audio to figure out.
2. There should be an agenda and a meeting start and end time.
3. Everyone should “mute” themselves. There is always a little background noise that comes through. Click the unmute button to come back in to the meeting.
4. Click on Gallery in the upper right-hand corner to see all of the attendees live.
5. East Cluster is still figuring out what the optimum number of attendees is. We had 10 yesterday. Not sure where the tipping point is between a productive conversation and chaos! We are working on having a couple of Zoom calls at different times and limiting the number of attendees.

Bee Well and Stay Healthy
East Cluster Coordinators Susan, Kristina and Lauri

Let’s Zoom Together!
By Thea Vierling

Good Morning, This is a short article about a zoom meeting we just had with Lauri Dorman from East Cluster, Connie Neuhouser, Thea Vierling and our president, Ann Jereb. We were brainstorming how this could be used with our clusters to keep in touch with each other. It could be a tool for keeping in touch during this time of social distancing or should we call it “hive placement”. It is interesting that Tom Seeley recommends that hives not be placed too close together. Is this “social distancing for the various diseases around! OK let me stick to the topic…. I wonder what Tom Seeley would say about beekeepers during this crisis of social distancing.

All of this makes us think about how we could use zoom during this time: hive dives, Bee Cafes, and just in small neighborhood groups. How can we share bee stories? Our East cluster group was just a group of Kenwood and Glen Ellen folks who are “bee buddies” during the year. It was less than 10 which is kind of ideal for stories about a split (top bar with Jim Spencer) and a question about how to tell if a hive swarmed with answers by Mato and Lizanne.

Back to the zoom conversation. This was Ann’s first try with zoom and she loved it! Check out that smile on her face! She said, “It was not that difficult and it was a lot of fun!”. Plus she said adding a face to the conversation was a great way to connect. Ann and Thea used Facetime on Monday (Yes we both combed our hair first!) but this way there can be a lot of others in on the discussion (please comb your hair first!). So your clusters are discussing zoom as a possible way to let you know what is happening in your clusters. If you have not tried it yet, download the app and then try to invite someone who already has zoom. You can do everything with the email address….. Maybe a grandchild…. They are zooming all over the place (don’t you hate getting old and not knowing how to do things that they are experts at!!! grrrrr)

We all had a great time zooming together. I understand from Lauri and Lizanne that Zooming is old hat! So get with the program and down load it. It was a lot of fun which is quite evident by the wonderful smiles on all of our faces. You can also watch how to videos for Zoom on YouTube.
April in the apiaries – Colony multiplication

Normally, this time of year is nearly optimal for colony multiplication in this area. By now, the colonies have gained much strength since their winter low. The weather usually becomes warmer and the spring honey flow is in full swing. This is when most colonies liberally produce offspring: They raise drones and young queens, and they swarm.

The beekeepers who multiply their colonies when so many favorable conditions come together can obtain very good results. But the calendar alone is not a good reason to divide colonies willy-nilly. Instead, it’s advisable to first inspect the hives and watch what the bees are doing to figure out when they are ready for propagation. Clear signs are found inside the brood nests: A strong warning is the sudden reduction in the production of young brood along with an abundance of sealed brood. When this is noticed there are still a few days before the colony issues a swarm and we have time to prepare for the division of the colony. Finding swarm cells, however, is a reason to act immediately.

Although the bees make the best they can out of any situation they are placed in, dividing colonies that are not preparing to propagate usually stretches their capabilities and leads to mediocre outcomes, if not to failures. There are in fact circumstances when the division of colonies should not be considered, such as when the colonies are diseased or weak, when they are in a state of poor nutrition, or during queen supercedure, for example.

Between weekly spring hive inspections, the colonies grow amazingly fast. As we monitor our colonies, we may also marvel at the whitening of the combs and at the nectar that dribbles out of the cells. These signs of a generous spring honey flow lead us to supplement the inspections of the brood nests with a rapid examination of the contents of the honey supers. We may find that it is necessary to add empty frames or supers. Harvesting some surplus honey may also be possible and actually advantageous, as this can help keep the hives within easily manageable dimensions. The addition of supers is quite effective, particularly when bottom supering is practiced. This consists of placing new supers directly above the brood chambers and under any supers that were installed previously. Baiting the bees with frames of honey removed from the previous supers is quite helpful in inviting the bees to move into the new space and in maintaining crowns of honey above the brood nests.

If the spring bloom can provide good nutrition for the colonies and possibly some surplus honey, these are not the only benefits that may be realized during this honey flow. In such conditions young bees produce much wax and they can build nice new combs. This is an opportunity not to be missed, as it allows us to replace the old and misshapen combs that have been taken out of service. Fully and nicely built combs facilitate the manipulation of the hives. Their production helps to delay or control swarming and to ensure better colony health by replacing with fresh beeswax the old wax that may carry pathogens and toxic compounds.

