



Napa County Beekeepers' Association Newsletter - July, 2025 issue #17

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. Summer has arrived and brought with it fresh new guest speakers, club events, and areas of focus in our apiaries. Summer has also brought an increased risk of fire danger. Extra care needs to be taken when working outside with torches and smokers. Have a fire

extinguisher, bucket of water or hose at the ready. As "Smokey" the Hive Smoker says, *"Only you can prevent apiary fires!"* Speaking of apiaries, we are already seeing a seasonal shift in the bee colony's life cycle. Recent hive inspections have shown that queens are slowing down their laying. Workers are now focused on back-filling cells with nectar and capped honey, and pushing the brood nest lower in the hive. Pollen of various colors is being stored for feeding larvae later in the year when it becomes less abundant. Much like canning, pickling or drying extra food from our gardens, all of this is part of the honey bees' food security system.

We are happy to announce that the NCBA will be hosting guest speakers at both our July and August club meetings! Join us at Round Table Pizza on July 21 when **Christine Kurtz** will be giving a presentation on 'Pests and Pathogens'. This is a hugely important topic - being familiar with these risks is part of our responsibility as beekeepers.

In addition, we've got a double hitter for our August meeting at Stone Bridge School. We will be joined by two guest speakers from UC Davis's Dept of Entomology and Nematology:

- **Dr. Elina L. Niño**, Director of E.L. Niño Bee Lab

- **Wendy Mather**, Co-manager of California Master Beekeeper Program (CAMBP)

See **Save the Date** section for details and locations and mark your calendars - both the July and August meetings will be very insightful!

Also in July, we will be holding two hive dives. Join us at 10 am on July 19 and/or 26 when we will pop open a few lids and get a hands-on look at what's happening inside hives. These events are a fantastic opportunity to ask questions, examine a colony other than yours, and deepen your understanding about the summer goings-on of bees. We **highly** encourage all of our members new to beekeeping (and seasoned vets as well) to attend as many of these events as possible. There are no shortcuts in beekeeping, but these dives are about as close as you can get to one. **RSVPs are required for hive dives** (see **Save the Date**).

Nowadays, many of us go about our days happily unaware of the Lunar Calendar or how the changes they herald affect our lives and surroundings. It's easy to forget that for millenia, humans have tracked and celebrated the four main points of this cycle: summer and winter solstices, vernal and autumnal equinoxes. Each phase of the yearly cycle brings its unique qualities. It can be easy in these electronic and tech driven times to detach ourselves from these celestial bonds. So, as we settle into the early days of summer, be sure to take a moment and think about the changes happening around us, to reground yourself with the earth and the moment we are in.

- Martin Podell



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Save the Date - NCBA Happenings

JULY CLUB MEETING

When: Monday, July 21, 6 - 7:30pm

Where: Round Table Pizza [3331 Solano Ave. Napa](#)

Focus: Guest speaker Christine Kurtz on ***Pests and Pathogens of the Hive*** - what to be aware of, what to look for, and what to do if problem(s) arise

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

JULY HIVE DIVES

When: Saturdays, July 19 and 26, 10am

Where: NCBA members' homes - address(es) provided with RSVP

RSVP: To attend either or both hive dives, email Martin (martinp.ncba@gmail.com) or Christine (napavalleybeekeepers@gmail.com)

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 and Wendy Mather will be talking about the California Master Beekeeper Program (Wendy) and current research in the E.L. Nino 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

Beeco's Bee Talk

In preparation for Christine Kurtz's presentation at our upcoming July 21st meeting, and given the time of year and what we should be looking for in our hives, Rob and Christine Waskowiak sat down and had a conversation about hive 'ailments' - what to look for and how to best help the bees. Here are some key thoughts from Rob:

I feel like one of the biggest things we can do, especially if we are treatment-free, is to help beekeepers understand what a colony looks like when it's becoming parasitized with varroa mite. What are the early signs that a colony is suffering from various viruses vectored by the mite, before it starts to 'circle the drain'? Then we can talk about some of the options. Over the years, especially having had Emily and Conner on board, I've been able to really slow down, make more astute observations, see what a declining colony looks like, and evaluate whether it will be

able to right itself. Looking at the mite counts on the inspection tray is certainly an indicator, but if you see high mite loads on the tray, you should follow up with the [alcohol wash test](#) for a more accurate count. After doing this for some years now, we pretty much know that if you get more than 20 mites per 300 bees, it's bad news.

