

# The Monthly Extractor



Volume 46, Issue 7

July 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

We are halfway through the year! How did that happen?

This has probably been the busiest, most challenging, and most exciting year thus far for me as President of SCBA! We've made so many strides forward and are still going strong!

Coming out of Covid, navigating a new year not knowing what restrictions we were facing, rethinking meetings, hiring our Volunteer Coordinator, and dealing with a crazy swarm season – plus the drought – have kept me on my toes.

The best part, I'm still excited and proud to be part of such an amazing organization and continue to look for leaders who will take on roles in our association!

We have a lot of new beekeepers this year, and I know many of you are eager to volunteer and step up into leadership roles such as Cluster and Garden Coordinators and even join the Board of Directors as a Board or at-large member. It's a great way to meet others with similar interests and goals, serve vital roles within our SCBA community, and help forge the future of SCBA.

Here are some of the Association highlights that make us outstanding!

~ First, we currently have more than 500 members! When I joined, almost 10 years ago, we had just over 200 members! Our association has evolved from a beekeeping club into a unique, strong association that is beginning to make some significant strides in Sonoma County and, more excitingly, carve a path to really actualizing our mission.

~We are the only association (to my knowledge) that has a gardening program! Not only is this extraordinary, our Gardening for Bees program strengthens our mission through propagating plants by our members (in the gardening program) for our members! One of the many conversations I've been having with folks is the need to perhaps have fewer beekeepers and more "beetenders!"

It is so important to remember that keeping bees (in hives) is not the only way to help support and nurture our bees, both honey and native, as well as all the other pollinators. Planting pollinator-friendly plants is a must! As we discuss the challenges with hive density, robbing, feeding, and other issues that continue to arise, consider what you can do to be a steward for our pollinators. Imagine what a difference it would make if everyone planted and tended to at least 10 pollinator-friendly plants every year in their garden.

(Continued on Page 2)

## July Calendar

No meeting- Picnic instead on July 17th!  
Hooray!

See flyer on page 3!

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## Notes from the Ag Dept. Apiculture IS Agriculture

Greetings, Beeks!

Recent questions from property owners and beekeepers have led to this month's topic: NEIGHBOR COMPLAINTS.

I'm learning that not everyone is a big fan of the bees. A few times each month, I get calls from folks asking what the rules are about beekeeping, and what they can do to make the hives in the neighborhood go away. ... HUH?? That's what I thought, too! Why would you want them to go away?

Well, some folks have a genuine fear of things that they don't really understand. I had one conversation where the caller was associating the hives that they could see in their neighbor's field with the yellow jackets that kept coming around their barbeque. They simply didn't know the difference, and their fear was profound. Their son has a severe "bee allergy" (meaning an allergy to all stinging insect venom).

So, what are the rules? Well, it's complicated. Many cities have a limit of two hives per single-family residence. This means hives may not be kept at apartment and condo complexes. Some cities also denote a specific distance that hives must be kept away from property lines. Please check with your city for their take on beekeeping.

If we're talking about county jurisdiction (outside of city limits), there is no restriction for beekeeping. Sonoma County is a "right to farm" county, but that ordinance only applies to certain zoning criteria. Ag-heavy areas are protected by the ordinance.

All that being said, the best possible answer to any question or concern about where the hives are placed is: KEEP THE COMMUNICATION LINES OPEN. Have a conversation with the concerned neighbors. They might not understand the behavior of bees, or the difference between the gentle Apoidea girls and their more aggressive Vespidae cousins. In one case, the complainant didn't want to see the dozens of hives when they looked out their window. The beekeeper was able to move the hives about a hundred feet to be out of view of the neighbor.

According to regulation, if the honey bees are determined to be aggressive during an inspection, then they are considered to be a nuisance and must be abated or moved. I have not yet come across that situation. So, when I receive those complaint calls, the best I can do is listen, explain the regulations within my jurisdiction, and encourage the caller to talk with the beekeeper to explain their concerns and to gain a better understanding of bee behavior.

