

The Monthly Extractor



Volume 45, Issue 6

June 2020

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

President's Message

Dear Fellow SCBA Beekeepers,

June has arrived and so has the summer heat. Our flower and veggie gardens are blooming and the bees have been swarming, growing and busy bringing in pollen and nectar. This has been a steady presence in our lives during this extraordinary time with social distancing and adjustment to our new normal.

Through all of this our bees have been steady, but they can have struggles of their own. From what I am hearing, it appears that we are seeing a large amount of queen failure at this time in the season. Remember to stay vigilant with your hives. A big booming hive or swarm isn't always a sure given for a healthy queen or hive. Things can change quickly.

There was a great article published recently in the Sonoma Index-Tribune about SCBA and featuring Thea Vierling and Susan Simmons. It was informative with nice photos, good information about clusters, swarms and education! Be sure you check it out at the following link:

<https://www.sonomanews.com/lifestyle/10945755-181/saving-sonomas-bees>

I want to thank Serge Labesque on behalf of all of us in SCBA for his contributions to the Extractor over the years. His generosity of time and sharing of

Join Our Zoom Meeting

June 8 Monthly Meeting will be via Zoom

In order to attend the zoom meeting, you will need to download Zoom to your desktop or device. If you already have Zoom you can skip this first step.

1. Download Zoom on or before 6:30pm Monday, June 8th by clicking on this link:

<https://zoom.us/download>

2. To join the meeting click on this link:

<https://zoom.us/j/93267573235>

his knowledge, wisdom and experience has been invaluable and greatly appreciated by all. He is retiring from writing his monthly column but I am pleased to announce that he has graciously agreed to allow us to continue with reprints of his columns from 2019.

As many of you are aware, the "Asian Giant or Murder Hornet" has received a lot of media press recently. Please see the article in the newsletter to find links to helpful articles about this insect.

Don't miss our June General meeting on June 8 via Zoom with Rob Keller. It should be a fun and informative evening with opportunities to ask one of our local experts your

beekeeping questions.

The presentation will be from 7-9pm. Members are asked to log on at 6:30pm.

Several clusters are now connecting via monthly zoom meetings. Be sure to watch your email for announcements.

See you on June 8th at the Zoom meeting!



Have a safe and healthy June, enjoy your gardens and bees and stay in touch with your SCBA community.

Ann Jerel
2020 SCBA President

General Meeting News

Monthly Meeting: Monday June 8 (Online via Zoom)

Time: 6:30 -7:00 log into Zoom meeting
7:00-9:00 pm guest speaker

Our June General Meeting Speaker will be Rob Keller, the founder of Napa Valley Bee Company. Rob is a graduate of the USD Master Beekeeping Program. He is an inspirational leader and educator of regenerative beekeeping. He teaches adults and children his love for art and his attention to aesthetics. He also makes custom made hives.

Join us for a lively informative evening discussing beekeeping with Rob Keller.

To reiterate the information on page 1 of this newsletter, in order to attend the May 11th, online General Meeting, you must do the following:

In order to attend the zoom meeting, you will need to download the Zoom to your desktop or device. If you already have Zoom you can skip this first step.

1. Download Zoom on or before 6:30pm Monday, June 8th by clicking on this link:
<https://zoom.us/download>
2. To join the meeting click on this link:
<https://zoom.us/j/93267573235>

Honey Extractor Rental

One of the benefits of SCBA membership is access to our honey extractors. We currently have a honey extractor for each cluster as well as one fruit press shared across all regions. Members can find the terms of this rental, as well as the necessary contact information, in the "SCBA Members-Only Info" section of the website. To see this section you will need to be logged in. Happy spinning and crushing!

Important!

Copy Editor needed for our monthly newsletter *The Monthly Extractor*.

If you are interested or would like more information, please contact president@sonomabees.org

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SWARM REPORT

by John McGinnis, The Swarm Guy

It's been quite the swarm season! 397 swarms reported by our members as of today 5/25/2020 Happy Memorial Day!