Question: We know that varroa mites themselves weaken the bees, but the mites vector a lot of viruses. What colony diseases have you seen here in the Valley?

I've had occasional encounters with chalkbrood. American Foulbrood has only ever been an issue with bees that were brought to me, but I've not encountered it in any of my apiaries. [Deformed Wing Virus](#) has been the main disease I've seen associated with varroa. One main way to help counter the spread of *any* disease, though, is to torch your tool, *everytime*. It's like a seatbelt - you automatically put it on when you get in a car. If I'm going into a hive, I grab my torch, and hit my tool before popping the lid. The other key way to help spread disease is to not share comb from another hive that has potentially collapsed from disease/infestation, and certainly not any nasty, brown comb.



We also need to keep reiterating the importance of 'place.' I've visited a lot of apiaries around the world and every region has its stressors. I don't want to say "woe is us," but we live in an extreme monoculture and a lot of the inputs used to make wine is having a detrimental effect on bees. They are continually receiving a sublethal dose of compounds, primarily systemic fungicides. It knocks down their immune system, opening the door to diseases vectored by the varroa. Looking for the silver lining, there are new young winemakers on the scene who are adamant about avoiding the industrial agricultural use of chemicals. That is super encouraging - there are more and more folks getting on the ROC ([Regenerative Organic Certification](#)) path.

Question: What do you do with a hive that is highly infested and/or circling the drain?

From a treatment-free perspective, there are not a whole lot of options. This is when beekeepers start having a hard time. It took me about a decade before I was comfortably able to accept that a colony is ailing badly and bid it a fair adieu. We have an obligation to the species, and to keep bees artificially propped up with chemical inputs does not do any bees in the 5+ mile vicinity a favor. Open mating is the primary reason I don't treat. Propping up a colony with chemical inputs and potentially fostering poor genetics doesn't do the species any good. Bees are not a puppy, not a kitten, but wild creatures. I don't want people to feel as if they're so precious that we need to prop them up and get in the way of natural selection.



If you're seeing a pretty heavy mite infestation, cage the queen right away. Throw some attendants in with her or use a communication cage that enables workers to interact with her and continue spreading her pheromones. Understanding the life cycle of the mite is equally as important as understanding that of the bee. Keeping her in the cage for about a month will create a brood break and interrupt the varroa life cycle. This works okay right now since laying has slowed down. However a severely parasitized colony doesn't always present symptoms until later in the summer/early fall when the queen needs to be laying eggs for her winter bees. When you uncage the queen, she will go back to laying eggs, but potentially with compromised genetics indicated by the weakness of the colony. My main goal is to get her through to spring, then introduce a whole new queen.

Question: You prefer to introduce a new queen from another colony and not let the bees raise their own?

Yes, while a brood break is a temporary solution, introducing new genetics with a queen that has come from proven stock is better. That is, a colony that has been long lived and demonstrated hygienic behaviors and genetic resistance to varroa-related issues.

Question: What about culling drone brood as a way to remove developing varroa mites?

I wrestle with that... who am I as a beekeeper? My direction keeps veering towards respect for the nursery. The bees put the drones in place for a reason - where is the drone brood, how much is there? The bees have a plan and when we interrupt that, we are second guessing them. So no, I don't make a practice of culling drone brood.

Question: What else are you looking for during a hive inspection?



Wax moth path, as indicated by bald brood.

Photo: Eric Malcolm, March 27 2021 Silver Spring, MD.

This time of year, we need to be in our hives looking at all the brood. Is there a solid laying pattern or is it spotty? I used to think that if bees were backfilling spotty brood, that was a good sign, but I am increasingly thinking that spotty brood may be a sign that something is amiss. How does the pool of royal jelly look for the very young larvae, especially as we move into summer dearth? Are there pin-pricked capped brood cells, indicating mite infestation or other potential diseases? Is there 'bald brood' where cappings have been removed, leaving the purple-eyed stage of pupae exposed (see picture - left)? This is a huge indication that something is up. And look at the pollen - there is a strong correlation between



[emtombed pollen](#) and a colony succumbing (see picture - right). Bees will seal off cells of compromised pollen with a layer of propolis in an effort to protect the colony from ingesting the fungicides or other pollutants the pollen is tainted with - a really concerning sign in a hive. Also, as we've talked about a lot at our meetings, *give hives shade*; full sun is increasingly a big stressor for the bees.

