The Monthly Extractor

Volume 46, Issue 4 April 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 knew it was coming; March Madness and swarms!

This is one of the most exciting times for beekeepers and it is also stressful, as many of our colonies are bursting at the propolized seams!

So, make sure you are ready. We've been stressing to be prepared with your baited swarm traps, prepared hive sets, smokers (and fuel), torches, tools, lots of frames etc.

Do you have a bee buddy yet? If not, contact your Cluster Coordinator, who might be able to help find a match. It is so much more fun and rewarding – and frankly easier – when you can go into a hive with support from a fellow beekeeper.

I am very excited to report that our Beginning and Seasoned Beekeeping Forums are going well. We are having great conversations and sharing ideas and experiences. Keep your questions coming!

It is refreshing to experience a shift in our association. Our community is getting stronger, even during Covid-19 times – perhaps that's why! Zoom is allowing us to break down the geographical boundaries that we have experienced for years. We are now able to meet and share ideas more freely through this new medium and boy is it working.

A shout out to Candace Koseba for setting up our General Meeting presenters! We've had a fantastic first quarter, and it's going to continue: Make sure to tune in for April's presenter, Jennifer Berry talking about Queens.

Following that, for the Forums we will continue the "everything queen" conversation. Until then, bee safe and enjoy the beeautiful weather!

Kelli Cox
2021 SCBA President
president@sonomabees.org

April Calendar

Monthly Meeting: Monday, April 12, 2021
SCBA Zoom General Meeting
Sign on at: 6:00 to 8:30pm

https://zoom.us/j/99560405530?pwd=c05wK3Zs-R1k1M1ZoUlU2azJlaXk0dz09
Meeting ID: 995 6040 5530
Passcode: 098420

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

April Calender Events

April 12 – SCBA General Meeting, 6:00 to 8:30pm
April 19 – New Beekeepers Forum, 7:00pm
April 26 – Seasoned Beekeepers Forum,7:00pm

Contents

This Month's Speaker

Jennifer Robyn Berry started learning the practice of keeping bees in 2003 when an old-timer enlisted her to help him install packages for his clients. It was love at first hive. She has nursed a fascination for insects since toddlerhood, when finding herself covered head to toe by a swarm of happy termites. As one of the few socially accepted obsessions with bugs, beekeeping dovetails well with her background in biology and landscape consultation. Jennifer currently spends her time as a professional beekeeper, teacher, and queen breeder.

The photo was taken at Jennifer's apiary in Marin County when an article written for *Bee Culture* magazine was being put together by Ettamarie Peterson. It was published last year.

www.jennifer-berrybees.com
Facebook: Jennifer Juniper Berry
Instagram: jenniferberry

Photo by Ettamarie Peterson

The SCBA board would like to apologize to Leonard Riepenhoff for a comment in last month's Extractor that implied that his solar ovens might cause harm to bees. That was not our intention and we are sorry for any problems that may have been caused as a result.
– The Board

Regional Cluster Coordinator News

Cluster Activities April 2021

Watch your e-mail for Cluster-specific April invitations. Swarm traps are being visited, and in some cases inhabited by beautiful swarms! If you need any guidance in making or placing a swarm trap on your property please reach out to your Cluster Coordinator Team. They can either guide you or connect you with another beekeeper who can help. Swarm time is here! Please remember to reach out via e-mail to your cluster's BeeShare Coordinator with questions you may have regarding receiving or sharing bees.

March Zoom education sessions and forums were extremely well attended! We want to thank our presenters who did such a wonderful job! March 6 we hosted Hive Splitting (Serge Labesque style teachings) shared by Nikki Hull-Campbell. In addition, Elizabeth Holdman provided a Bee Math session, with this handy locker-code mnemonic: 16-21-24, Queen bee/worker bee/drone bee growth cycle. There is much to gain by understanding the fundamentals of bee math and what's happening with the girls and boys in your hive! On March 20, Christine Kurtz presented Hive Biology via Zoom; her presentation was packed with fantastic photographs and a wide array of information for each slide. Christine's knowledge and experience compounds each year and we are so very thankful she goes out of her way to share it with us. Thank you so very much to our March Zoom speakers! Links to recordings of the presentations and slides are on our website: https://www.sonomabees.org/members-only/video-recordings. (This is in the members-only section; please do not share the links.)

If you were unable to attend either the Beginner Beekeeper forum on the third Monday evening or the Seasoned Beekeeper forum on the fourth Monday you won't want to miss out in April.