I hope everyone is keeping safe and healthy. Hopefully we can soon put this Covid 19 scenario behind us and get back to a semi-normal life again. I miss our meetings. Enough about that, I'm pretty sure we were able to supply everyone on the needs bees list in the South Cluster with at least one colony and some two! I have personally, with the help of my beautiful wife, been able to capture 36 swarms and have passed a few swarm calls to other beeks in areas a little further from my base. All in all, it's been a stellar swarm season. There are still a few days left in May so maybe there will be a few more. I'm pretty sure we will surpass the 400-swarm mark! Everyone stay safe, and I'll see you soon.

Great Bee Sharing Experience

by Ettamarie Peterson

On May 22nd I got a call from a lady who had been keeping bees in her back garden. Years ago, she was a member of SCBA but has been too busy to keep up her membership. She had three colonies last year and all three failed over this winter. Before she could get around to taking apart the largest hive a huge swarm came into it. She showed me the video of the bees coming in and it was spectacular.

She asked me to help her take the hive away as she was afraid her new dog would not be compatible with it. Using her tools, we opened the top super which was completely filled with honey from last fall. It was quite a job getting the honey moved into a large tub but was necessary to do before attempting to move the hive. The next honey super down had some more frames of honey and some signs of where brood had been. We took that level off as well. The next level was another honey super similar to the one above and then there was a deep brood box below that. The swarm had just arrived a few hours before and were settling into the deep box nicely. We made the decision to keep the deep and one super as the swarm was so large and there was honey for them.

The lady's name is Cheryl Nyce and it is a perfect name for her! She wanted to donate the excess honey and bees to me. I told her I could extract the honey and bring some back to her and had a beekeeper in mind that needed the colony. She donated the colony with the boxes, bottom board and telescoping cover to Brad Jann. He came over that night with a friend and loaded it on to his truck. The bees are now in Brad's apiary.

Brad and I agreed that this lady is really nice and well named! He will also be taking her some of his honey as a thank you gift.



Brad Jann taking away the hive to his apiary

Regional Cluster Activities

Summer Solstice, June 20, 2020 is rapidly approaching! Hard to believe we are almost halfway through this year. I guess one could say "time has been flying by as we are having so much fun in lock-down". With our communities opening up slowly, please be vigilant with your safety and those around you.

Cluster coordinated activities this past month have been focused on hive development. We are planning on hosting Christine Kurtz for an all-cluster Zoom education Café in June. Date TBD, watch for the invitation. For those of you still on your cluster "Needs Bees" list, we are sorry. We hope for more swarms to share. For those of you who are swarm catchers, please know that we still have beekeepers with ZERO bees. If you capture a swarm that can be shared within your cluster or a nearby beekeeper, please immediately contact your beeshare or Cluster coordinators. We aim to place bees with every active SCBA member requesting a start. Happy JUNE to you all!

Our Member Aerial Gilbert is featured in a *Bee Culture Magazine* Article

Many of you may know Aerial Gilbert, one of our south cluster beekeepers. She lost her sight several years ago and is featured for her unique beekeeping skills in an article in Bee Culture magazine. Please note that Bee Culture is going digital this month and will be free.

<https://www.beeeculture.com/catch-the-buzz-blind-beekeeper-relies-on-sound/>

Please note the following column is a reprint from 2019. While reading it, keep in mind that there will be differences in weather from year to year.

My June Beekeeping To-Do List by Serge Labesque

© 2019

Hive dynamics keep stores and brood together

Inside a hive, the brood nest or the cluster must remain within very close proximity to the colony's food and energy reserves. But the contents of the combs are not fixed or unalterable. Since the size and overall location of the brood nest, as well as the amount, type and arrangement of the colony's supplies change constantly, their moves have to be well choreographed. Normally, the bees organize the contents of their nest without any beekeeper intervention. They may accumulate, consume, or relocate stores within the hive. And most of the eggs that are laid ultimately develop into bees that emerge from the comb. In turn, the cells that have been emptied or vacated may be cleaned and prepared to receive eggs or stores again, but not necessarily the same thing they previously held.

When pollen or nectar is deposited in a cell before the queen lays an egg in it, the stores retain or gain comb over the brood. This is frequently the case during a honey flow or when the bees re-organize their brood chamber at the end of summer and during the fall. Conversely, when a queen places an egg in a cell, the brood nest remains set in place at that location or makes an incremental move towards the stores. We may picture this in-hive activity as a tug-o-war between brood and stores. It results in the gradual relocation of the brood nest over time, mainly up and down the comb, and to a lesser extent, from comb to comb.

