



Napa County Beekeepers' Association Newsletter - August, 2025 issue #18

Our Mission: Supporting Napa's beekeeping community through educational outreach, treatment-free management, and pollinator habitat advocacy.

A few words from Martin



Greetings to you all. Daylight hours are getting shorter, hives are back-filling, and colony populations are shrinking. The bees are well aware that it's summer in the Valley. It's been a busy month for the NCBA, too. We held two great and very different hive dives, each bringing its own individual set of circumstances and showing how

unique each beehive can be. We also hosted a fantastically informative and very well attended club meeting during which Christine Kurtz went over the different diseases to be on the lookout for inside our hives. A big thank you to both Christine K and our hive dive hosts, as well as Round Table for continuing to provide a meeting space, although it is becoming clear that we probably need to find a larger location soon.

As we transition into mid-summer, take notice of how the bees' life cycle has shifted. With this change, we need to shift our thinking and management practices inside of our apiaries. Colonies are no longer building up and expanding like they were before the summer solstice. Populations have hit their peak and the time for big and invasive hive manipulations is quickly coming to an end. We have also fully entered robbing season! Hungry bees from other colonies and yellow jackets are looking for an easy meal. Reducing hive entrances and plugging or covering any holes or cracks in hive boxes will give your bees less space to protect and defend. Consider some strategic placement of yellowjacket traps if they are threatening your hives. It's also best to minimize the time

our hives are open during inspections. The smell of fresh honey travels quickly and an open hive is an easy target! A tight sealing container for collecting any wayward honey or comb is a valuable addition to your inspection kit this time of year. And as always, the risks of a fire are increasing - be smart and safe with your torches and smokers.

We also have a new column this month called 'Tales from the Club Hive.' Check it out and follow the life and times of this new colony.

Also, make sure to mark your calendar for our **August 18 club meeting** when we are joined by **guest speakers Wendy Mather and Dr. Elina L. Niño from UC Davis** for a conversation on the California Master Beekeeper Program and current E.L. Niño Bee Lab research.

Lastly, **two more hive dives** have just been confirmed and are coming up quickly - **Saturdays, August 2 and 9**. See details under 'Events' and RSVP soon. Until then!

- Martin Podell

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Save the Date - NCBA and Local Happenings

AUGUST NCBA HIVE DIVES

When: Saturdays, August 2 and 9 - **RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER - RSVP soon!**

Where: NCBA member's home - address provided with RSVP

What: On Aug 2, join Rob Keller and Christine Kurtz as they examine a hive for a potential queen issue, while on Aug 9, Rob will demonstrate an alcohol wash for a mite count.

RSVP: Email Martin (martinp.ncba@gmail.com)

TOMATOGANZA! 2025

When: Sunday, August 10, 11am - 3pm

Where: 500 1st Street, Napa

What: *Tomatoganza!* is the Napa County Seed Library's annual food fest, tomato taste-off, fundraiser, and seed-saving event, hosted by *CIA at Copia* in their beautiful culinary gardens. Local farms will offer their season's most delicious heirloom, beefsteak and cherry varieties that you'll sample and savor, then vote for "The Local Favorite." Festivities include live teaching demos, bestowed ribbons, and saved seeds to plant at home.

Tickets: \$20 per person or \$48 for a group of three. Visit [Tomatoganza!](#) for tickets and additional info.



AUGUST CLUB MEETING

When: Monday, August 18, 6 - 7:30pm

Where: **Special location for this meeting:** Stone Bridge School, Napa 📍 1019 2nd Ave

Focus: Guest speakers from UC Davis, Wendy Mather and Dr. Elina L. Niño will be talking about the California Master Beekeeper Program (Wendy) and current research in the E.L. Niño Bee Lab (Elina).

