

The Monthly Extractor



Volume 45, Issue 10

October 2020

This is our newsletter that reflects the various techniques, theories and art of sustainable beekeeping. Articles are contributed by SCBA members.

President's Message

Greeting Fellow SCBA members,

Tuesday marked the Autumn Equinox and fall has officially arrived. With days gradually growing shorter, the bees are busy foraging for the last bit of pollen and nectar. As you prepare your bees for the winter, remember to have a plan and be quick while in your hives. Christine Kurtz reminded us all recently that this is a particularly intense robbing season.

We are continuing to look for a president and secretary for next year. I am pleased to report that the board positions have been reworked and simplified. These two positions are super fun and manageable, and you will be surrounded by a competent and friendly team of returning board members that will support you in every way. Additionally, I will also be available next year as past president to support the new president.

The October general zoom meeting will be featuring Tom Seeley. This definitely will be a fun and informative evening

I invite you to join our great SCBA team. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the president or secretary positions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Stay safe and bee well.



Ann Jereb
2020 SCBA President

OCTOBER CALENDAR

Monthly Meeting: October 12th

SCBA Zoom General Meeting October 12

Speaker: Tom Seeley

Topic: "The bee colony as a honey factory"

Sign on at: 6:30 Presentation: 7:00-8:30pm

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/93354102560>

Meeting ID: 933 5410 2560

We are very excited to announce this month's general meeting speaker is Dr. Thomas D. Seeley. At our meeting, he will discuss The Bee Colony as a Honey Factory. He will explain how honeybee colonies operate as a factory that produces honey efficiently despite tremendous day-to-day swings in the supply of nectar.

[More detail on Page 2]

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This Month's Speaker

At our monthly Zoom Meeting on October 12th, we'll hear from Dr. Thomas D. Seeley.

We are very excited to announce this month's general meeting speaker is Dr. Thomas D. Seeley. Dr. Seeley is an award-winning author of multiple books about bee colonies including Honeybee Democracy. He is the Horace White Professor in Biology at Cornell University. He is based in the Department of Neurobiology and Behavior, where he teaches courses on animal behavior and does research on the behavior and social life of honeybees. His work is summarized in three books: Honeybee Ecology (1985), The Wisdom of the Hive (1995), Honeybee Democracy (2010), and The Lives of Bees (2019).

At our meeting, he will discuss The Bee Colony as a Honey Factory. He will explain how honeybee colonies operate as a factory that produces honey efficiently despite tremendous day-to-day swings in the supply of nectar. He will examine the important division of labor between the nectar foragers – elderly workers who toil outside the hive collecting the nectar – and the nectar receivers – middle-aged workers who toil inside the hive converting the nectar into honey. Much of this work is communicated through bee dances and signals. He will show videos of bees producing all of these signals.

C. sieberi, 'Firefly' has light violet flowers with yellow insides. 'Tricolor' is a striking lilac-blue flower with yellow and white banding.

Dutch Crocus, C. vernus blooms later, but still in early spring. This is the most commonly planted crocus and is very vigorous. 'Grand Maitre' is lavender-purple. 'Jeanne d'Arc' is white with purple markings, 'Vanguard' is a pretty striped blue and purple flower.

Fall Blooming Saffron Crocus, C.sativus,

Yes, the most expensive spice in the world is easy to grow, beautiful and loved by bees! You need a couple of dozen to gather enough saffron for a paella dish. They are small purple flowers, and you pick the deep orange stigmas as soon as the flowers open, dry them and store them in a jar. Saffron is also used in a tea with ginger and honey, cakes and many rice dishes.

Fall or Autumn Crocus C. speciosus, 'Oxonian' large violet and purple flowers with deep orange stigmas. 'Conqueror', deep indigo-purple with striking red-orange stigmas.

Plant them in masses, in a rock garden, 2-3 inches deep in well-drained garden soil. They appreciate a good winter chill.



BEE PLANTS FOR OCTOBER

By Alice Ford-Sala

Alice Ford-Sala

Crocus Family: Iridaceae

We all know and welcome one of the first bulbs to bloom in late winter, the cute purple crocus. But did you know there are some lovely (and delicious) varieties that bloom in the fall? All crocuses have grassy foliage, sometimes the flowers appear after the foliage appears, others with, yet others afterwards. Bees love them all and deer generally leave them alone, but gardeners need to protect from gophers.

Spring Blooming Wild Crocus, Species Crocus

These are the very earliest to bloom. Many attractive varieties are available, just jump into a bulb catalog and maybe get a collection of several.

C.chrysanthus, usually cream to yellow to orange to blue. 'Cream Beauty' is soft yellow, 'Blue Pearl' is light blue with white and yellow markings, 'Goldilocks' is very deep yellow with some purple markings.



Saffron Crocus

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 October Beekeeping To-Do List by Serge Labesque

© 2019

Lizards!