Occasionally, inclement weather during periods of intense brood rearing results in wide bands of empty cells around the brood, the stores the cells contained having been consumed. In these conditions, which happen most often during cold and wet springs, the foragers cannot compensate for the large amounts of stores that are being devoured. Strong colonies led by prolific queens can tackle this situation by rapidly expanding their nests higher up in the hives. If this move is not prevented from happening, the colonies are not constrained and their vigor is not affected. It can be anticipated that the upper parts of the brood nests will be filled by incoming nectar as soon as the adult bees emerge from the comb and good weather conditions return. The brood nests will then be gradually relocated lower in the hives.

When the honey flows are generous, or when the bees relocate uncapped honey, which they do during their preparations of the hives for winter, the brood nests are forced to retreat into the lower parts of the brood chambers. When, on the contrary, meager honey flows or dearth arrive, a gradual move upward of the brood nests in the hives can be observed.

Beekeepers, however, interfere more frequently than the weather with these natural processes, sometimes with dire consequences. This can be the case, for example, when queen excluders are used. These devices can isolate brood nests from the stores they need. Similar stressful conditions may be created when frames or supers are added without considering the impact of their placement. Most often, there is a clear demarcation between brood and stores at the edge of the brood nests. However, a seemingly random mix of brood and stores may at times occur within the brood area. Honey-bound conditions of the brood nests are one example of this. In the spring, when the brood chamber of a hive becomes honey-bound, the queen is forced to reduce her egg-laying rate. Soon after, she will be ready to fly out with a swarm. Usually, bees also cram their brood nests by including stores in the brood combs during the preparation of the hive for winter. One of the multiple benefits of this is that the brood that will become the winter bees a few weeks later will be well nourished. Another is that the heater bees that keep the developing young warm will find sources of energy where they are needed. In addition, this condition leads the queens to gradually slowdown.

The location of the hives, the weather and the honey flows have a strong influence on the hives. Nonetheless, it is the bees that manage the contents of the combs. They place their stores and the brood methodically, not just to maintain good nutrition of their developing young, but also to initiate life-changing colony events such as swarming, or to prepare for winter and other challenging times. This bee behavior is vitally important to the colonies. It deserves our attention... and respect.

June in the apiaries

The longest days of the year usher in substantially different weather conditions and the next phase in the life of the colonies. Now, the season of colony reproduction is essentially over. Swarms are becoming scarce. Not surprisingly, beekeepers shift their attention from hive divisions to the honey supers.

At the end of the spring honey flow, which is marked in this area of California by the California buckeye and blackberry blooms, a sudden period of dearth seems to catch the bees off-guard. Unable to find much nectar, many foragers resort to robbing in order to gather food for their colonies. Young and weak colonies can be at risk, especially in places where the density of hives has become high. The colonies eliminate large numbers of drones and become defensive.

Although the brood nests of the established and mature colonies have reached their maximum size for the year, the young colonies are still building up. Led by young queens that will have to be evaluated in early summer, they have to begin to prepare their nests for next winter.

Hive inspections are often limited to watching the bee activity in front of the hives, examining the monitoring trays and occasional peeks into the honey supers. The brood chambers are accessed less frequently, as colony health is usually good at this time of year. But this cannot be taken for granted. So, open-hive inspections need to be performed anytime there are signs suggesting that there might be a colony health issue. These manipulations are timed to avoid the heat of the day in order to reduce the risk of triggering robbing or defensive behavior. As the grass has dried, it is necessary to be particularly careful with the smokers, too, as they must be kept at the ready during these hive inspections.

If practical, it is good to provide some shade to the hives during the afternoon. This helps to reduce their need for water. Regardless, sources of water must be kept available to the bees without any interruption. Any surplus spring honey that has become ripe and sufficiently dehydrated may be harvested. However, it is important to make sure we leave enough honey in the hives for the bees. This is in anticipation of the summer dearth, which can be pronounced in locations that depend on natural vegetation. I prefer harvesting a few frames of honey on multiple occasions instead of entire supers at once. This reduces the risk of robbing, does not appear to agitate the bees, and facilitates the entire process. Wet frames are returned to the hives in the evening, again to reduce the risk of robbing.