More information here: [E. L. Niño Bee Lab](#) and [California Master Beekeeper Program](#)

Cost: Free for NCBA members; sliding scale \$5-20 for non-members



WORKSHOP - WELCOMING POLLINATORS INTO YOUR GARDEN

When: Saturday, August 23, 10am - 12noon

Where: 1710 Soscol Avenue - UCCE Meeting Room, Napa

What: Learn how to create a vital habitat to support bees, butterflies and other pollinators

info: Held by the UC Master Gardeners of Napa Valley, tickets (free) can be reserved at [eventbrite - click here](#).



MASTER GARDENER'S FALL FAIRE

When: Saturday, September 20, 1 - 4pm

Where: 1710 Soscol Ave., Napa

What: Sponsored by the UC Master Gardeners of Napa Valley, this annual event is loads of fun for adults and kids alike. Over 25 educational booths, demonstrations, activities, giveaways of seeds, bulbs, and more!

Also: This is the first year the NCBA will have a booth at the event! Please consider helping out - whether it is just for set-up or breakdown, or you'd be interested in talking bees and pollinators for an hour. Contact Christine at napaValleyBeekeepers@gmail.com to learn more and volunteer!



Beeco's Bee Talk



Something I think about a lot with this newsletter is how can we best use it as a vehicle to help our members gain a deeper understanding of bee biology? I find it really difficult to convey most of this information through the written word. Of course you can pick up on some of the nuances through reading books and articles and I strongly encourage that, but it really helps to join the hive dives to see things in-person. I'll try to convey some key info here, though, with some imagery of prominent things you should be looking for in your hives this time of year.

High Varroa mite loads on your tray are the first real indicator that there may be a problem. If you have loads as high as this, ➡ you definitely need to go deeper in your inspection and see what's happening in the nursery. It's not always a bad thing, but more often

than not, it's a big indicator of what your bees are dealing with. Notice how these mites are deep dark maroon in color, telling you that they are older ones that have gone through their entire lifecycle. It's really important to pay attention to this. Finding younger mites that are more gray in color indicates that the bees have interrupted their early development by recognizing mites in the cell, opening the cell, and removing/exposing the parasitized pupae.

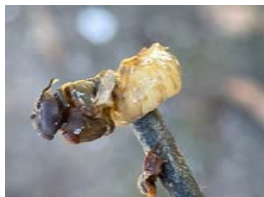


Deformed Wing Virus or DWV is a really big indicator that a colony is starting to suffer the impact of Varroa. I used to think it wasn't necessarily a death sentence to see a large contingency of DWV in a hive, but after the last few years when we've been doing more testing, I'm kind of hedging on that. If you are seeing a lot of DWV bees in your hive or even crawling around on the ground in front of your hive before the yellow jackets get to them, I'd highly suggest you go a little deeper in your inspection and probably test for mites.

This image to the right shows another good indicator: bees half way out of the cell with their ➡ tongues out. It's telling you that the colony is having a difficult time keeping up with the mite loads. This picture also shows a few of the mechanisms bees need to have in place to help them manage the mites. The three young exposed pupae are in different stages of development and parasitization. The one to the far left looks pretty healthy and about to emerge soon. The one next to it was recognized as being parasitized, so bees opened the cell and started to cannibalize it rather than remove it from the hive. That mechanism still interrupts the early development of the mite family, but also helps spread viruses via trophallaxis - that is, the exchange of regurgitated food and liquids between bees which can also be a route for virus transmission. The third pupae developed a little further, but not completely, and died in the cell before fully emerging. The tongue out on that pupa is a dead giveaway - nothing says high mite loads like a bunch of bees with their proboscises out. See the lower cells in that same pic, the bees have recognized the mites in the cell and have started to open those infested cells. (Another image of proboscis out ➡)



Here's what they look like if you help the bees and pull them out of the cell prematurely.