On another note, please make sure your hive registration in BeeWhereCalifornia.com is current. Registration is required if your hives are not on your own property, or if you sell any product such as honey, comb, etc. If Sonoma County is your "home county", then your \$10 registration fee (regardless of number of hives) and registration number can be phoned in at our main office: (707) 565-2371 or mailed to:

Sonoma County Department of Agriculture  
133 Aviation Blvd, Suite 110  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Feel free to contact me with any questions.

*Beverly Hammond*

[Beverly.hammond@sonoma-county.org](mailto:Beverly.hammond@sonoma-county.org)  
Sonoma County Agricultural Inspector III  
(707) 565-2371

~We are the only association that has a Bee Share Program. The intent of this very important program is to help our members keep local bees and limit bees imported from outside Sonoma County.

~We are the only association that has a Regional Cluster Program, which encourages educational support with Bee Buddies and SCBA Educators who provide ongoing education with videos that can be viewed on the members-only section of our website.

~Thanks to Zoom and efforts by our coordinators and core volunteers, we started the Beginning and Seasoned Beekeeper Forums, through which we've been able to support new beekeepers and begin conversations about the challenges our bees and beekeepers are facing in Sonoma County. A huge thank you to Eric Crawford (north), Elizabeth Holdmann (south) and Shannon Carr (central) for taking over leading the Beginning Beekeepers Forum.

~We've been discussing hive density, feeding, robbing and all things associated with our ongoing drought and the absolute need for good forage to help the honey bees thrive. These conversations are so very important as we continue to lose hives to starvation and disease. It is great to see folks talking about some of the more challenging topics and to really start looking into some of the facts, reasons, and assumptions that have shaped many of our opinions and caregiving strategies. Now that most of us are able to socialize again, we can resume hive diving (in larger groups) and gather at Cluster Cafes and actually be with our bee buddies again. This support system we have built for our membership has been very helpful to everyone, and while parts were missed during this last year and half, we found other ways to connect, and we continue to evolve and improve the systems we have set in place.

Here's to the next 6 months. Upwards and onwards!

~We are still working on how we will be resuming the General Meetings. I can say it is going to be a combination of Zoom and in-person as we have seen how many members were able to join us with Zoom that otherwise couldn't. We WILL NOT have a General Meeting in July. Rather we will have Our SCBA Summer picnic on July 17th and I'm so looking forward to seeing you there.

*Kelli Cox*

2021 SCBA President

[president@sonomabees.org](mailto:president@sonomabees.org)



**You are invited to**  
**Sonoma County Beekeepers Association**  
**Annual Summer Picnic!**

We are all super excited for our annual Summer Picnic this year! Join us for a fun afternoon filled with friends we have not seen in way to long, yard games, pasta dinner (and polenta for those who are gluten free), a gorgeous sunset, and meet our new volunteer coordinator – Shannon Carr.

**Location:** Bees and Blooms – 3383 Petaluma Hill Rd, Santa Rosa (Thank you Susan and Geoff!)

**Date/Time:** Saturday July 17, 4pm to Sunset

**Food:** SCBA is providing a pasta and polenta dinner from Pasta King, including salad, desert, and non-alcoholic beverages

**What you can bring:** Your own utensils (help us reduce waste by bringing reusable plates and silverware), food storage containers (if there is any extra, we don't want it to go to waste), alcoholic beverages (BYO B&W)

**Yard Games:** We have a giant Jenga and cornhole games, but if you have a favorite yard game you want to share, bring it along!

**Want to help?** We could use volunteers to help with set up, serving dinner, and clean up. If you would like to help you can sign up with Shannon via email: [volunteercoordinator@sonomabees.org](mailto:volunteercoordinator@sonomabees.org).