Nectar-storage space is added more modestly now than earlier in the spring. This is not only because the early summer honey flow is usually modest, but also to help preserve or establish a crown of honey in the upper part of the brood chambers. This part of hive space management is particularly important with Double-Deep Brood Chamber (DD) hives, because the colonies and their winter stores will have to be well established in the brood chambers by the end of summer or early fall. If the upper parts of the hives were kept excessively open, the brood nests would tend to move up in the hives, since there is less nectar available to the bees. For the same reason, comb building is slowing down. Therefore, it is beneficial not to direct this task to the honey supers when new comb may be needed in the brood chambers. Yes, it is still springtime and I am already planning for fall and winter. This is because it will take all summer long for the colonies to prepare, especially if we divert too much of their effort and energy to the honey supers.

The color and fragrance of the wax that is collected during the spring honey harvest are just delightful. At this time of year, this product from the bees may be easily processed in solar wax melters.

The weeks around the summer solstice may provide a last chance to raise a few queens under favorable conditions. Originating from the very best of our hives, these young queens will be kept at the ready to requeen colonies that do not perform well, or those that do not con-

trol mite population satisfactorily.

Do not miss going to the apiaries in the warm evenings and enjoying the sweet fragrance that emanates from the softly humming hives.

In summary, this month:

- Inspect hives when the foragers are out in large numbers, avoiding the heat of the day.
- Follow-up on the development of young colonies.
- Begin to evaluate the quality of the young queens. Replace failing or undesirable queens.
- Keep an eye on the health of the colonies.
- Combine or requeen inherently weak colonies or those that are not developing properly.
- Perform hive divisions and raise queens when conditions are favorable.
- Maintain adequate air circulation through the hives.
- Be aware of situations and manipulations that can trigger robbing.
- Make sure the components of the hives fit tightly to prevent secondary entrances that might allow robber bees to enter.
- Ensure that sources of water are continuously available to the bees.
- Provide filtered afternoon shade, if at all possible.
- Adjust the size of the hive entrances to match the forager activity and to reduce the risk of robbing.
- Monitor swarm traps.
- Keep some equipment at the ready to catch the occasional swarm.
- Manage honey supers (Add space, as necessary.)
- Harvest surplus spring honey, making sure to leave enough honey in the hives.
- Discard old and misshapen combs.
- Render wax.
- Routinely clean and scorch tools and equipment.

Serge Labesque
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Bee Plants of the Month

By Alice Ford-Sala

Eremurus

Fritillaria Fritillary

Family: Liliaceae

Fritillary is also the name of a butterfly, but we're talking about a beautiful flower bulb. Many are very striking, with nodding checkered or spotted flowers that rise from a single stem. Depending on the variety, they can range from 6 inches to a few feet high. Foliage is strappy and small.

Try to plant several bulbs for maximum beauty and attractiveness to bees. There are some native to California, and some from Europe and Asia. They all do well in meadow, woodland (think dappled sun in your garden), and rock gardens. Plant them in fall in well-drained but good soil.

They do need a winter chill, as occurs in a normal Northern California season. They are deer and rodent resistant, some have a skunky smell.

F. biflora, Mission Bells : A California native, it adds interest to a rock garden or border. The brown spotted flowers hang in chocolaty bells, attracting bees and butterflies with nectar.

As with many California natives, very little to no summer water is just fine, as too much water will rot them.

F. meleagris, Checkered Lily, Snakeshead, Guinea Hen: Native to damp grasslands or meadows in Europe and Asia, can take summer moisture. The 2-inch nodding bells are held above the foliage on stems 1-2 feet tall. Maroon, purple and white, bees are particularly attracted to *F. meleagris*.

F. persica, Persian Lily: Very attractive, deep purple-plum flowers on stems 2-3 feet tall. Each stem can have up to 30 blossoms rising above grey-green leaves.