On occasion, swarms that are captured or that settled into our equipment may have to be relocated and given permanent homes. They will begin to show their true colors in two or three months, possibly after superseding their original queens.

Thanks to good spring nutrition, most colonies are vigorous and healthy at this time of year. Unfortunately, there are some that may be lagging or diseased. Chalkbrood and European foulbrood seem to be the causes of the most frequent incidences of health problems during the spring. Weak and diseased colonies benefit from the drastic reduction of the volume of their hives and from the removal of all contaminated combs. Queen-related issues are easily corrected in a variety of ways, which include using young brood from a healthy colony to allow queenless hives to raise new queens, transferring queen cells, hive combination, or introducing young queens that were raised separately.

A few minutes are to be spent cutting or pulling the grass that grows in front of the hives, as it may hinder the work of the foragers.

That’s the plan for my normal April beekeeping routine. What will be left of it after this challenging March weather and the constraints we are subjected to because of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions remains to be seen. Even though we may have to curtail our efforts to keep up with the bees during this critical time of year, we should not worry too much about the colonies. Trust the bees. They’ll be alright.

Division of a double-deep hive

In this division, the contents of the hive produce three splits of approximately equal size. Unless the queen is found during the execution of the procedure, the contents of the brood chamber are distributed among the splits in such a way that the queenless divides can raise their own queen and later develop into strong units. In order to achieve this, they must be given a little young brood, sealed brood, bee bread and honey. The divide that is kept at the original location will preferably not hold the original
queen. It may be given the smaller fraction of the original brood chamber contents and the balance of the honey super, as it will retain the foragers. When the other splits are kept in the same vicinity as the original hive, they need to be packed generously with young bees that are removed from the brood chamber and their entrances are reduced substantially.

Between four and seven days after performing the division, the divides are inspected to find out which split is queen-right. If the queen is found in the split that was left at the original hive location, this split may be exchanged with one of the queenless splits. Additional space is provided as necessary to both these divides.

This method is an effective way of controlling swarming, of generating good queens and new colonies.

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.
- Inspect the hives regularly. Focus your attention on the open brood (eggs and young larvae) for signs of colony preparation for swarming and of possible health issues.
- 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, making sure to leave enough honey in the hives for the bees (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.
“Retired Truck Driver in Petaluma Finds Second Career Building Beehives”

Suffice to say the fit 70-year-old grandfather of three isn’t really retired. From a 60-acre ranch on the western slopes of Sonoma Mountain outside Petaluma, he now builds and sells high-quality beehive components, captures and relocates wild swarms (45 swarms last year alone), and raises bees of his own: a dozen healthy hives at present. And from the insects’ bounty, he and his wife, Darlene, produce and sell honey, candles, soaps, and lip balm. “It’s an interesting hobby. I always tell everybody, ‘It’ll change your life,’” McGinnis says. “It definitely changed my life. It’s an amazing thing.”

To read to complete article: https://www.sonomamag.com/retired-truck-driver-in-petaluma-finds-second-career-as-beehive-builder/

Sonoma Magazine
By Nate Seltenrich
March 2020

John McGinnis     Goah Way Ranch     (photo by Erik Castro)
Dichelostemma Wild Hyacinth
Family: Asparagaceae

Dichelostemma is also known as a subfamily of Brodiaea. You may have seen these beautiful wildflowers when out hiking in the hills. They are corms, not true bulbs, but you plant them the same way, in the fall before the rains.

They are very attractive to native bees, honeybees and hummingbirds. Plant them in masses for maximum beauty and concentration of nectar.

Dichelostemma capitatum Blue dicks The name is probably a shortening of the botanical name (Dich). Anyway, in my youth I named them “leap for joy” because they are such a delight when hiking in the green hills of California. Early blooming, they have umbels of tiny blue bells held in a round ball, rising 8 to 10 inches above the ground on leafless stems.

D. congestum Ookow This corm was a very important food source for Native Americans and grizzly bears. It was even named “Indian potato” due to its wide use in the Native diet. The flowers look very similar to D. capitatum, but with more spherical clusters of blue or violet bells. Usually blooms right after D. capitatum in Spring.

Dichelostemma ida-maia Firecracker plant Well named, this gorgeous flower has scarlet red with yellow-green tipped tubular flowers that hang in a cluster, attracting bees and hummingbirds. Rising 2 feet tall, it blooms in mid to late spring here in Northern California.

Plant these bulbs in average soil. They need good draining soil and prefer a dry summer, or they will rot. All of the Dichelostemma do well in containers, you might want to consider container planting if you have gopher issues. They would look cheery in the ground or a container mixed with California poppy, phacelias, clarkias, etc. Also consider planting some near native roses, Ribes, manzanitas or coffeeberry. The growing conditions are the same.