RSVP – By Friday, July 9th on the event page on our website at <https://sonomabees.org/event-4331056> or send an email to [volunteercoordinator@sonomabees.org](mailto:volunteercoordinator@sonomabees.org) to let Shannon know if you can make it so we can plan food appropriately and let her know if you are bringing any activities.

## Cluster Activities 2021

**Mark your Calendars for our planned July Zoom education gatherings. Zoom reminders will be sent via separate e-mails in July.**

Mon. July 19, 7:00pm: New Beekeepers Forum

Mon. July 26, 7:00pm: Seasoned Beekeepers Forum

If you joined us for either of the June Zoom forums, you were reminded that Summer Solstice has passed. It is hard to believe the year is half over and our bees are starting to ready their hives for the cold fall and winter months. Stay connected to our SCBA team of experienced beekeepers. If you have a hive situation and need guidance, please reach out to your Cluster Coordinator Team. Don't wait until it is too late!

We look forward to seeing/meeting you at the Annual SCBA BBQ set for Sat July 17th. Come enjoy dinner and a beautiful sunset with us!

**Mark your calendars for our August All-Cluster Zoom Education** featuring our very own Nikki Hull-Campbell of the South Cluster. She will be presenting **"Preparing your Hives for Winter," Serge Labesque style.** Saturday, August 21, 9:30am. Invitation and Zoom link will be sent in August.

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## Gardening for Bees

Our garden group has done a fantastic job of putting vital gardening information on our website.

Dearth Plant List: [A comprehensive list of plants that produce nectar through the long nectar dearth of late summer and fall.](#)

Gardening Flyer: [Our introductory pamphlet on gardening for honey bees and other pollinators.](#)

Bloom Tracker: [A form to report what is blooming in your garden, adding your results to local knowledge as a citizen scientist!](#)

### Elderberry *Sambucus*

Family: *Caprifoliaceae* (Honeysuckle)

This important and lovely plant has a long and revered history in the Old World as well as here, in Native North American culture.

Elderberries are said to be protectors of gardens and lands, and according to several sources are very beneficial for treating colds and fevers.

Native elders include:

*S. Mexicana* (*nigra* ssp. *caerulea*), blue elderberry, Mexican elderberry.

This native is often seen on banks above rivers and streams. It is a fast grower, reaching 10 to 25 feet tall, and almost as wide. The white-yellow flowers are umbels – large clusters of tiny flowers. Bees and other beneficial insects, as well as people, use the flowers. The flowers have traditionally been used by native people to treat fevers and other illnesses. The blue berries are adored by birds and are edible. They can be cooked into a syrup or sauce or dried for winter use. They grow well with some summer water but are adaptable to low watering once established.

*S. racemosa*, red elderberry is also a native and an important habitat plant, but the berries are POISONOUS to humans. So, don't ever eat red elderberries.

European and Native to North America *S. nigra*:

There are many varieties of *S. nigra*.

*S. nigra* var. *Canadensis* is a large and lovely shrub, with bright green leaves, creamy white umbels and purple-black berries.

*S. nigra* 'Black Beauty' is my very favorite. The flowers are pink and contrast beautifully with the deep red, almost black foliage.

*S. nigra* 'Black Lace' has frilly, dark purple leaves and pink flowers.

*S. nigra* 'Marginata' has leaves that are variegated green and light yellow. Flowers are white, and the berries are black. It is very easy to grow.

With all elders, you must cook the berries before consuming them, and pick off the little stems. All elders make great hedgerow plants, but remember they lose their leaves in the winter.

# Can the Bees Survive the Drought and How Can We Help Them?

By Thea Vierling

When it comes to climate change it's easy to get into "devastation thinking," which makes us feel powerless. We have little control over the many injustices and problems facing the world but there are things right here in Sonoma County that we can have some control over. For instance, the drought, which unfortunately could be here for a long time, is something we have no control over, but how we react to it is what we can control and how we then respond gives us a sense of power.