F. imperialis, Crown Imperial: This is a very unusual flower, growing up to 3 feet tall, the hanging cluster of flowers, which can be yellow, orange or white with large 2-3-inch flowers, is topped by a "crown" of leaves that give it its name. This one in particular has a strong odor that some people don't care for. However, that odor is supposed to repel gophers and other rodents, so it might be worth planting!



F. meleagris

Alice Ford-Sala

GARDENING FOR BEES

JUNE UPDATE

By Kitty Baker

MAY POP-UP SALE SUCCESS

Gardening for Bees Group (G4B) leader Maryle Brauer reported enthusiastically on the success of pre-Mother's Day Pop-Up porch sales. SCBA members came and claimed a total of about 350 bee-friendly plants from Angy's and Angelo's locations. "We made \$943, which is especially striking given the lower prices of the plants." By comparison, plant sales at monthly SCBA meetings in the peak planting month of May 2019 were slightly lower, at about \$900; and for May 2018, just \$564 – an impressive record of G4B Group's growing following as a forage source for members.

"Many thanks," Maryle continued, "to the growers of these plants: Alice, Kelly, Angy, Laura, Sibi, Angelo and the greenhouse team. Also, Connie, the Champion, for getting out 500 plus labels in short order." And special thanks to both Angelo and Angy for hosting these creative no-contact Pop-Up sales.

The success of Pop-Up sales, means more planting and potting seeds and starts. The greenhouse team is meeting to keep the plant supply coming via social distancing work sessions at the greenhouse. Maryle sends her praise and cheers, "Keep on growin' team Nurseries!"

JUNE POP-UP SALE PREVIEW

Plans are taking shape for the June Pop-Up. G4B will be featuring a few 'double-duty' plants that feed both bees and beekeepers. Varieties include nasturtiums, various herbs and perennials – sunflowers and berries. G4B's Wild Apricot emails will announce sale time/date/location details and a list of plants. G4B will also post timely Cluster Facebook reminders. Please note: there will not be a July Pop-Up so get your plants now! Pop-Ups may skip months due to low plant availability or inopportune planting time.

June sale dates will be Friday - Sunday June 5, 6, 7 at locations to be announced. Don't miss this plant sale special: one of Angelo's beautiful gaillardia plants FREE. Get a free 4" gaillardia (see photo) when you choose any 4 other plants.

G4B GARDENERS' JUNE GREEN THUMB TIPS

Angela Nowicki offers ideas to protect your sunflower leaves from pincher bugs/earwigs. She starts with a gallon jug of water, adds 5 tablespoons of liquid soap (she prefers less harsh castile soap) and 1 tablespoon of any vegetable oil as a surfactant, to make the solution stick to the plant to either discourage or suffocate the pest. She suggests spraying the underside of leaves with plain water, followed with the soap solution. Another alternative is to sprinkle diatomaceous earth around plant stems to lacerate soft-bodied pests.

Angy finds nasturtiums are an effective way to lure non-beneficial insects away from other plants, referring to a past Facebook post by Christine Kurtz. "Basil," Angy says,

"keeps hornworms away from tomato plants." And she's trying a trick seen on YouTube to discourage birds from eating her strawberries and blueberries – marble-size painted red/blue rocks as decoys. Maryle chimed in suggesting tulle, a fine mesh fabric, to protect your berry crop instead of bird netting – an effective and safer alternative that birds won't get caught in.

Kelly Corbett offered suggestions for the New England asters that so many in SCBA have. "These plants get very tall, floppy and unmanageable by their October bloom time. To improve their look and encourage robust blooming when the bees really need forage, I cut them back in late June to about knee high. Then they behave and don't flop over their neighboring plants. They bloom beautifully, the bees love them, and the gardener is happier." She relays a recommendation by Kate Frey for the book *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden* by Tracy DiSabato-Aust. It explains aster pruning in detail on page 117. The website Medium posts a link to download the book, so you can easily read up on the finer points: https://medium.com/@welcomed_gamboege_ferret_838/download-in-pdf-the-well-tended-perennial-garden-the-essential-guide-to-planting-and-pruning-3ab89cf28273

Sibyl Bugarin shared suggestions for seeds to sow that will bloom in the hottest three months of summer dearth. Start these heat-loving plants now for blooms in August through October: zinnia's, Amaranthus, sunflowers, Tithonia, Nicotiana, penstemon, Queen Ann's lace, evening primrose, scabiosa, verbascum and salvias. All of these can grow and bloom into the fall to help the bees with the dearth. "Several of these in my garden bloom straight into winter, tolerating the cooler weather." Watch for them in upcoming Pop-Up plant lists.

