

The Monthly Extractor



Volume 46, Issue 2

February 2021

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

President's Message

Greetings Fellow Beeks,

Well, we got through January! So much has happened this last month and although it's been cold and rainy the air feels lighter and there's a sense of new beginnings and healing for not only our Country but Sonoma County.

As we navigate through the Covid challenges, now figuring out the vaccination process, and wait patiently for our turn, we at least know that being scared and isolated is coming to an end. More than likely we aren't going to be able to resume our Bee Cafes and Hive dives for a while (hopefully summer) but we still have Zoom!

And speaking of Zoom: I hope you were able to join us last month for our speaker, Hillary Kearny, on hive inspections. I think it was one of the clearest and thorough beginning videos I've ever seen. I learned some really great ways to help me navigate my inspections that I will be adopting this spring. It is going to be posted in the Members Only section under videos if you'd like to watch it. I highly recommend taking the time!

You will be getting our annual Member Survey sometime in early February. Please take the time to fill it out. It's the tool our Bee Share team uses to find homes for the swarms and splits that will be here soon. Yes indeed, some are predicting swarms starting as early as mid-February! Make sure you get your equipment ready. Take advantage of the weather and ready those frames and swarm traps!

Don't forget to get your questions to the "Ask the Experts" form on our website. Then join us at 6pm for 40 minutes of Q & A with a team of experts! It's a great way to get your questions answered (all questions welcome) and meet other beekeepers in your clusters. Utilize the Chat room on Zoom to help each other. I noticed so many of you were making connections last month, that's what this Association is all about!

Anyone interested in posting one or two Honey recipes a month? Please send to me at President@sonombees.org.

Thank you to all the folks behind the scenes working

to keep our Association growing and thriving, even with all the challenges.

All the best,

Kelli Cox
2021 SCBA President



February Calendar

Monthly Meeting: Monday, February 8, 2021
SCBA Zoom General Meeting
Sign on at: 6:00 to 8:30pm

<https://zoom.us/j/95855399420?pwd=aJJGam5FT-GV4TjY2RVZLTjE3TTdZZz09>

Meeting ID: 958 5539 9420

Passcode: 264815

6pm - Zoom Meeting opens
6:05pm - "Ask the Experts" Q&A begins,
6:40 - SCBA news and meet our newbees
7:00pm - Presentation begins [See Page 2 for details]
8:00-8:30 - Presentation concludes
8:30 - end of meeting

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February Speaker

Stephen Repasky of Meadowsweet Bees

BIO: Stephen Repasky is a second-generation beekeeper living in Pittsburgh, PA. EAS Certified Master Beekeeper, Author of Swarm Essentials and current president of the PA State Beekeepers Association.. Manages approximately 200 colonies (all single brood chamber) for honey production, queen production and nucleus colonies.

TOPIC: Swarm Management: What's Happening in Your Hives? Swarming is a powerful instinct, one that most successful beekeepers have encountered by their second year. In this presentation we outline the ramifications of swarming behavior (highlighting the often-overlooked benefits), proven management techniques, and how to recover and even prosper from a successful swarm attempt.

WEBSITE: <http://meadowsweetbees.com>

Regional Cluster Coordinator News

January has come to an end.... Here comes February! The dry warmer than normal month sure has brought our hives to life! Much of the cluster-based zoom education was focused on various aspects of equipment, as this is the time to get your hive clean and ready for bees! Remember, if you have any questions about your equipment, location for your hive, etc. please reach out to your cluster coordinators via e-mail. They are happy to assist, and/or find a volunteer who can.

Rorie Sweeney

Regional Cluster Coordinator



Central Cluster held a zoom meeting on January 16th. After introductions and welcoming new members, we talked about challenges faced in 2020 and what we will continue to face in 2021. We talked about the status of our hives and viewed a slide presentation focused on hive equipment. Central Cluster is now geared up to host a monthly zoom café and we are looking forward to sharing in this upcoming beekeeping season.

If you are a Central Cluster member and want to participate in helping our cluster members or the SCBA in general, please let us know. I would welcome the help with Central Cluster. Just think of the new friends you can meet and share beekeeping experiences with.

Bee well,

Steve Heglin

West Cluster held a marathon first zoom meeting of the New Year. We discussed and had slideshow presentations about cleaning and sterilizing hives as well as basic equipment needs for beekeepers. Additionally, Gina Brown shared her Tom Seeley-inspired adaptations to hive equipment. As if that wasn't enough, we were treated to a little poetry by West Cluster member, Kathleen Fatooh. (See below) It was great to connect with old friends and welcome new members!