So, what can we do to be better beekeepers during this tremendous challenge we and the bees are going through?

Let's look at the history of SCBA over the past 10 years as a model for how the community (our SCBA community) has evolved to get things done! A major challenge for SCBA began in 2011 when our organization began to grow (from 50 members to now more than 500 members). Everyone wanted to have bees! Bees were the new chickens. Because of the colony collapse there was concern that bees were going to vanish and so beekeeping became a thing. We began seeing new beekeepers every year who did not know the first thing about keeping bees and we couldn't keep up with assisting all of them, thus creating a challenge for our association. The question was how do we train all of our members to be good beekeepers?

## #1: A need for Education for Beekeepers.

When Christine Kurtz and I started the Cluster groups, we did so because there were so many beginners with no beekeeping skills and not enough mentors to teach them those skills! We created the Regional Cluster groups to teach beginning skills and also create a system of bee buddies who could help each other. We additionally divided the association into geographical areas so it would be easier to form smaller communities within our growing organization. This solution was successful, and we now have a lot of good beekeepers, many of whom read about beekeeping, research problems, think for themselves, read about solutions, and address new problems.

For example: Varroa mites and diseases began 50 years ago but really began to dominate in the last six years. To treat or not to treat, that was the question. Yes, some folks treated Varroa mites, which was one solution, but other folks looked at queen behaviors for solid genetics such as VSH, ankle biters, and periods of broodlessness (which can reduce Varroa populations).

Finding and increasing good genetics against AFB worked 50 years ago. More recently, genetics against Nosema worked successfully and is working against DWV, we think. This is still being determined!

The varroa mite population might finally be dropping but now we have the SHB, (small hive beetle) so we are tackling that one, too.

Yes, the bees are evolving, genetically changing, but it is also beekeepers and scientists that are moving the evolution forward faster.

A great example is queen breeders who are finding good genetics and are using them to create more queens with those genes and then expanding those good genes in the genetic pool.

In our association of more than 500 members, we now have many members who understand the importance of good queens. They know how to re-queen, how to recognize the qualities of well-mated queens, good genetics, healthy drones, a good brood pattern This helps to ensure good queens in swarms.

Also, our SCBA Gardening for Bees group is doing a fantastic job of helping our members choose bee friendly plants for all seasons and educating our communities about the importance of planting pollinator-friendly plants.

To these ends we have made incredible improvements in our beekeeping knowledge, number of experienced beekeepers, and in what we offer the bees!

## #2 How will the drought affect beekeeping:

Obviously, we can't stop droughts from occurring, but we as beekeepers can consider ways to adapt knowing that drought is our reality. Let's first consider hive density and the number of beekeepers in a given area.

### **~Hive density:**

Some have suggested that hive density is a problem. Do some areas have too many hives and if so how many is too many and how can we measure this? A well-informed researcher from UC Davis, Eric Mussen, says that an acre of forage/per hive/per day is needed. That's a lot of forage required and with the number of hives increasing every year maybe there is not enough food for the number of hives.

### **~Number of Beekeepers:**

Are there too many beekeepers? In many states (and countries) people have to register their hives and must take classes before they are allowed to have a hive. This is one way to control the number of hives in an area and help ensure beginners come with some skills.

This could get very sensitive: for example, if I have three hives but you have eight and the next guy has only one hive. But, he lives on one acre and has an incredible field of well-planted bee-friendly plants, while the guy with eight hives has nothing planted on his property so all those bees are going over to the acre with forage planted. As for me, I live in a house with a small lawn and I feed my three hives, the bees from your eight hives may rob my hives. The guy with eight hives is selling his honey and smiling! Sound familiar?

This sadly is already happening. What's the answer? Who is responsible for the answer?

Also, what about those commercial beekeepers who put 20 to 200 hives in a location near your hives. Do we have a right to say something about those hives? Well they probably feed them, but our hives might get robbed by their hives. And if they swarm, that creates more hives in our county, both feral and managed by swarm catching beekeepers.