Sibi also discovered a novel way to control slugs by using orange peels. Note the photo of her early morning baby slug fest. "There are seven slugs in the picture," Sibi challenges. "Can you spot them?"

"I eat the orange then put peels pith-side-down on soil," she explains. "Yummy for both of us!"



Here are a couple scenes from Sibi's bloom-full garden.



Connie Alexich suggests this easy-access source of gardening information: a weekly video series on all topics related to bees and bee forage courtesy of UC Davis. Connie volunteers at the Häagen-Dazs Honey Bee Haven garden on Davis Campus and appreciates the knowledge shared by garden director, Christine Casey. Videos are just 3 or 4 minutes long and cover a range of topics, mostly regarding plants especially attractive to honey bees as well as native bees. The May 11 segment focuses on plants in the sunflower family, explaining the nutritional benefits to bees of their composite flowers. Links to the videos:

[UC4k1G3UT6eLlqB094wZ-gw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC4k1G3UT6eLlqB094wZ-gw) or <https://beegarden.ucdavis.edu/BeeGardeningResources>

And finally, a 360° around Diana Holmes' lovely garden as its many varieties begin to bloom.



Diana's story offers us all a bit of hope. "To be honest," she says, "there has never been a strategy in my garden! It's a very organic process! When we moved here six years ago, the soil was terrible – originally a garbage burning area with brick remains of a burn pit. The first year I threw out a big bag of wild flowers and still have the calendulas coming up every year. The next year I added compost, planted lots of lavender and started adding whatever I liked. Then I joined SCBA and planted whatever was available from G4B plant sales. The photos show the results of that. I have three hives that I want to supply with food. So, my goal is to plant flowers honey bees like and deer don't. It is wonderful having SCBA in the greenhouse (near Diana's cottage) as I am learning a lot from Sibi about starting new plants."



ana's cottage) as I am learning a lot from Sibi about starting new plants."



Leucodendron with bee



Roses and Foxglove



Agrostemma and Columbine

Many thanks to Diana for sharing this. And to Sibi for providing all photos that illustrate this article.

Queen Rightness or Not

By Christine Kurtz

There seems to be a pattern in my apiary. In March and April it's the job and thrill of making splits and catching swarms. Most are shared with other beekeepers and some do stay to replenish my winter losses. The importance of checking whether your colony has a queen on a regular basis can make the whole difference in the success of your hive(s). This is especially true when going through a queen event like re-queening. The date of birth of these new colonies are meticulously recorded so you do not miss the important follow up date to check on the queen rightness of those colonies. I use a piece of blue paint tape right on the hive to write the date when I need to check it.

Splits known to be without a queen are checked a week later for queen cells then left alone for 3 weeks before checking for a mated queen. That is 4 weeks total from the actual splitting. At times due to weather an additional week is given if the colony seems calm, cells are polished and the feel is that the bees are still expecting a mated queen. A disorganized colony, loud with what is called a queenless roar, obviously unhappy is given an additional frame of eggs or a grafted patch of eggs cut out from another colony to try again. Some additional nurse bees are added since the current lot is slowly aging out of nursing and graduating to foraging. Splits with queen cells are a week ahead and need to be checked 3 weeks later. Splits with queens are managed for space on a regular basis of 7-10 days in the spring during comb building.

I tend to give swarms a couple weeks before checking for signs the queen is good. This enables the colony to build comb first for immediate food storage and for the queen to start laying her eggs. This is an important step with swarms. From the outside the hive, bee activity may look laborious, but it doesn't reflect the status of the queen inside. The queen is an aging queen that leaves with the swarm and is often superseded soon after the nest is established. This needs to happen successfully. Sometimes the queen might have been injured in the capture process. A secondary or tertiary swarm will come with a virgin queen and she will need to mate and come back successfully.