The diversity of beekeepers in attendance is wonderful. Our members have lots of experiences and knowledge that we can all learn from. If you don't yet have a bee buddy you may find one during these sessions. To all of you who have participated and shared your questions, experiences, and knowledge – THANK YOU! We are all learning as a group and the excitement of spring is here!

Rorie Sweeney
Regional Cluster Coordinator

Central Cluster Hive Notes

Because Covid-19 continues to keep us from meeting in person, our cluster has not scheduled a café yet. Our meetings are generally a time for members to ask questions, find a bee buddy, and learn about a topic related to a specific time of year. These cafés help not only the seasoned beekeeper but the beginner beekeeper as well. I am going on my fourth year of having bees and not one year has been the same. Like children, each one is different in their own unique way and you must adjust to their needs. I am sure part of the reason for the differences is due to the fires, as there are fewer flowers for the bees in my area to get nectar and pollen. Another reason is the lack of rain. My first year our rainfall was much higher than the last few years. I am glad to see that we are getting some rain now to help the flowering plants produce pollen and nectar.

We have, however, been able to come together as beekeepers over Zoom. I personally want to give a shout out to our President Kelli Cox for arranging the Zoom meetings for the beginner beekeepers on the third Monday of the month at 7:00 and the seasoned beekeepers meeting on the fourth Monday of the month, also at 7:00. These forums allow members to ask questions to help them navigate the "what to do and the how-to dos" of beekeeping. This question and answer forum has been a refresher for me on some topics and has been very helpful.

I was not able to attend the all Cluster Zoom meeting on March 20. Christine Kurtz discussed Hive Biology and Elizabeth Holdman talked about bee math. I heard both topics were very helpful and informative.

I have to say that I was fascinated with our general meeting speaker Dr. Thomas Seeley and his presentation on "How A Honeybee Swarm Chooses Its Home". I was amazed to find out how the bees communicate with each other and work together on finding their new home, what the bees look for, and where they look.

If you have question or a suggestion for topics you would like to know more about, please let me know by sending me an email at Centralcluster@sonomabees.org.

I am still looking for a volunteer or two to help with our Cluster. It takes several bees to make a hive successful just like our cluster. Don't be shy, we do not sting! I am sure you will make a few new friends and learn more at the same time!

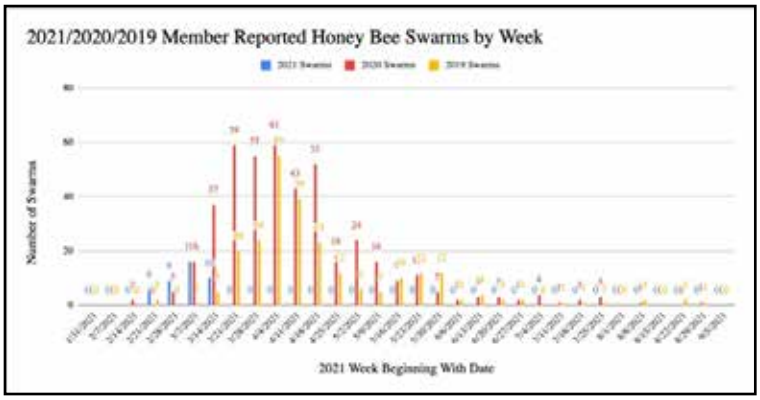
Bee well,

Steve Heglin
Central Cluster Coordinator

Bee Share Program Update Late March 2021

The bulk of the swarm season in Sonoma county occurs between mid-March and mid-May, peaking in mid-April. This can vary a bit by year due to weather. With the cool temperatures and rain over the past few weeks, we've had fewer swarms so far this year than last year at this time.

Below is a histogram of reported swarms by week so far this year compared to the last two years. You can follow the swarms by week at https://www.sonomabees.org/swarms-by-week. A table of the number of swarms by city is at https://www.sonomabees.org/swarms-by-city. You can also find the swarms-by-city and swarms-by-week links in the Swarm Center.



SWARM REPORTING REMINDER – Please report your splits and swarms via your laptop, tablet or phone at https://www.sonomabees.org/member-swarm-report. Going to that link will prompt you to sign-in to the website to file your report.

If you aren't able to use the web, then please email swarm@sonomabees.org and copy your cluster's Bee Share coordinator, e.g.: NorthBeeShare@sonomabees.org.