Density of hives and beekeepers both need serious thought and discussion. More study may help drive good outcomes for the bees.

### **~Feeding hives:**

The solution for lack of forage foods could be either feeding our hives or letting the ones who are starving die out. This brings up many other questions.

Is sugar syrup (2-1) just as healthy as nectar? No, of course not, but there are additives such as Honey Bee Healthy, which adds supplements to the feed. Is this acceptable?

Maybe we can "simulate the nectar season" for instance intermittent feeding just like the nectar season. Will feeding make the colonies grow too big? Well, of course it will but with intermittent feeding, also called seasonal feeding, the bees will have to do their regular population decrease. (By the way, population decrease is also a method of controlling varroa mites: no brood, no varroa.)

Do we feed all hives? Probably not! And probably not all the time.

There can be major differences in available forage between one area and the next. Even one mile can make a difference in the stores in a hive. This difference can be because of the water table in some areas and/or the gardening habits of residents.

Rather than feed bees sugar water or other supplements, some folks feed their bees frames of honey – although usually not this early in a season. A couple of facts to discuss: Honey needs to be liquified before it can be used. This takes time and energy. 2-1 sugar water is already liquid and can be used right away. 1-1 sugar water needs to be evaporated to get to the consistencies needed for good nutrition. Freezing frames of honey does not kill viruses like deformed winged virus, which is a major viral disease. Also, honey might invite robbing more than sugar water because honey has a stronger smell. If a beekeeper wants to give a hive a frame of honey, it should be done in the evening after peak robbing time. Do we take those frames out every morning? Probably not. But robbing is, and will remain, an issue. By the way, feral hives also can be robbers.

Clearly, feeding hives – whether with sugar water, supplemental food, or frames of honey is a major subject filled with various factors that should be discussed.

### **#3 Heat:**

The heat is serious. Bees need water to cool down and it's a lot of work. Bees will beard on the front of the hive to cool down, but they are also taking water into the hive and fanning to bring the temps down.

### **Solution:**

Provide shade, umbrellas or tarps or locate hives in shaded areas. Provide water sources with rocks so they don't drown.

### **#4 Gardens, gardening, nectar season and stores:**

How can we help people get gardens with bee friendly plants? Not all plants have nectar. Gardening techniques like pruning – and remembering not to prune plants before they flower (i.e.: Privet which is a good nectar source right now in June.) Autumn Bliss blooms in August. Let's flood our gardens with it!

### **Solution:**

Education! We need to educate ourselves and our communities about planting for the bees, nectar plants, nectar seasons, don't prune until after it is finished blooming! The SCBA garden program is already doing a lot in this area but more needs to be done. We need a comprehensive education program involving not only our members but the community, the school gardens and our neighborhoods!

### **#5 Compare with areas like Colorado, Arizona and Nevada:**

Surely there is beekeeping in areas with hot dry weather. What can we learn from them? They have bees, too. Do they feed? By the way the entire West is in a drought. Maybe we need to see what other beekeeping associations are doing? How are they changing their beekeeping techniques?

**Solution:**

Call folks from other states about problems they have and what they do. This is a problem in a lot more areas than Sonoma County.

**#6 Vineyard management:**

Is there a way that we can get the vineyards to stop cutting the mustard? (Ok I'll calm down but...) Seriously they cut the mustard at prime blooming time, prime foraging time, prime building up stores time. How many bees as a result?

**Solution:**

Educate vineyard management. Do they have pollinator gardens on their property? Do they spray? And when? They need to get on board with us to save the pollinators, not just make a profit. We may need to get political and not buy wine from some wineries who cut the mustard!

**#7 Combining hives:**

What if you get a swarm and don't have a place to put it? Combine a swarm with a non-performing or at least under-performing hive that has a non-performing queen. We have often combined hives in August and September; this year, we need to do this sooner.