Every year with the bees brings its own series of quirks, surprises and challenges. This spring, an unanticipated hurdle emerged in my main apiary in the form of four-legged creatures: ordinary lizards.

I had often seen lizards waiting near the hive entrances, stalking foragers, but I very seldom saw one catch a bee. Although their preying habit was annoying, I did not think it could have a significant impact on the colonies unless they would catch a queen; not impossible, but an unlikely event. So, I did not dwell on the issue or do anything to prevent the little fellas from capturing a few foragers. Everybody has to live. This year, however, changed my opinion on the danger lizards can present.

In an area of the apiary where the bees had regularly been doing very well, three colonies started declining at the same time. The hives were rather close together, forming a small group that was spread over a distance of about thirty feet. The examination of their brood nests did not reveal any sign of disease or parasitism, but their adult populations were unmistakably shrinking. That's when I started paying more attention to the lizards that scurried in all directions anytime I came near these hives. If I walked away for a minute, they would almost immediately be back again right next to the hive entrances, ready to pounce onto a bee. And they were all pretty plump! Something had to be done to control this unsafe situation.

At first, I saw no solution other than moving the three hives out of this lizard-infested location. This was promptly done. Unfortunately, and as might have been expected, the lizard issue spread rapidly to all the other ten hives in the apiary even though they were dispersed over a distance of 600 feet. The lizards had become as dangerous as skunks, raccoons and mice can be.

Normally, the bees can defend themselves and sting an occasional lizard to death. But this lizard population was exceedingly large. A little search showed that there are lizard repellents, and that some plants, such as peppermint or eucalyptus, are also said to keep them away. But these means seemed quite impractical or not suitable in that location, if they were actually effective at all.

Alternatively, modifying the design of the hives to make it more difficult for lizards to jump on bees seemed possible. Maybe fences could prevent the lizards from running to the foragers. So, I cut and installed strips of ½" welded wire mesh in such a way that they created spiked edges around the front of my hive bottoms. Barely noticeable, these defensive obstacles stumped the lizards. At once, the reptiles' potential prey had been reduced to the few bees that flew or landed outside my fences. These bees, by the way, might be robber bees. I'll admit that I took pleasure in seeing the predators mystified. The fact is that the colonies did very well during the rest of the summer in spite of the obviously large lizard population that also thrived throughout the apiary. However, I still find it intriguing that lizards, which are known to be a problem in subtropical and tropical areas, have become such a problem here. Is it simply a fluke, a normal spike in their population, or could it be another sign of climate change? I do not know. Regardless, "good fences make good neighbors". I think that I'll make these "lizard guards" permanent features of all my hive bottoms next winter, and we will all be happy, the bees, the lizards and me!



October in the apiaries

During the last hive manipulations of the year, we ensure that the colonies have all they will need to make it

through winter. Once this is accomplished, we will leave the bees undisturbed for a few months. No later than mid-fall, the hives should be safe and sound, containing adequate quantities of well-organized stores, a good queen, and enough developing winter bees to form viable winter clusters.

Right now, the queens are steadily reducing their egg production. To some extent, it is the saturation of the brood chambers that force them to slow down. When the bees respond well to the clues of the season, they also help by filling these combs with stores. Consequently, we see that the brood nests hold mostly sealed brood that will become the winter bees.

The volume of brood between early- and mid-fall presages the size of the future winter clusters. It is a good basis to estimate the amount of stores that must be left in the hives. To keep it simple and safe, twice as much honey as there is brood in terms of comb surface area has shown to be sufficient in my apiaries over the years. This usually corresponds to 15 to 35 lbs. of honey, depending on the strength of the colony. Any honey in excess of this amount is surplus honey that may be harvested before closing the hives for winter. If there is a choice, it is preferable for the bees' sake to leave the lighter honey and to harvest the dark honey, as this may be honeydew honey.

The combs that are centered directly above the brood nests probably hold some bee bread that was left in place when the brood nests moved downward in the hives. This is a good thing, because the bees will probably use this source of protein in mid-winter. The centermost combs of the stores, above the brood nests, should also be comprised of worker-size cells, since that is the location where the brood nests will most likely be located in mid-winter.

The tightening of the contents of the hives during the fall presents a good opportunity to remove old and misshapen combs. If these undesirable frames still hold a little honey or nectar, the comb may be placed in the hive top feeders and crushed. The bees will gather the honey and will relocate it in the brood chambers. Any bee bread may be placed directly on the top bars of the brood chambers. However, combs that hold healthy brood should be left in place.

The removal of some of the frames allows the hives to become somewhat narrower, which is a favorable configuration of the hives during winter. The use of follower boards facilitates these modifications and creates wide air gaps between the follower boards and the sides of the hives. This, too, benefits the bees by improving the air circulation within the hive.