Bee Poetry

by Kathleen Fatooh (West Cluster member)

Once a bee who was trying to be funny
gathered brandy to make into honey.
The whole hive fermented.
The bees went demented.
But the beekeeper made lots of money!

South Cluster - Save the Date!

"Coming out of Winter" a Serge Labesque teaching presented by Nikki Hull Campbell from South Cluster.

Date: Saturday February 20

Time: 10am start

Zoom invite will be sent in February with additional details.

Go to www.sonomabees.org to renew your membership if you have not done so yet! You will not be on our swarm list unless you have paid for 2021!

SCBA Pillars of Conduct

As a regional beekeeping association, we gather around our mutual interest in honey bees and their care. Our love for the bees brings a diverse community together and in difficult times this can add tension to our lives. It cannot be overstated how difficult 2020 was for everyone, from pandemic to political struggles to multiple devastating wildfires, and yet through it all we remained an active, loving community. SCBA has and always will operate with principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion as a foundation; our members will not discriminate on any basis.

Moving forward into 2021 we would like to remind ourselves of this fact and be mindful of the following pillars of conduct:

1. We treat each other with dignity and respect: We are a kind and caring association and uphold these values in all our interactions and workings.
2. We act with integrity and honesty: We are all volunteers and owe it to each other to show up, be accountable, and follow through on our commitments.
3. We remember our shared love: The bees are what brought us here and what keep us here, and we will continue building for them.

Kelli Cox

President Sonoma Beekeepers Association
president@sonomabees.org

2021 SEASON BEE SHARE DETAILS HERE!

All SCBA members in good standing will receive by email a survey on February 10th. This survey is important as it helps us collect information from members who are requesting new swarms or a hive split. We also use this opportunity to learn from beekeepers who may have hives that successfully over-wintered and may produce swarms or possibly provide the opportunity to be split and ultimately share the bees with other cluster members.

The Bee Share Program is a voluntary participatory program run by the SCBA cluster groups with the ultimate goal of sharing local bees. The primary goal of this program is to maintain and support local Sonoma County cluster-specific honey bee genetics (to the extent possible, given commercial drones). By sharing and working together, we create community amongst cluster members. Within cluster

groups, we support and strengthen cluster member cooperation and bee buddy relationships.

If you are looking to possibly receive a swarm donation or hive split through your cluster group, please complete the survey in a timely manner. Bee Share Coordinators will reach out to you to confirm details before placing you on the "Needs Bees" list for your cluster. We then wait for the swarms and splits to become available and donated. The "Bee Share Program" is by no means a guarantee that you will receive a swarm or split, however we strive to get bees to all those who request them.

Please note: Due to very high demand, priority is often given to members who lost bees due to wildfires, members without bees, and to those members who are active volunteers for their Cluster and the SCBA.

The Bee Share Team

Bee Plants for February

By Alice Ford-Sala

As lovers of nature, bees and flowers, we look forward to the lengthening daylight as it stirs the queen in her cluster, the seeds and bulbs in the cold soil, and the sap in the depths of our plant allies.

With the difficult year we just had -- including illness, distance, fires and drought -- I thought I would concentrate on healing plants in 2021. Healing for our pollinator friends, our fragile planet and us.

Valerian *Valeriana officinalis*

Family: *Caprifoliaceae*

Valerian has long history as a therapeutic for anxiety, insomnia and nervousness. The root is harvested and is made into teas, tinctures and capsules. The roots are quite pungent when dried; sometimes the odor is likened to old cheese or gym socks. Originally native to Europe, it has spread widely across North America.



Valerian

Valerian is a perennial; you can grow it from seed or root clump division. It is said to be easy to grow, given partial shade to full sun, rich soil and sufficient water. It self-sows freely. In some areas it can be invasive, so be sensitive to this when planting near wild areas.

With lacy, ferny leaves, Valerian grows 3 to 5 feet tall, topped with umbels of white-pink and mildly fragrant flowers that are very attractive to honey bees and other pollinators. Valerian provides both nectar and pollen for their benefit during the bloom time, June through August.

It is often called "garden heliotrope" as it resembles that flower but is not related. Another false cognate is *Centranthus ruber*, which is commonly called Red Valerian. Being so tall and lacy, it makes a nice background for other smaller plants or as a screen between garden areas.