Don't forget the surviving colonies must get checked for queen rightness coming out of winter and then every 7-10-days through spring. These checks of course are weather permitting. Mostly I am able to intervene promptly if there is a queen problem because I have several colonies. If I don't have frames of brood, I have been participating in beekeeper communities where the resources available to me are just a phone call or Facebook post away. Sometimes it comes in the form of a donated frame with eggs. And sometimes if it's a secondary or tertiary small swarm that would struggle to build up because of low population, the small swarm is "married" to the queenless colony via newspaper method.

When May rolls around there can be havoc in some of my colonies. It's also the time that calls start rolling in from beekeepers who either know something is not

right in their colony or they are needing a queen for their diagnosed queenless colony. Our queens are struggling, queenlessness is rampant and many colonies fail without our intervention. Don't continue to blame varroa mites for collapsing colonies. Look to see what is happening to our queens. Some peter out and some disappear. Too many don't come back from their mating flight. Some re-queen with what seems like a perfectly fine queen except the bees decide to replace her again. Queens just don't live as long as they used to and supersedure happens often. The reason for timely inspections is to check your colony to be queenright. This is something that you can actively do as a beekeeper. It's not necessary to find the queen but look for evidence of her. Eggs are only eggs for 3 days. If you see them, you know she has been present recently. The presence of older larvae confirms that there was a queen earlier.

A colony without a queen nor the resources to make one (a larva under three days old) will end up with laying workers. This is a very difficult situation to rectify because the bees do not accept a new queen thinking they have one. How long it takes for a worker bee's ovaries to develop depends on not only how long a queen has been absent but also the presence of brood which also helps suppress worker ovaries. So, the timeline may vary but a worker can start laying eggs about 3 weeks without a queen and perhaps a few days longer with lingering brood.

Now that the cluster groups are well established it is a dream for many of us to eventually have in each cluster small scale queen rearing groups so that we have available good locally raised queens. I'm excited as I'm hearing of a possible pilot group in one of our clusters and the possibility to emulate it in the future in other clusters. About three years back we started a private queen rearing Facebook page that has been pretty inactive (the name if you wish to join: SCBA Queen Rearing Group). Perhaps we can activate it again and start talking about what you are seeing in the queen world, what you are doing in your apiary or what you would like to do. We can share triumphs and foibles and help each other get to that next step of queen rearing. I'll try to find good educational articles to share. **Meanwhile check that your colonies are queenright.**



Asian Giant Hornets or “Murder Hornets”

As many of you are aware, the “Murder Hornet” has received lots of media press recently. While it may present some future concerns, it is important for us to all stay informed and able to educate others about the hornet. Please see the links below for helpful articles

If you should site an insect resembling this large hornet you can contact Beverly Hammond at the Ag Department. She can be reached at:

Beverly.Hammond@sonoma-county.org

707 565-2371



Photos are helpful for identification and if you capture the insect, she requests that it be placed in the freezer immediately before bringing it in for identification.

https://earthsky.org/earth/what-are-asian-giant-hornets-dangerous?fbclid=IwAR1HxrrQTKOJrupkiMRyAmSUL-2b4v-etSw-WzGH_g78zNeK6pyRVtkl1m8Q

<https://patch.com/california/davis/ridiculous-call-asian-giant-hornet-murder-hornet-uc-davis>

An Idaho Potato Box and a Swarm

By Thea Vierling and Tripp Hunter

The other day I got a most interesting swarm call from a young person who was at home with her brothers and sisters. Mom was not home. You know the story: “Stay in Place” and the older sister will take care of the siblings who are not in school! With a great deal of excitement, she said there was a swarm at her house. She figured out how to find the website by calling several places and eventually found the swarm list and my name. So, I asked all the questions we all ask. Where was it? How high? When did it get there? Was it already there or just coalescing? It turns out that she could not quite describe it because she actually had not seen it. Her brother had seen it and they were too nervous to get too close. I had some fears that it might be yellow jackets but the older sister assured me they were honey bees because one of her teachers had told her about swarms. (Education works again!) She described an Idaho potato box on the top shelf of an outdoor storage shelf and bees were going in and out of the box. Then she told me that one of the younger kids saw the bees about 4 days ago going in and out! Ahhhh so now it is more of an “extraction” than a swarm because there will be comb and also the bees might be more aggressive

about defending their new-found home. (There is a picture of the shelf at the end.)