Please put SWARM REPORT in the subject line and in the body of the email include

- how you heard about the swarm (first hand, friend, public swarm list, etc.)
- the swarm date
- the location of the swarm
- the size (e.g.: softball, football, basketball or beach ball!) or split size in frames
- the recipient's location (yourself or someone else)

If you have a swarm or split to share, please reach out to your cluster's Bee Share coordinator. 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
LINKS: Swarm Center:
https://www.sonomabees.org/swarm-center

Bee Plant of the Month
April 2021

By Alice Ford-Sala

Red Clover Trifolium pratense
Family: Fabaceae

Here is another healing plant. Growing two to three feet tall, red clover is a biennial, which means it grows leaves the first year and blooms the next. The pretty red flowers bloom at the top of green three-leaved stems. Red clover is a fast-growing cover crop that, as you can see from the family name, Fabaceae, is in the bean family. Most members of this illustrious family fix nitrogen from the air by a symbiotic relationship with bacteria that grow on its roots. Farmers and gardeners often inoculate clovers and bean crops with an inoculant that is specific for that crop. The inoculant is Rhizobium bacteria or clover. A good nursery will carry it, or you can order it online. Clover roots also provide erosion control, and many people use it as a green manure, tilling or gently turning it into the soil before planting in the spring. It is also good for weed suppression, especially if you can get it up and growing before weed seeds sprout in the spring.

Red Clover

So, red clover benefits the soil, provides a good livestock forage crop, and bees love it! All clovers are very attractive to bees, which we learned when we were children and running barefoot in the lawn that was also seeded with clover. Watch where you step!

Red clover is used widely in herbal medicine. It is rich in many vitamins and minerals, including trace minerals. It is said to "clean" the blood and lymphatic system. It is also widely used as a tea or tonic or external treatment for skin conditions. It is said to be beneficial for respiratory issues. The flowers and leaves are often recommended for relief of menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and insomnia. Please check with your health care provider before taking any herb or treatment, it may interfere with heart medications and affect blood thinning.

Clover honey is the most popular honey in the US. Many claims are made for its medicinal benefits – as an antioxidant, as a wound dressing, as a blood pressure regulator. I can't speak to those or the claims for the uses of the plant, but your bees will hum happily as they gather the abundant nectar.

Note: Crimson clover – Trifolium incarnatum – is also a wonderful bee plant. It's not as widely cited as a medicinal herb, but it is beneficial in much the same way as red or white clover.

Alice Ford-Sala

Research Buzz!

By Gina Brown

One more column about wild hives, then I'll move on to a different topic! A team from Penn State has released a fascinating, two-year study, comparing wild hives to managed hives. Here is the name of the study and a link to the original research:

The Role of Pathogen Dynamics and Immune Gene Expression in the Survival of Feral Honey Bees, Chauncy Hinshaw, Kathleen C. Evans, Cristina Rosa and Margarita M. López-Uribe, published in *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution.*

Wow! Please don't be put off by the fancy title, as this research asked a few simple questions:

1. Do wild colonies have a higher disease burden that managed colonies?
2. Does a higher disease burden lead to a higher expression of immune genes?
3. Does expression of immune genes correlate to colony survival?

Ok, so let's dig in! The aim was to find wild colonies and "pair" those colonies with a managed hive within seven miles. In the first year, the study included eight pairs and in the second year the researchers added 17 more pairs. Over the course of the study, some colonies died, or were unavailable, so they made substitutions, and ended up with 20 unique wild colonies and 24 unique managed colonies. In each colony, they collected approximately 75 foragers, in the spring and fall each year to measure disease and they dissected 30 bees from each colony to look at immune genes.

To look at disease burden, they measured three common pathogens that infect honey bees: Deformed wing virus (DWV), Black queen cell virus (BQCV), and Nosema ceranae. In the fall sampling of the first year, the DWV levels were significantly higher in the wild colonies compared to managed colonies, but levels were not significantly higher at the other three timepoints. Levels of BQCV and Nosema did not significantly differ between wild and managed colonies at any timepoint.

To look at expression of immune gene expression, they measured six genes (argonaute-2, vago, pgrp-s2, pgrp-1c, defensin-1 and hymenoptaecin). To understand how each of these genes work, you may want to read this article … or get a degree in genetics.

In the spring of the first year, wild colonies had higher average expression of five out of the six immune genes, although pathogen levels were not significantly different at that time. In the fall of the first year, expression of three of six were also higher in wild colonies, where one of six was higher in the managed colonies. In the following year, pathogen levels were similar between wild and managed colonies, yet in the spring, wild colonies had higher average expression of two of the six immune genes. No differences in gene expression were observed in the fall of the second year.