Although it is commonly used and is generally considered safe, you should be cautious when using any herb for the first time and use a small amount until you know you can tolerate it. If you have any underlying health issues, check with your medical provider before using it.



Alice Ford-Sala

East Cluster -- sharing this Poem:

Mary Oliver and Bees Happiness

by Mary Oliver from *American Primitive*

In the afternoon I watched
the she-bear; she was looking
for the secret bin of sweetness -
honey, that the bees store
in the trees 'soft caves
Black block of gloom, she climbed down
tree after tree and shuffled on
through the woods. And then
she found it! The honey-house deep
as heartwood, and dipped into it
among the swarming bees - honey and comb
she lipped and tongued and scooped out
in her black nails, until

maybe she grew full, or sleepy, or maybe
a little drunk, and sticky
down the rugs of her arms,
and began to hum and sway.
I saw her let go of the branches,
I saw her lift her honeyed muzzle
into the leaves, and her thick arms
as though she would fly -
an enormous bee
all sweetness and wings -
down into the meadows, the perfection
of honeysuckle and roses and clover -
to float and sleep in the sheer nets
swaying from flower to flower
day after shining day.

From Your Editor

For many, many years we were extremely fortunate to have Serge Labesque give us his words of wisdom guiding us through our beekeeping tasks throughout the year. We know he is a hard act to follow, but would anyone like to submit a monthly column to this newsletter? It is extremely beneficial to all beekeepers, especially the newest ones. Let me know if you want to do this! Send me an email to ettamarie@petersonsfarm.com. Your words will be considered your opinions but should be based on good science, as Serge's always was. It does not to be as lengthy as Serge's was, for sure.

Etta Marie Peterson



SWARM SEASON 2021

Swarm season is fast approaching and there are a few things that need to be addressed before it arrives. The swarm list is a free public service offered by the Sonoma County Beekeeper's Association. The list will remain as it was last year with no new members added for the 2021 swarm season. If you were on last year's list there are two things that you need to do prior to your name being reactivated. First, your membership dues must be current and, second, you must sign and return the 2021 contract that will be sent to you shortly via email. Once these two requirements have been met you will be set to go.

The one and only exception we will make is that if you were on the swarm list in 2019 and for whatever reason you chose not to participate last year; we can add you back in for this year once you have met the two requirements mentioned above.

Due to the pandemic, we will not be having any swarm etiquette training. The swarm reporting feature on our website will be reactivated and I encourage everyone

capturing swarms or doing splits to PLEASE use it!

I know that there were a lot of losses this last year, as I wasn't immune to that. Don't despair: Everyone can still capture swarms and do splits whether you're on the swarm list or not. If you are in a good location, swarm traps have been very successful for many members. Then there is also the Needs Bees list! Look for the article by the Bee Share Team in this newsletter for more detail on how to get on that list.

I hope this season brings us all lots of swarms and that members with healthy, successful colonies will be willing to do splits so we all can have bee colonies this year. Please be generous and donate any extra swarms or splits back to the members of our wonderful organization. Thank you for all your understanding. I'm hopeful that before too long, we will be able to meet together in person again, as I have really missed that.

Thank You,

John McGinnis,
SCBA Swarm Coordinator

GARDENING FOR BEES

The G4B group enjoyed a refreshing break after 2020's very productive and creatively executed season of getting forage plants in the ground. As we face yet another year of challenge and change, we will be approaching both plant development and plant sales with due caution, in compliance with county restrictions. Both format and timing of our plant sales will be tweaked in an effort to keep all G4B and SCBA members safe from Covid-19.

Beginning with our first meeting of the year, in February, we will set goals for months ahead as the pandemic continues. The first plant sale will likely be delayed to May or even June.

The group has received queries about availability of lavender plants, so a few of our propagators have been experimenting with that challenge. Lavender is a woody plant that takes time to root, more so than the usual G4B offerings. Sibi predicts, "Life will be full of promises and peaches in late summer when the majority of the population is vaccinated. Meanwhile, I'm propagating a French lavender variety that will take 6-9 months before I can even check if they've rooted."

So, although we cannot promise or even predict plant availabilities, G4B Group would like to share our spirit of optimism with a photo of Angy Nowicki's lavender starts. Patience, only time will tell. Also, a photo from Sibi of her Tree Dahlia in bloom.