On the upside, there's a new mechanism that we've observed over the past few years called uncapping-recapping. I also call it bald-facing (see picture next page). Basically it goes back to those mechanisms we saw earlier, when the bees recognized there were mites in the cell. In this case, for some reason they decided to uncup the young pupae at the purple-eyed stage, leave them uncapped for a period of time, *then recap them leaving the bees in the cell to finish its full*

development. There isn't a lot of research behind this, but I have seen frames in which literally 25% of the cells are opened; when I went back a week later, they were all recapped. I'm not fully convinced that all the pupae survive this process, but I can get fully behind it being a great way for the bees to interrupt the early lifecycle of the mites. (bald-facing bees ➡)



I guess the big takeaway here for you all is to be in your hives this time of year and *pay close attention to your brood*. All the clues are there to get a good idea of the survivability of your bees through the upcoming winter. If you are only going into your hive infrequently, this is the time of year to do that deep, thorough dive. Popping lids and pulling trays don't count - you need to get in there and inspect your brood. As you go along, be sure to record your observations carefully. Become familiar with the signs that your hive is thriving, or not. Also, understand that we are playing the long game here and allowing natural selection to favor those colonies whose genetics, both behavioral and physiological, enable them to weather the 'mite storm' and other stressors. Our beekeeping practices can definitely enhance a colony's health and survivability, and understanding what we are seeing during an inspection is a key part of that.



Lastly, join us on the next couple of hive dives at Emmanuelle's - August 2nd and 9th! We'll be going over much of this material in real time and also doing a mite check so that you can see how it's done.

- Rob Keller

WOW Facts about Mad Honey

- ★ Mad Honey contains grayanotoxins which are neurotoxins that induce a range of symptoms, from mild dizziness and blurred vision to severe nausea, arrhythmia, seizures, and loss of consciousness.
- ★ Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder referred to mad honey as *meli mænomenon* and was among the first to recognize that the toxicity was linked to honey derived from the nectar and pollen of oleander, azalea, and plants in the genus *Rhododendron*.
- ★ Most mad honey is made in Nepal and Turkey where it can be a sought-after delicacy, renowned for its altering effects and cultural significance in traditional practices.
- ★ The Himalayan giant honey bees (*Apis laboriosa*) build their huge (up to 1.5 m wide), open-comb nests on tree limbs or steep cliffsides... tall ladders needed!
- ★ During the 18th century, around 25 tons of mad honey were exported from the Black Sea Region to Europe every year. In France it was known as *miel fou* (crazy honey) and was added to beer and other alcoholic drinks to give them an extra kick.
- ★ Mad honey has long been used medicinally as an aphrodisiac, in alternative therapies for gastrointestinal disorders, and for hypertension.



- ★ There are many instances in which mad honey was also used as a biological weapon. Queen Olga of Kiev, as revenge for her husband's brutal death, served huge quantities of mead made from mad honey to her Russian foes. Her own army then proceeded to massacre 5000 of the enemy soldiers as they lay in a stupor. 🤪
- ★ Lest you now be freaked out by rhododendrons growing in your yard, know that bees would need to visit those plants almost solely in order to concentrate enough grayanotoxins in their honey to make a difference - not likely!

In the Pollinator Garden



Summer for many gardeners means basil and tomatoes, berries and peaches, whether grown yourself or purchased from a hard working farmer. Spring flowers are but a memory, and shining now in our gardens are the sunflowers and asters, sending up their cheery daisy-like flowers amidst the buckwheats, goldenrod, and California fuschia. These flowers that will bloom well into the fall are much needed by bees and other pollinators as we enter the season of dearth, or lack of nectar.

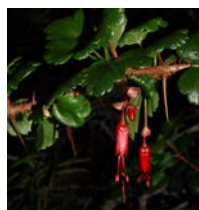
Perhaps *others* are visiting your garden as well, drawn in by irrigated and tender foliage as the natural landscapes around us dry up. Black-tailed deer, a subspecies of mule deer, are ubiquitous in the Valley. Each spring in our back field (largely grassland and brambles), we are treated to the sight of newborn fawns. This year we kept company with two does, one yearling, and four fawns (of which two survived). They welcome this safe haven, and when the grasses dry up and are mowed for fire safety, the deer turn to eating the wild (Himalayan) blackberries or make the treacherous road crossing to nibble on lush plants by the creek. As much as I treasure these creatures, I have also emerged from the house to find an entire bank of rose bushes pruned back, each and every delectable blossom gobbled up. As for sunflowers... when the flowers can no longer be reached, the sturdy thick stems are perfect for rubbing fleas off one's haunches. Heaven forbid they maneuver their way into the veggie garden - what a feast that would be.