To look at colony survival, they compared over-winter survival rates. For the first year, the overall survival rate was 63% for both wild and managed colonies. For the second year, wild colony survival was 47% and managed colony survival was 38%. In all cases, expression of two specific immune genes (hymenoptaecin and vego) had a significantly positive correlation with over-winter survival.

Ok, so let's go back to our questions:

1. Do wild colonies have more disease? **Sometimes DWV, but not for other diseases.**
2. Does a higher disease burden lead to a higher expression of immune genes? **Possibly, although in this study the wild hives consistently expressed more immune genes than managed hives, even when disease was not higher.**
3. Does expression of immune genes correlate to colony survival? **Yes, expression of hymenoptaecin in wild hives and vero in managed colonies was correlated with survival.**

If you'd like to suggest a topic of research to explore, you can email me: boragelane@comcast.net

Saving a Feral Bee Tree Colony

by Nicholas Freedman

"Hey, Nick, can you help me with this removal?"

I ran into Christine Kurtz on my road and she told me about a colony discovered while a large grove of eucalyptus trees was being removed from a Penngrove property. Taking a look at the pictures, I suggested we load the colony on a trailer and move it as is. I didn't want to disturb them more and knew the risk of cutting out the comb and bees and perhaps losing the queen. She agreed and hoped I could handle it for her.

"Oh heck, yes," I cried out. Eight-plus hours of combined effort by at least nine people, four of us from South Cluster, and we may have saved this feral colony. What an extraordinary effort, experience, and group we have.

It was the calmest colony I have ever been around. First, the section was cut out from its sanctuary tree, exposing a three-foot by one-foot section of comb and colony to the open air. Then an excavator clamped its jaws around the section to move it 50 difficult yards. A chainsaw trimmed hundreds of pounds off the tree' base, then the excavator picked it back up and moved it another 15 yards and dropped it in a trailer. The tree section was wrapped in blankets and driven across town after dark, then picked back up and deposited in my apiary the next morning. Then I patched together the fully exposed colony face using extra bark; the colony had been exposed for more than 24 very cold hours. All the while, not one guard bee bumped me, no one was stung, and none of us had gear on the entire time.

Thankfully, as my tractor was tipping over under the weight of the stump, John and Darlene McGinnis arrived. I was thinking about how I could use his muscle and her smarts, and they pulled right in. They waived me off using a feed-bag to insulate the exposed comb before patching over the face and Darlene suggested the tin roof, the perfect solution. She is a skilled planner and strategic thinker. John laughed at my weak little tractor and once again proved he is a bigger guy than I when he ran home and got his stud machine. My youngest daughter's boyfriend lent a hand, running for the right tools and screws.

Leif, the landowner made the initial call, and he was so generous in the effort to save this colony. He worked with us at every step, and the woodcutters made easy work of moving this massive tree and trimming off thousands of pounds of added weight – all without compensation.

"Boy do I love honeycomb," one of the adorable kids watching the fun said; he was rewarded with a big chunk later. Now I just need to find the next-door neighbors' number and ask them about the old Shasta Trailer parked next door in the dirt.

It was a most excellent bee adventure.

PS – After two days of settling in, bees are flying with pollen coming in. A good sign as they get over this massive trauma.

Exposed and threatened, onsite and ready to move

Tucked in safe, protected and dry

Bee Notes for April

By Rachel Parker

Why do you keep bees?

What do a hot tub, basement bathroom, and a barn have in common? They are all places where some of our local beekeepers got their start in beekeeping.

At his very informative presentation at our General Meeting in March, Dr. Thomas Seeley touched on the topic of beekeeper practices, noting that many practices depend on why a particular beekeeper nurtures these little insects in the first place. And, that, I'm finding can depend on happenstance and serendipity as much as anything when it comes to hobbyists.

My friend Yvette Vloeberghs, who now tends 12 hives in her Napa apiary, truly is an accidental beekeeper: Back in 2007, when she was living in Berkeley, she found a cluster of bees living in a basement bathroom near the laundry. She called a local bee merchant, who offered her a choice: he could knock out the bathroom wall and remove the bees, or place a one-way door on the outside of the house where the bees were entering the structure, position a hive with some attractive-smelling stuff in it, and lure the bees into the hive. After a few days, all of the bees had left the bathroom and set up housekeeping in the hive.

She was captivated by their social patterns. "I enjoy working with them, seeing how they work," she told me.