I decided to just leave it there until evening when I would come back and pick it up. I thought it was great that the kids reported the swarm so I took them a jar of honey. That night Erin, my bee buddy, went with me to pick it up. We met the whole family. We put some screening over the holes, put a bag around the box and off we went. The next day this swarm went to Tripp, a member of east cluster who is on the “needs bees list”. After we described the difference between an extraction and a swarm, we told him how he would be able to give the bees back some of that beautiful comb which might have honey and eggs in it. I also asked Tripp if he would take lots of pictures because I thought this would make for an interesting article for all of you to read. Let’s face, there are no two swarms alike and every one of them teaches us something!

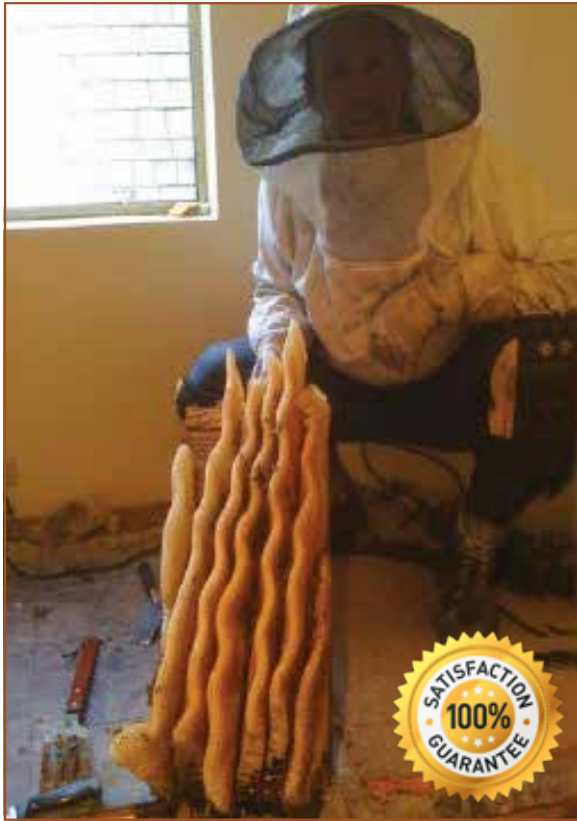
We gave him rubber bands and recommended a few things but eventually he had to do it by himself. We told him we would be available by phone for consultation! Here is his description of the process with photos attached.

“After discussing with Erin and Thea the possible methods of extracting the comb, my assistant Val (photo credits) and I decided a box cutter would be best for separating by slicing off each cover flap of the box top. With that approach I could get to the under-

side of the flap without disruption of the box contents. Imagine my heart-racing anticipation of the unknown while making the first cuts. Inside was a massive number of bees clustered on a couple of pristine, white pieces of comb. These first pieces, the largest, literally fell into my hands from the change in gravity and weight of the bees, and it was easy to lay them onto a frame with the wire supporting. I tried hard not to smush or damage the comb, and to be gentle with the pressure of rubber bands that gave security. The bees were very cooperative, preferring to move off the comb as I gingerly handled it. With one lid-piece finished, I received another wonderful surprise detaching the next cover flap: more comb and lots more bees! Those comb pieces held to the cardboard better, being smaller (and perhaps a few days older?). Thea's previous suggestion of using a spatula came in handy here. A gentle scraping did the trick. As you can guess, many bees were airborne throughout but many more huddled in mounds inside the box. With comb transplant completed and frames in place, the bees took to the hive quickly. I attempted to get the many bees still in the box to 'walk over' by tilting the box, but they walked in the opposite direction toward the dark corners and away from the tilt. The ubiquitous Sonoma Valley turkey feather proved useful until almost all the bees had been brushed into the hive. Placing the box on the ground at the hive entrance enabled the stragglers to find the way to their new home. Six pieces of comb and eight rotting potatoes; no brood or honey, and I saw neither eggs nor a queen."

This adventure was an exciting experience! A lesson to the old adage to be prepared because you don't know what you're going to find. And, to ask your mentors and buddies!





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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 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:
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Santa Rosa, CA 95402-0098