How might we live in harmony with deer? For many of us, that may not be an issue if the garden is fenced and/or situated where deer don't frequent. For those of us who *do* meet these hungry herbivores, though, there are a few basic approaches:

- Fence off parts of your yard, 8 ft high if there's room for deer to get a running start, 6-7 ft high if the space is tighter.
- Provide wire cages or protective enclosures for plants until they are mature enough to withstand nibbling. Young, tender foliage is always fair game, even on plants widely considered distasteful to deer.
- Use *non-toxic* deer repellants to keep deer away from particular plantings. I use a spray such as *Liquid Fence Deer & Rabbit Repellent* on younger plants until they are bigger and more resilient to deer grazing. There are many products and DIY recipes - just make sure they are safe for wild animals, pets and people.

For those areas that *are* accessible to deer, one can either let well enough alone or put in plants that are more deer resistant. With few exceptions, deer will eat almost anything if they are hungry enough. Plants represent a source of food *and* water this time of year. However, there are some guidelines for choosing plants that the deer will generally avoid (*note that CA native plants are generally more deer tolerant than non-natives*). Deer will *usually* avoid plants with:



- **Tough, leathery leaves** (such as various manzanitas, madrone, coyote brush)
- **Furry or fuzzy foliage** (think CA sagebrush, CA fuschia, many sages)
- **Spines** (look at various Ceanothus spp, yuccas, fuchsia-flowered gooseberry, CA barberry)
- **Strong aromatic oils** (found in many Salvias/sages, bay laurel, yarrow, Monardella spp)
- **Toxins** (in Solanaceae/nightshade family, buckeyes, milkweed, chamise, many ferns)
- **Grasses** (examples are fescues, needlegrass, sedges, needlegrass, deer grass)

Check out these links to find many plants that will enable deer and gardener to coexist harmoniously!

<https://www.calfloranursery.com/find-right-plant-results>

<https://www.yerbabuenanursery.com/gardening-guides/deer-proofing-your-bay-area-garden>

(recipe for DIY deer repellant spray found at bottom of the Yerba Buena page linked here)

<https://www.mostlynatives.com/plant-characteristics/deer-resistant>

And at the end of the day, perhaps we simply relish the experience of sharing our patch of earth with wild creatures!

- Christine Waskowiak

Tales from the Club Hive



Martin with NCBA hive - just need to add bees. Sturdy hive stand made by George Altobelli.

As many of our regular readers will know, we have started our first NCBA club hive. Its purpose is to allow us to follow a single colony's journey throughout the seasons, sharing its ups and hopefully not too many downs with all of you. The story for this hive started in late April when we set out a swarm trap. In less than a week, scout bees had already found it and a swarm moved in.

As the bees went about their business, the club built and painted new hive boxes and hive stand (plans on how to build your own in issue #17), then placed them in the site selected to become the new apiary. In late June, Rob and I moved the bees to their new home. Upon opening the swarm trap box for the first time, we found that all 10 frames had been drawn out with perfectly aligned comb, what a treat! We transferred the frames into the new hive boxes, adding two J-frames and follower boards, thus reconfiguring the nest from one deep with 10 frames into two deeps, each with six frames. We did notice that there were very few stores and the brood pattern was pretty spotty.



Day 8: Spotty worker and drone brood, queen cell on bottom right comb.

First inspection, 8 days later: There were now several frames of nectar and some capped honey, as well as stores of pollen. There was still some spotty capped brood, but no larvae, no eggs, and no Queen!