As the year progresses, G4B hopes to share educational meetings featuring pollinator gardening skills with all G4B members via one or two Zoom meetings. We'll keep you posted as educational content is developed.

In the meantime, G4B's former leader, Ellen Sheron, shares her timely and thorough approach to the tasks

of managing your pollinator garden through winter months for robust results in the 2021 growing season. There is so much to learn from Ellen's expertise.

Happy gardening preparations to all.



Lavender starts in progress
photo by Angy Nowicki



Tree Dahlia in bloom
photo by Sibi Bugarin

Pollinator Gardens

What to do in Winter

Looking out the window at my pollinator gardens



in winter, it's hard to remember when they were bursting with flowers of every color—bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds were busy visiting the flowers, and the entrances to our hives were crowded with honeybees, carrying pollen and nectar into the hive.

So much life going on back then!

What I see now are brown and grey sticks, spent blooms, and dried seed heads. Even on sunny days, I rarely see bees entering or leaving the hive. I do see lots of birds, eating seeds and berries that result from all the pollination that took place growing season.

You might think the garden is dead, but on closer inspection, you'll see that many or most of the plants are actually dormant, which means they've temporarily reduced their metabolic activity during the cold winter months. Although the outer foliage may die back, there's still abundant life in the roots and core of the plant. The plant is developing leaf and flower buds in preparation for the coming growing season.

Every year, I look forward to this time to look closely at what's growing, plan for the next growing season, and help the plants get ready for an always surprising burst of growth come spring. Since I became a beekeeper about five years ago, my primary goal as a gardener is to maximize the amount of forage for pollinators every month of the year. That means I need to focus on:

- Choosing bee-friendly plants
 - Making sure every plant is healthy and has the correct amount of sun and water
 - Pruning to produce lots of flowering branches
 - Improving the soil so plants have all the nutrients they need and are able to withstand heat and drought, and the soil microbes the plants depend on are thriving.
- Here are my winter tasks. This is it—I actually do very little during the actual “growing season.”

Cleanup

Remove dead annual plants. Plants that complete an entire life cycle in one growing season. They may be dead, but many have formed seeds that will germinate in the spring or summer. Examples: zinnia, cosmos, annual sunflowers, tithonia, and many native wildflowers. I often collect seedheads to plant later in the year, or I save the seeds to give to other gardeners. Many will self-sow around

the dead plants. Let them grow or move them to another area of the garden.

Cut back perennial plants. These are plants that typically live for three years or more. Perennials make up most of my garden. The foliage may or may not die back during the winter, then regrows in the spring. Examples: salvias, penstemons, asters, teucrium, calamint, yarrows, perennial sunflowers, and bee balms. To create more flowers and reduce nonproductive woody growth, many can be cut back severely in the winter.



Chilean aster (*Aster chilensis* 'Purple Haze') before pruning and after pruning

Reduce the size of patches of plants that threaten to take up too much space. I call them “thicket formers”—plants such as New England aster, Maximillian sunflower, goldenrods, and bee balms. Many spread by underground runners. These are some of my favorite plants, but they can take over. Just dig up plants around the edge of the thicket; you can move them to other parts of the garden, give them to friends and neighbors, or compost them. You'll usually need to cut them back first.



New goldenrod plants
Fireworks goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa* 'Fireworks') before pruning
(note new growth at base)

Divide plants that can be used in other parts of the garden



Sedum 'Autumn Joy'



Cut-back Sedum



New Sedum plants

crown. You can use your own if you have it, buy a few bags from your nursery, or purchase it by the yard from places like [Sonoma Compost Company](#), [Grab N' Grow](#), or [Wheeler Zamaroni](#).



Part of cut-back and mulched garden: penstemon, lavender bee balm, horehound, shrub marigold, calamint, flowering carrot, delphinium, and more!

Prune woody shrubs and trees to create more blooming branches, reduce size, and remove diseased wood. Remove diseased or insect-infested plants and put them in the green can. Remove weeds, by hand-pulling, hoeing, mulching, or [soil solarization](#). If you have a drip irrigation system, check to make sure everything is working; repair plugged emitters or broken PVC pipes.

Happy gardening!

Ellen Sherron

Assessing the garden

Once you've accomplished these tasks, you'll have a better view of your garden. You can stand back and make some decisions about how to improve it for the next growing season.