Alice Ford-Sala

Blooming now is the Tatarian Honeysuckle. Bees love this!
Photo: Ettamarie Peterson
New Swarm Catching Trick
By Ettamarie Peterson

The other day I was called to collect a swarm that was wrapped around a young redwood tree in McNear Park. When a swarm is wrapped around a tree trunk or mixed into a bush that I cannot clip branches from, I use the old comb trick. I always take a couple or more frames with old fairly dark comb so I can put at least one frame into the swarm and patiently let the bees walk on to it. I have found it helps to have a couple of drops of lemon grass oil on the top bar, too. The bees in this swarm covered the frame rather thickly so I put it in my box hoping the queen was on it. The second frame was not so attractive to the bees so I attached my swarm box just below the bees with the hole opened in the top and the front entrance also opened. I brushed bees down into the box but many of them decided to move up the trunk. I got the brilliant idea (Well, I thought it was brilliant!) to gently paint Fischer’s Bee Quick on the tree trunk just above the cluster of bees being careful not to get any on the bees. I never spray them because this messes up their ability to smell the queen and is not nice to the bees. I used my trusty turkey feather as a paint brush taped to a pole and it worked! If you do not have any turkey feathers, you can get a cheap small, long handle paint brush to tape to a pole. As the bees inched their way down to the opening I used the “brush” a little more. I was really pleased that this “herded” the bees down into the swarm box.

This particular swarm box is one of my favorites because it has handles and a hole in the top. I always have some bungee cords in my swarm supply bucket and they hooked the swarm box to the branches just where it was handy to the bees. Unfortunately, this style of box is not made any more but I have made some much like it using campaign posters and ends cut from old deep bee boxes.

Things that are good to put in your swarm supply bucket or box are lemon grass oil, feathers, Fischer’s Bee Quick (available at beekind Store), bungee cords of various sizes, duct tape, caution tape to leave around the box area if it is in a public place, laminated signs to hang on your ladder if you have to leave it there until sunset (mine say “Live Bees, Do Not Touch Ladder”) and contact cards to give to people you talk to as you are saving the bees, a sheet or old curtain to lay on the ground beneath the box. I also have started asking people to send me a photo of the swarm so I can get a good idea of its size. I have found what we consider a small swarm, people often claim is thousands of bees (which they also claim to be allergic to or need removed before their child’s birthday party or their barbeque starts very soon). Also, don’t forget to ask how high up the swarm is. I explain that I am just five feet tall and often need at least my step stool or a ladder or my trusty bucket on the pole. By the way if it is a bucket-on-a-pole job it is best to take along another beekeeper to help or have an extra suit you can put on someone willing to become a beekeeper for a while! Oh, take your cell phone and a camera to share the pictures. Don’t forget to report the swarm to our association via www.sonomabees.org, or to John McGinnis swarm@sonomabees.org.
Late March
Bee Sharing Program Update

The Bee Sharing program is in full swing. Sonoma county had a very dry and warm February and March so the swarm season started early this year compared to last year. Last year the first reported swarm was March 1 in Healdsburg while this year the first reported swarm was February 21st in Petaluma. The last reported swarm for 2019 was September 3 in Healdsburg.

As of March 30 a total of 93 swarms were reported throughout Sonoma County. That compares to 28 swarms reported through the same date last year or more than triple last year. Please refer to the bar chart of 2020/2019/2018 Reported Honey Bee Swarms by Week (below).

In terms of reported swarms by city, Petaluma has 30 followed by Santa Rosa with 23, Healdsburg 10, Windsor 9, and Sonoma at 6.

As of March 30 a total of 2 splits were reported throughout Sonoma County. That compares to 8 through the same date last year.

In response to requests for online reporting you can now report your swarms and splits via your laptop, tablet or phone at https://www.sonomabees.org/member-swarm-report. You will need to sign-in to the website to file your report. Once you are logged into the sonomabees.org web site you can follow the number of swarms by city at https://www.sonomabees.org/swarms-by-city and the number of swarms per week at https://www.sonomabees.org/swarms-by-week. (NOTE: swarms-by-week currently does not display properly on an iPhone with Safari but it looks fine with Chrome or Firefox). On the sonomabees.org web site, you can find the swarms-by-city and swarms-by-week links as menu items under the SCBA MEMBERS-ONLY INFO menu.

If you aren't able to use the web then please email swarm@sonomabees.org and copy your bee share coordinator, eg: WestBeeShare@sonomabees.org. 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 beachball!) 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!

The Bee Share Team
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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
Maryle Brauer
707-934-7392
southcluster@sonomabees.org

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

West
Gina Brown
415-828-8459
Boragelane@comcast.net

East
Claudine Latchaw
(707) 971-9708
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

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Owner/Beekeeper
415/871-4662
info@marincoastalbee.com
Regular monthly meetings of the Sonoma County Beekeepers’ Association are held on the second Monday of each month 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.

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. (See page 1 of this newsletter for speaker details.)

Our mailing address is:
Sonoma County Beekeepers’ Assoc.
P.O. Box 98
Santa Rosa, CA 95402-0098