Instead, there were at least 10 capped Queen cells. Did the queen not survive the move to the new location and hive box? Or did the workers supersede her so they could rear a new younger, more productive Queen? I lean to the latter. The spotty brood pattern seen during the re-hiving was a red flag, already telling us that something was less than ideal for that colony.



Day 22: J-frame of freshly drawn comb; lots of workers, but no brood

Second inspection, 14 days later (day 22): Upon opening the hive, I found that only a few of the capped worker brood cells remained. These were from eggs laid right before the loss of the Queen. I also found that most of the Queen cells observed two weeks prior were completely gone. Virgin Queens can be difficult to find as they have not fully developed their ovaries and grown to full size, and I was unable to locate her. It's quite possible she was inside the hive or out on one of her mating flights. It's also possible that none of the Queen cells produced a viable Queen. I will inspect again in seven more days. The hive still has a healthy sized population, but without an actively laying Queen, these workers won't be replaced as they begin to reach the end of their life span....CTD ('circling the drain').

The colony did draw out one of the J-frames (see pic left) and continues to backfill with stores. It's too soon to panic, but a mild concern is appropriate. To be continued!

Photo Gallery

Hive dive on July 19 at Glen & Rina Mitchell's home - we gave a booming hive more space and enjoyed tasty snacks:



Sharon, Christine & Glen at work



Martin looking at honey stores



Moving frames into an additional super

Then off to Alan Spence's yard on the 26th for another hive dive, a visit to his bountiful veggie and flower garden, and some luscious peaches to take home.



Brilliant pollinator-flower shots provided by Christina Dalmas:



Lots of camera action this month...

Series of photos below: Christine W and Martin doing a mini-cutout of comb from upper chamber of observation hive, packed with brood and stores attached to plexiglass windows, plus Queen whom we didn't find until the very end.



Observation-hive chamber had a wire Queen excluder on the bottom, so pulling it apart was necessary to move Queen into lower hive box. The chamber was disassembled, plexiglass windows pulled off, and comb carefully cut out & secured in empty frames with rubber bands.



You can see the narrow Queen excluder once all the comb has been removed. Filled frames were placed in waiting deep box. Smile on Martin's face because Christine has just spotted the Queen, making sure she scoots down between the frames. Deep sighs of relief!



Comb bits laden with honey were placed in empty super on top of inner cover, then top cover added to keep robber bees and yellow jackets out. The sticky comb was quickly cleaned up by the bees, then the box removed. All done, hive put back in order, bees and beekeepers alike are happy!



Beekeepers' Bites

Peach and Mint Salad

Ingredients

2 peaches, pitted and sliced
1 Tbsp honey
½ Tbsp lemon juice
2 sprigs of mint, ripped or sliced
Pinch of salt



Instructions

Whisk honey, lemon juice and salt together. Pour over sliced peaches and gently coat. Gently fold in mint and let sit for 3-5 minutes before serving.

NCBA Membership - sign up now!

The Napa County Beekeepers' Association has launched its membership program. Thanks to all of you who have joined! In addition to covering various administrative and website expenses, membership dollars enable us to offer you:



- More guest speakers on a range of topics
- Hands-on educational events & workshops
- Priority access to available bees (via swarms, splits)
- Various swag discounts & freebies
- Individualized mentoring/consultation
- Continued monthly meetings & newsletter

Information on the different membership tiers and application form is available to download here: [NCBA Membership Levels & Form.pdf](#) You may also request membership info and form by emailing napavalleybeekeepers@gmail.com.

NCBA T-Shirt Orders

Beautifully printed locally by Grapeleaf Graphics with our logo, 100% cotton, available in S/M/L/XL, regular or ladies cut (pictured). Shirts will shrink a bit, so order a size larger if you like a looser fit.

Only \$25 - cash, check or Venmo (see t-shirt order form linked below)

Send completed [NCBA T-Shirt Order Form](#) to Martin at martinp.ncba@gmail.com or order at an upcoming NCBA meeting.





Napa County Beekeepers' Association

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