Ettamarie Peterson fell into beekeeping in a similar fashion. For her, it was a barn wall where bees had set up shop. "We were fascinated to discover them when they broke through the wall board. We made a window to watch them. We covered it up with cardboard when we were not showing it to our friends," she said. Then, one day the hive swarmed. A local beekeeper discovered the swarm on her mailbox and she showed him what she had done to observe the hive when it was in the barn.

"He was impressed and said he would bring me back the bees if I wanted them," then he suggested she buy her equipment at Western Farm Store in Santa Rosa and join the Sonoma County Bee Club, the predecessor to SCBA. This was 27 years ago.

Our own president, Kelli Cox, considers herself an accidental beekeeper, as well. Her first husband had been stung and had an allergic reaction, so beekeeping wasn't something that she expected to take up. But one day about 10 years ago she found a hive had swarmed into her hot tub. She contacted a beekeeper whom she'd met a few weeks earlier (and event that she chalks up to serendipity) and asked what should be done. He came and removed them and cleaned up the mess.

"When he took them away, I missed them and decided I wanted to have them back, without much understanding of why," she adds. "The beekeeper said we could have the bees back, but would have to join SCBA and wait for 3 weeks."

Lucky for her, the next general meeting was in two days. Her conversion was instant. "I felt like I'd walked into a different world and loved it."

Then there are people like me. I had a few pots of lavender on the deck of our old home in the East Bay, and I enjoyed watching a few bees visit. I'd have lunch and watch as they flew from bud to bud, busy, intent on a task, and not a bit interested in either me or my tomato sandwich. It was hypnotic, and I decided that once I moved to Sonoma, I'd love to have bees in our garden. Then, in my own little bit of serendipity, one of the first neighbors I met when we moved here was a new beekeeper, and she gave me all kinds of good tips, including joining SCBA and taking classes from Serge Labesque.

All of the beekeepers I've met and spoken with have a curious nature, but not all are scientists. Every one of them has learned from other beekeepers, dived into learning about the bees' nature, and invested both time and money to tend to the bees. Like me, all of the beekeepers I contacted for this column said they got into bees because it is so rewarding to watch their work, to support their colonies, and know that for all of that, the cluster may swarm or may fail for unknown reasons.

It is a combination of art, science and work with nature that is sometimes unpredictable, said one local beekeeper. He ended up as a beekeeper when a family member decided to revive an abandoned hive on the family's property. Not quite an accidental beekeeper, but very close.

As hobbyists – whether accidental or intentional – we can make choices about how we practice beekeeping. We can feed them or not; we can buy treatments for disease and mites, set up protection against animals and ants or not – perhaps guided by our personal principals of supporting strong lines of bee genetics, or simply supporting our colony. The commercial beekeepers who move their hives thousands of miles per year to pollinate crops have fewer choices. When their hives fail or when a swarm occurs, they often need to replace that colony in order to meet their financial commitments. (For an incredible look at bees and commercial beekeeping, I recommend "More Than Honey," a 2012 documentary about the challenges the bees and society face around the world.)

For me, keeping bees is one of the ways I try to "do my part" to help in the environmental challenges we're living through and to generate something positive on my seven acres of land. To help the bees – if we get any this year – I'm planting a pollinator garden (despite my reservations about water use) and mulling over a feeding program through the year. I'll address mites and disease if and when they come up. But, my goal for my bees this year is to keep the hive going.

Rachel Parker

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

Letter to the Editor

Veterinary Student Seeking to Shadow a Beekeeper

My name is Courteney Thompson, and I am currently attending Western University's College of Veterinary Medicine in the Class of 2023. I was born and raised in Sonoma County in the town of Windsor, and I aspire to return to the county post-graduation with the goal of working as a local large animal veterinarian.

In my first year of veterinary school, I was exposed to the world of veterinary medicine as it applies to honey bees by becoming a student member of the Honey Bee Veterinary Consortium. As this platform allows me to observe the interaction between veterinarians and beekeepers, it also made me aware of the importance of experiencing for myself what entails successful beekeeping if I wish to better understand the pathology that may accompany these fascinating and important animals.

In past summers I have worked for Cotati Large Animal Hospital and would come across beekeepers who either owned their own livestock along with their honey bees or incorporated their apiaries into other people's cattle and sheep/goat pastures. Additionally, I have an overall passion for applying methods of conservation and holistic management to my veterinary degree, and considering the important overlap livestock has with honey bees, I take a strong interest in learning and experiencing more of what it takes to care for them in addition to the personal research I have already done. I have also noticed in school the possible disconnect that can stand between beekeepers and the veterinarians who are required in certain circumstances to oversee their treatment and yet are inexperienced in comparison. I would love to be able to bridge this gap even on just a local level is possible.