Finally, I'd love to see us having open discussions where there are no rights nor wrongs. Have we not done that before? Zoom is a perfect forum for this discussion where everyone can be heard. We have some very bright people in our association with many skills from many walks of life. We can do this. This could be done by clusters because every area has different conditions, different nectar dearth, different water sources, etc. The drought is challenging us. We need to address these issues. We have 500-plus members. Let's talk.

**Solution:**

Beginning and Seasoned Beekeeping Forums.

See you there!

*Thea Vierling*

SCBA former treasurer, Educator, And Co-Founder (with Christine Kurtz) of Regional Cluster Groups



Bees love Nigella (aka Love in a Mist)  
Photo taken May 26, 2021  
by Ettamarie Peterson

## Research Buzz!

By Gina Brown

### How does the drought impact honey bees? Good & bad news

Without too much effort, I found and read 13 scientific papers that discuss the impact of drought on honey bees and other insects. I'll begin with the silver lining. A 10-year study in Louisiana showed that the lowest growth rate in varroa mite populations occurred during a 3-year period of drought (1). Hot dry weather is apparently bad for varroa mites. A very interesting review of the research regarding using a combination high temperature and humidity to kill varroa mites is available from Randy Oliver at [Scientificbeekeeping.com](http://Scientificbeekeeping.com). Good stuff and it looks promising as an alternative to chemical treatment for varroa mites.(2)

Okay, back to the drought. I have included this recent study from the University of California, Riverside, because it modeled both the quantity and quality of available nectar and pollen in a drought. The design of this study was straight forward: They grew 160 clover plants (*Trifolium wildenovii*) in controlled conditions. Eighty with optimal water, 80 with 30 percent less water. They recorded the date of the first bloom, number and size of all inflorescences and collected nectar and pollen. (Rainfall in Sonoma County varies quite a bit by region, but Santa Rosa reports 12.86 inches of rain by June 25 this year, compared with an average of 34 inches by the same date.)

The impact of only a 30 percent reduction of water was profound. It caused flowers to bloom later by three days, produce only half as many inflorescences per plant, and resulted in a 48 percent reduction in seeds. In terms of nectar, there was 17 percent less nectar available, and the sugar concentration was reduced by 11 percent. The total amount of pollen per plant was decreased by 36 percent and there was an 8 percent reduction in raw protein. Clearly, a decrease in both quantity and quality.

Then, the researchers developed artificial diets based on these results for honey bee (*Apis mellifera*) and bumble bee (*Bombus impatiens*) larvae, specifically, measuring growth, onset of pupation, adult emergence, weight, and mortality.

For honey bees, larvae development time was longer (pupae were first observed on day 9 for optimal diet and day 11 for water-poor diet) and the optimal diet had 26 percent higher survival from egg to adult. For bumble bees, foragers lived 60 percent longer on the optimal diet and colonies produced 50 percent more bees (3).

Interestingly, in both cases, adult honey bees and bumble bees, there was no treatment effect on adult body mass. This suggests that adult bees, or the colonies, may somehow compensate for the poor nutrition, at least in this case. Perhaps colonies produced fewer bees or they changed

their foraging or robbing behaviors to survive the drought? Lot's more to learn!

As a beekeeper, there are many choices to make to support bees and often those choices evolve over time. I would say there are few hard and fast right or wrong actions to take. Some might choose to feed colonies more during a drought. Other might choose instead to keep fewer bee colonies, smaller bee colonies, or space colonies less densely.

We can all agree that planting more drought-resistant bee forage and keeping a reliable water source close by for our bees are great steps to take during a drought.