In order to further better the in-hive conditions for the overwintering bees, recently harvested dry lavender can be placed in the hive top feeders. It provides insulation that prevents condensation of metabolic water on the underside of the feeders and it absorbs moisture quite well without rotting.

A generously dimensioned screened ventilation notch cut in the edge of the lids of the hives helps eliminate the excess moisture that would otherwise accumulate in the hives.

The frenzy of forager activity that is visible in front

of the hives will soon subside. These are summer bees contributing their last-ditch effort to their colonies' future. In a few days, in a few weeks at most, they will have disappeared. The only bees that will then be left in the hives will be the winter bees.

As the bees prepare their nest, they seal cracks and they plug excessively large openings with propolis. However, the overall condition of the equipment remains the responsibility of the beekeeper. Mouse guards need to be set in place without delay to prevent mice from accessing the inside, and the hives also need to be secured against the wind and the rain.

In summary, this month:

- Assess the colonies, their health, queens, brood nests and stores.
- Examine how the bees have arranged their brood chambers and how the stores are organized. Ensure that there is some comb with worker-size cells, uncapped honey and pollen centered above the brood nests, surrounded by honey.
- Combine or requeen hives that are not performing satisfactorily (no later than early in the month). Better yet, reduce their volume to strengthen them.
- Adjust the volume of the hives to match individual colony strength and needs.
- Remove old and misshapen combs (follower boards greatly facilitate this).
- Early in the month, configure hives for the consolidation of honey stores (Breaking the cappings of patches of poorly located sealed honey helps.)
- Harvest, extract and bottle only surplus honey.
- Render wax from discarded frames and from cappings.
- Return wet frames and cappings to the bees for cleaning (by placing them above hive top feeders or inner covers).
- Watch out for yellow jackets and any instances of robbing. Reduce the entrances of the hives that are threatened. Close any secondary hive openings.
- Ensure that the hives are adequately ventilated.
- Install mouse guards and reduce hive entrances.
- Routinely clean and scorch tools and equipment.
- Store unused equipment to protect it from wax moth or mouse damage and from the weather.
- Secure the hive tops against high winds.

Serge Labesque
© 2019



GARDENING FOR BEES

OCTOBER UPDATE

OUR GOAL: TO HELP SCBA MEMBERS FEED THE BEES

Covid-19 or not, our bees need forage plants that provide essential pollen and nectar, especially during this extended late-year dry season – and even more on account of the recent heatwave, fires in every direction, and the lingering smoke. To embrace the challenge, G4B has invented two workable alternatives to the usual plant sale at our monthly in-person meetings of the past:

- Improvised Pop-Up Sales
- Curbside “CSA-style” plant sales hosted occasionally by core G4B committee members

POP-UP SALES A HIT: More than a dozen dedicated volunteers coordinate these plant sales. It’s a logistical feat that the G4B Group has been proud to negotiate over the past few months. The strong sales assure us that we’re making a difference and enabling SCBA members to plant more nutritious food for the bees.

While we’ve reported impressive fund-raising results, dollar figures don’t capture the important accomplishment of getting an estimated 2,500 forage plants in the ground. That’s a promise of more abundant pollinator habitat across Sonoma County. Then too, there are the less tangible benefits:



(photo from SCBA webpage)

- 2,500 plants that have been grown without chemicals
- Cultivars chosen especially for desirability of their nectar or pollen for bees
- A selection of varieties that can provide a cascade of blooms through all seasons
- An emphasis on dearth-flowering, late-bloomers that provide forage when it is most needed
- A wealth of perennials that will serve pollinators season after season.

CSA-STYLE SALE: Over the weekend of September 9-11, Ellen Sherron hosted a CSA-style sale that consisted of 70 plants she propagated from her own backyard pollinator garden. SCBA members emailed plant orders, which Ellen acknowledged and coordinated for curbside pickup. Her plants sold out fast. The CSA-style private sale proved to be another way to safely distribute plants. Thank you, Ellen!

During these home-bound months, the G4B Group is happy to have an avenue to continue to offer bee-friendly plants as best our circumstances allow. We are happy to help members have greater control over the food sources convenient to their bees. And, we are happy to offer plants when so many of us have a little more time to plant and tend to them.

AN OCTOBER POP-UP IS IN THE PLANNING

While plans may need to shift and change due to the virus and fires, the G4B Group is tentatively planning our next Pop-Up sale for Friday October 9 through Sunday October 11. Stay tuned for announcement of location, plant varieties, and other details on this physically distanced, outdoor sale.



G4B SUPPORTING SEBASTOPOL POLLINATOR GARDEN PROJECT

G4B’s Miles Sarvis-Wilburn and other members of the G4B group are working with Sebastopol Grange #306 to design and install a pollinator garden hedge on its property. Currently in the planning stage, Miles will be asking for additional helpers for a “workday” in October to plant the hedgerow. The focus is on California native plants with a few non-native, non-invasive plants that G4B recommends for butterflies, bees and birds. The G4B Group is excited to participate in the development of a new pollinator garden for the community, and we’ll report more about this fun project later in the Fall.