Move any plants that are in the wrong place — too much or not enough sun, too much or not enough water, too large for the space. Some plants just never thrived, or maybe you don't like the way they look. Maybe they're okay plants, but you've never seen a pollinator visit. Some are way too invasive. Especially if you have limited space, you may decide to remove the plants or move them to another part of the garden.

A cardinal rule of pollinator gardening is: bees prefer large blocks of the same kind of plant. Can you expand patches of plants that do well and that bees really seem to like?

Do you have plants that provide forage every month of the year? If not, introduce plants that bloom when there's not much for bees to eat—often late fall or winter. Many California natives bloom during the winter or early spring. These resources list pollinator plants for all seasons: [The Bee-friendly Garden](#), Kate Frey and Gretchen LeBuhn; [Attracting Native Pollinators](#), The Xerces Society; [California Bees & Blooms](#), Gordon W. Frankie et al.

And finally, is there a place in your yard where you can tuck in just a few more pollinator plants? Plant a vine up that ugly fence, create a hedgerow, replace all or part of a lawn with blooming groundcover plants.

Mulch mulch mulch

After removing dead or unhealthy plants, pruning, and thinning your garden, add a shovel or two of compost around each plant, being careful not to cover the plant's



Bee Notes

By Rachel Parker

For most of us in Sonoma County, the summer of 2020 was hellish: locked down under Covid-19 restrictions, choking on our smoke-filled air, day-time temperatures breaking records and night-times too warm to sleep with the windows open. For me, and, I think, many of you, there was the added crisis of our bees.

August 15 is our wedding anniversary, and I recall sipping amazing red and white blends at a new winery, in 105-degree heat, looking up at the sky as our host said “we are supposed to have some clouds come in, maybe lightening.” Chills went up my sweaty back. By dinner time, at an outdoor table in Healdsburg, the sky was filling with puffy grey and white clouds and a breeze was welcome. But, by midnight, that welcome breeze had brought the clash of atmospheric titans, and lightening lit up the sky.

Our bees said enough is enough, and absconded.

They'd indeed been through a lot. In the spring, we'd welcomed them to their new home by locking them into the hive (having reversed the hive boxes fronts and backs). We nursed the remaining bees to health with sugar-water supplements (thanks to Christine Kurtz's speedy assistance), then held our breath for signs of vitality in the brood. And, low and behold, there were indeed eggs and larvae to be found. And pupae, and new bees. Mother nature was proving her resilience.

Although new beekeepers, we weren't completely ignorant. We had taken Serge Labesque's classes – both introduction and intermediate beekeeping – and followed his advice. I attended SCBA meetings and my cluster meetings most months. We developed friendships with people nearby also keeping bees. I'd read the books and taken notes. It felt like preparing for parenthood.

But just as with actual parenthood, we found book-learning to be far different from day-to-day beekeeping. The overwhelming message from the experts was to observe, record, and try to disturb the busy bees as little as possible. Each day, I'd stroll over to the hive to listen, watch the girls dash in and out; my family notes that I even spoke to the bees as they'd fly from the rock roses to the lavender filling their pouches with pollen. My monthly hive checks became twice monthly during the warming early summer, just to see if we needed to add frames and check for disease. The hive was growing, disease was under control thanks to good hygienics (I guess, as it certainly was not anything we were doing), and I could hear and see the community working in the garden. We planted more salvia, sunflowers, and lippia to support their food stores.

We started to get anxious – really anxious – in early August when we observed challengers at the outside of the hive. We had some choice words about the commercial beekeepers who've parked dozens of hives nearby. We narrowed the entrance and called around for support. On closer inspection, it was clear that the challengers were not bees but yellowjackets, or as one friend calls them “meat-eating bees”. We were prepared and set out wasp traps, enriching them with bits of meat. Within a couple of

hours, the wasps had turned their attention to the yummy bait.

Phew. The entrance was still narrow, but bees were able to come and go unmolested.

But, then the heat, you remember, the heat that felt as a hair dryer was pointed right at normally temperate Sonoma. (The German word for a dry wind, in fact, is the same one for a hair dryer: Föhn.) We put umbrellas over the hives, and then braced the umbrellas with stones as the wind was picking up. Then went for our anniversary celebrations.

Lightening overnight was just too much for the girls to take. In the morning, I went out to look at the hive and heard nothing, the garden was too quiet and it felt like a ghost town.