Sources:

- (1) Harris, J.W., Villa, J.D., Danka, R.G. 2004. Environmental effects on the growth of varroa mite populations. *Bee Culture*. 132(5):23-25.
- (2) Oliver, Randy 2021. A test of Thermal Treatment for Varroa, Part 1. [Scientificbeekeeping.com](http://Scientificbeekeeping.com)
- (3) Erin E Wilson Rankin, Sarah K Barney, Giselle E Lozano, Reduced Water Negatively Impacts Social Bee Survival and Productivity Via Shifts in Floral Nutrition, *Journal of Insect Science*, Volume 20, Issue 5, September 2020, 15, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jisesa/ieaa114>

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



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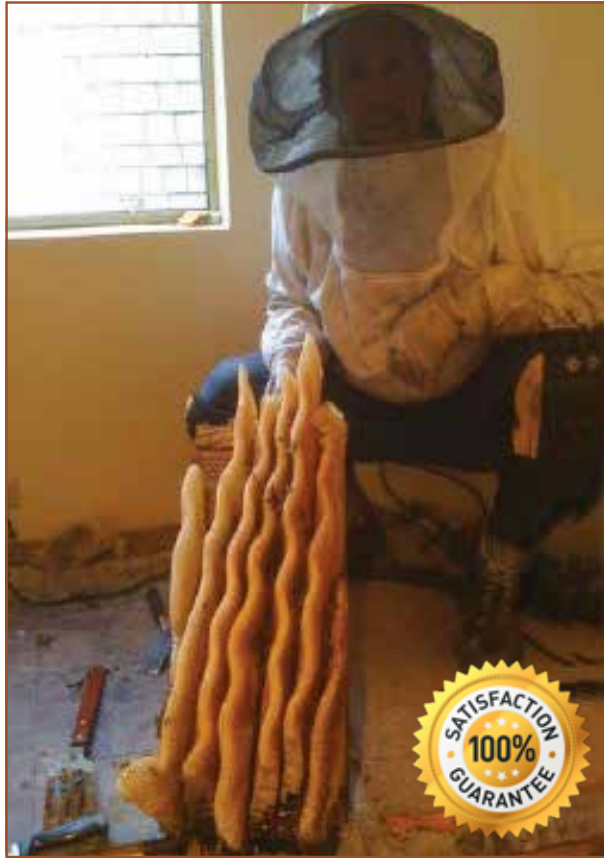
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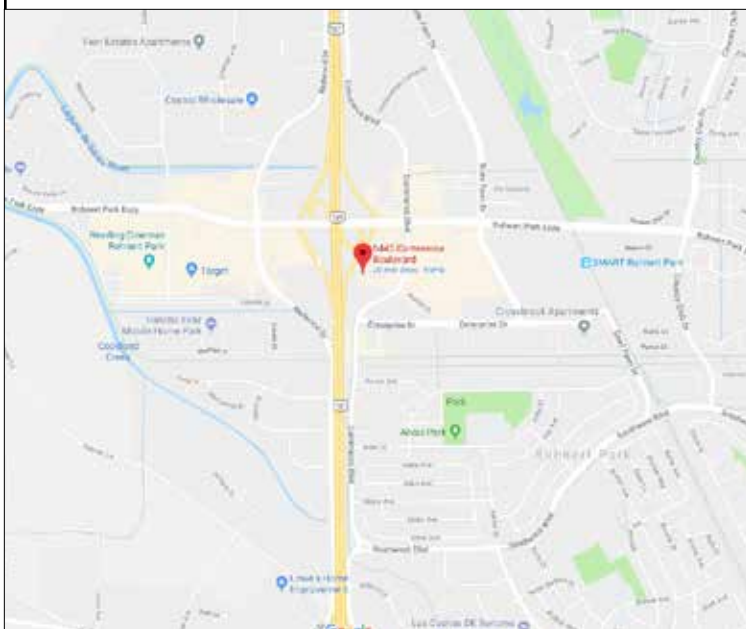
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## 2021 Board Members and Other Helpful People

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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](http://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: No meeting this month! Summer Picnic Saturday July 17, see pg 3**

### 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!