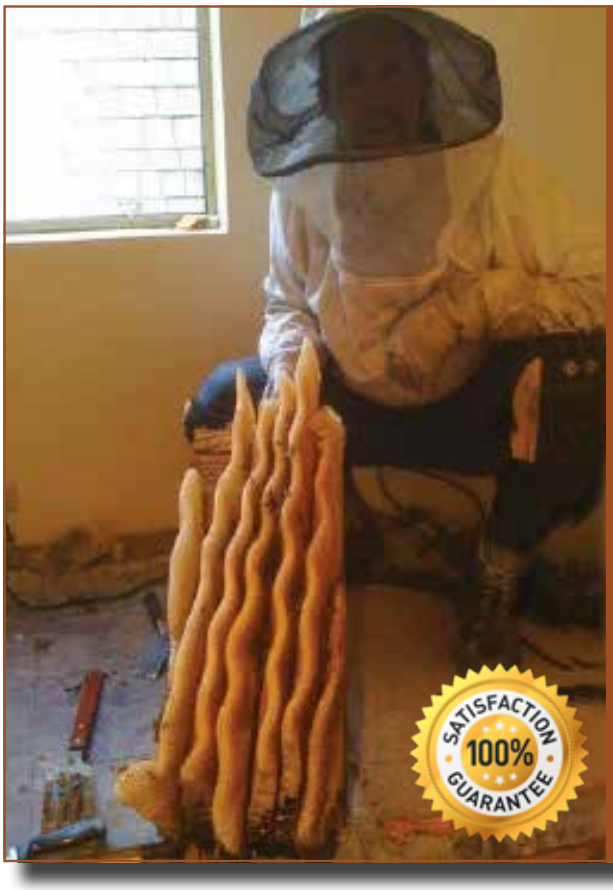
For the above-mentioned reasons, I am seeking a summer opportunity to shadow a local Sonoma County beekeeper any time between the dates of July 5th to July 16th of 2021. I have included my contact information below, and I thank you all so much for taking the time to read my background. I appreciate any additional resources you may have to provide or recommend me on my honey bee educational journey.

E-Mail: thompson.court31@gmail.com
Cell Phone: (707) 547-7545 texts or calls are welcome

Editor's Note

In the past, veterinarians just might happen to be interested in bees on their own but not very many were. Now some medications for bees are actually only able to be prescribed by vets. It is good that this vet student has an interest and is reaching out to our association to find a mentor for a week. We need to educate this group of students for many reasons. I hope someone in SCBA will follow up with Courteney's request. Here is her bio and contact information.

Etta Marie Peterson



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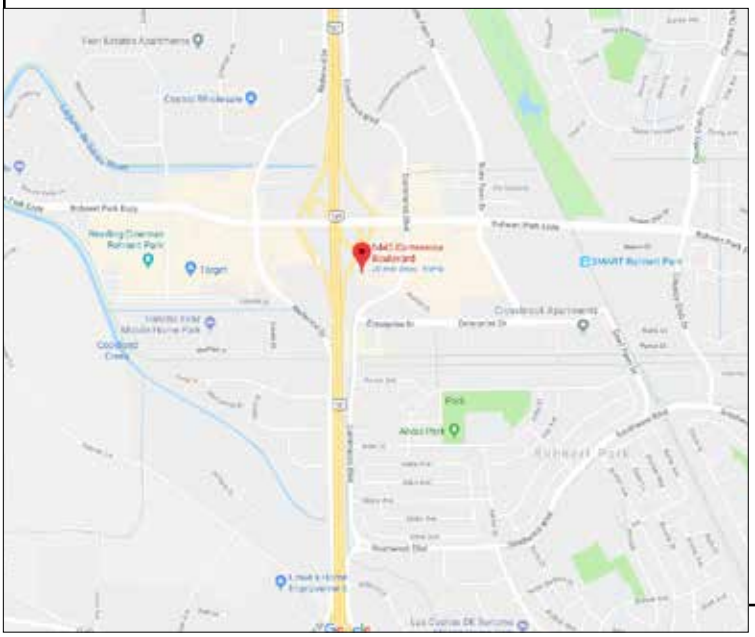
2021 Board Members

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!