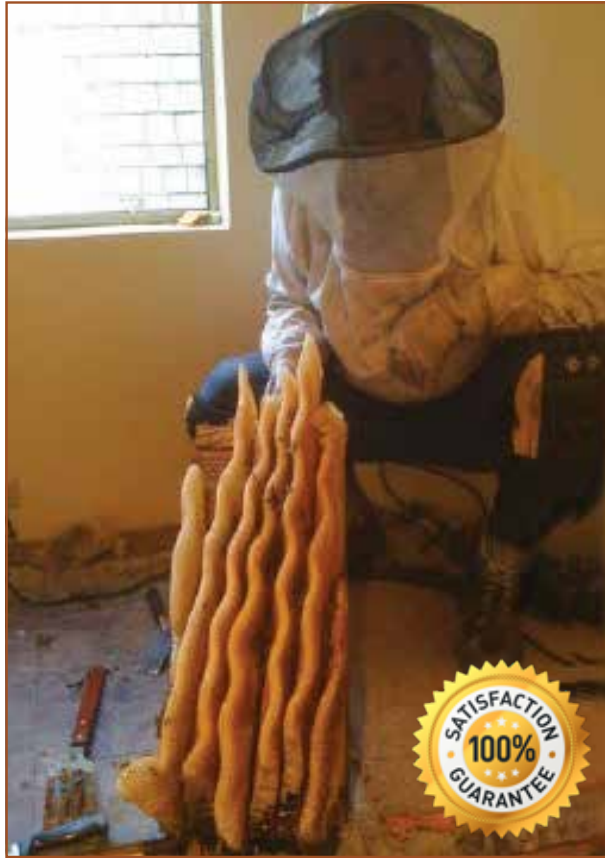
The whole community had up and left. I felt like all of my friends had decided to leave my home and go to a better party. You know, with plenty of drinks and delicious food still spread on the table, music still playing. Where'd they all go? What did I say or do? When we opened the hive, there were a few larvae still trying to complete their journey to become bees, some dead bees on the monitoring board, ants exploring the little honey the community had been able to store. I was heartsick.

So, now, on a strangely bright and warm mid-winter day, I smile when I see or hear a bee buzzing across the garden, settling on our blooming succulents or the bunch in a neighbor's manzanita. I'll gratefully accept a cluster or two, try to deploy better beekeeping techniques, and nurture the cluster. But, I wonder, what could we have done differently? Let's have a conversation, let me know what you did last year, what you think I could do differently. I welcome your comments and advice, and I'll continue to chronicle my efforts to support these amazing members of our community.

Rachel Parker keeps her hives on Sonoma Mountain. You can reach her at rachelroperparker@gmail.com



Rachel Parker



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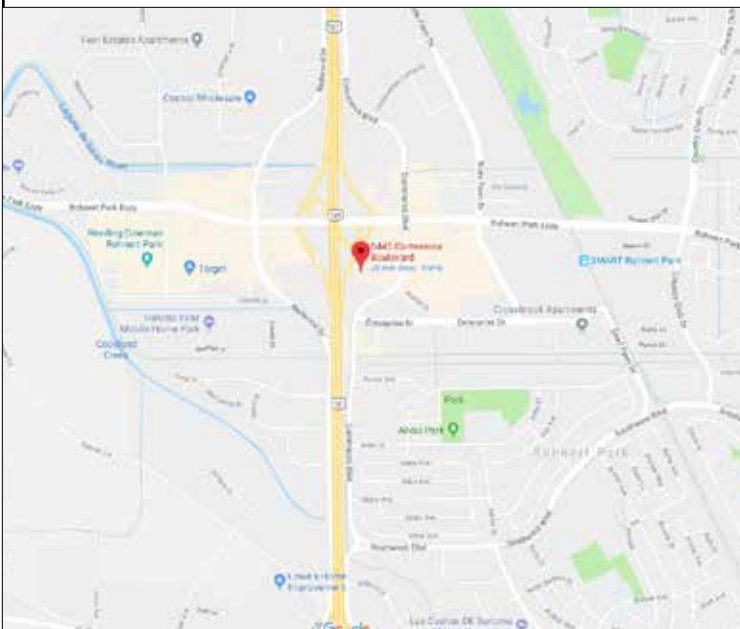


2021 Board Members and Other Helpful People

Click Here
for the Up-to-Date
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; meet new members; bring your own cup and fill it with tea or coffee and have some goodies.

7 pm – Presentation 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!