G4B GARDENERS OCTOBER GREEN THUMB TIPS

Sibyl Bugarin suggests a few annual plants to consider planting in late fall to winter over for next year’s bloom. Some of the seedlings she’s having good luck with (her photos below):

- Sweet peas – one of the first flowers to bloom and she loves the scent in her spring garden.
- Scabiosa – self-sowing, easy to start and grow right now, comes in many colors.
- Snapdragons – a new one she’s trying this season.

Sibi also offered a reference link to [Johnny’s Seeds](#)’ information on wintering over annuals.

Ellen Sherron to Share Seasonal Advice.

Ellen, the previous coordinator of SCBA’s Gardening for Bees Group, has a wealth of experience growing pollinator plants and has documented and photographed her processes and results through many seasons. She has generously offered to share seasonal gardening recommendations to encourage us all to become more successful

bee-forage gardeners. Watch for her Fall installment on planting before winter rains in the November Extractor.

Concerned about the aftermath of the fires and smoke on your garden? Ellen refers to an article in the LA Times that assures us that ash from the fires, a form of potash, is a useful nutrient for garden soil. [Read Article Here.](#)

The article does say that a buildup of ash on plant's leaves can block sunshine, which is necessary for the photosynthesis that creates leaves, flowers, and fruit. So gently spray ash off and let it enrich soil around the plant. According to [SF Gate](#): Potash is a water-soluble form of potassium oxide that is aided in the breakdown process by soil bacteria, making it easily absorbed by plants, helping them produce flower and bear fruit. It also helps plants better use other nutrients and prevent nitrogen depletion. Although a dusting of potash shouldn't be a problem, large amounts from wood fires can increase soil's alkalinity.

JUST FOR FUN: DANDELION vs. CATSEAR?

[Here's a link to a KQED video](#) about a bee-friendly cousin to the dandelion you may never have heard of.



Sweet peas



Scabiosa



Snapdragons

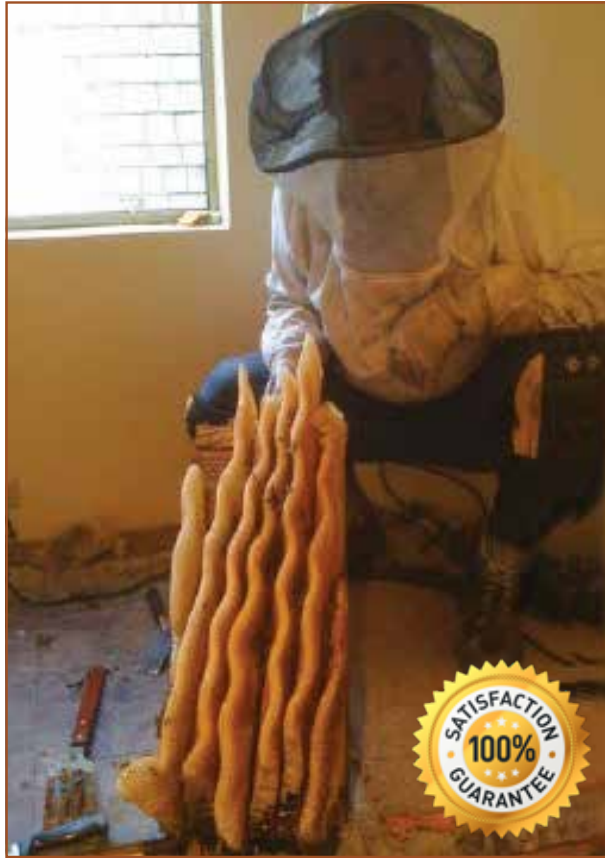
TIPS FOR MAKING BEEKEEPING EASIER

By Ettamarie Peterson

Reducing the size of the entrances to your hives is a good idea, but I learned last year that you don't want to overdo it. I had made an entrance very small and bees died in the hive. Because the entrance was so small, the funeral bees could not take the bodies out and they piled up inside blocking the entrance even more. Consequently, the entire colony died! Christine Kurtz said that she sweeps the entrance and screened bottom board each day with a stick, helping the bees get rid of the dead bees. Watch those entrances for clues to what is happening in the hives. You should still see bees bringing in pollen.



Bees love bottle brush!
Photo by Ettamarie Peterson



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2020 Board Members and Other Helpful People

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Roster of SCBA Resources

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:

**Sonoma County Beekeepers' Assoc.
P.O. Box 98
Santa Rosa, CA 95402-0098**

**REMEMBER: This month's
meeting is a ZOOM Meeting
(see page 1 for details!)**

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!