Of course, notes and record keeping are super important. Record your observations! If a colony succumbs (or not), you are able to look back through your notes and do a kind of forensic analysis. Lastly, I strongly recommend that everyone come to July's meeting with Christine Kurtz! She will do a deeper dive into hive diseases and pests; her knowledge and experience are invaluable.

- Rob Keller

Project *Apis m.* - 2025 Colony Loss Information



[Project Apis m.](#) is a power-house organization that “funds practical research supporting beekeeper priorities... leading to practical tools and solutions supporting bee health and pollination security.” On June 3, 2025, Project *Apis m.* released a research summary from the U.S. Department of Agriculture shedding light on the causes behind the catastrophic honey bee colony losses (over 60%) reported by commercial beekeepers earlier this year, just as bees

were being staged for California's almond pollination season. Researchers found high levels of Deformed Wing Virus and Acute Bee Paralysis Virus. Importantly, all Varroa mites collected from affected colonies tested positive for a genetic marker linked to resistance to amitraz, the most commonly used miticide in commercial beekeeping. Researchers at USDA are also examining the impacts of nutritional, chemical and environmental stress and will soon release those findings. See [New USDA Research Links Early 2025 Honey Bee Losses to High Viral Loads and Mite Resistance](#) for more details.

While the vast majority of us are hobbyist beekeepers, it behooves us to be aware of the 'larger bee picture' as commercial honey bee health and issues *do* affect us, whether it be through co-mingling of the commercial and hobbyist bee populations and genetic pooling, or policies and practices regarding miticides and agricultural chemicals. As is the case with many scientific endeavors these days, budget delays and cuts to current USDA's bee research programs are very concerning and will hinder their ability to investigate the causes of these losses and provide solutions.

NCBA Membership - sign up now!

The Napa County Beekeepers' Association has launched its membership program. 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: [PDF NCBA Membership Levels & Form.pdf](#) You may also request membership info and form by emailing napavalleybeekeepers@gmail.com.

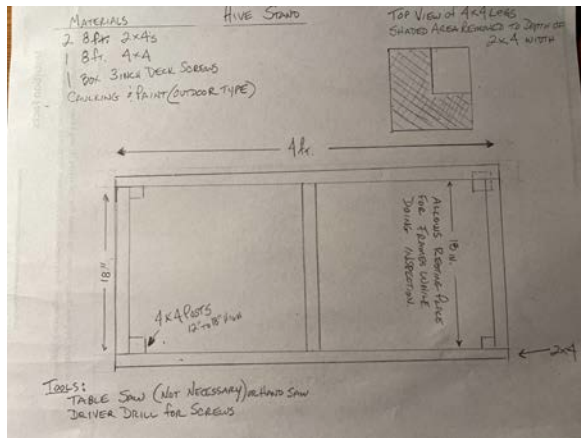
WOW Facts about Pollen

- ★ Pollen grains are actually the male gametophytes or sperm cells of a plant.
- ★ The study of pollen is called **palynology**. A palynologist can look at a pollen grain under a microscope and based on its size, shape and surface texture, identify what plant species it came from.
- ★ These unique characteristics of pollen grains have been used by forensic experts to solve crimes, so beware of what plant you brush up against before doing something nefarious!
- ★ Palynologists can also determine the geographical region where a particular honey was produced based on the honey's pollen content.
- ★ The European Union has much stricter regulations about honey labeling than here in the U.S. Pollen analysis is required for labeling honey as *monofloral* (that is, produced primarily from a single type of flower). The origin of honey must be verified, as well as its overall content, to prevent adulteration and selling of a product that is not 100% honey (making sure none of that corn syrup gets slipped in!).
- ★ Animals that eat pollen are palynivores. We know that bees eat pollen, but lots of other insects also eat it. Orb web spiders, in particular, have been observed eating pollen that gets trapped in their webs.
- ★ Different plants produce varying amounts of pollen each year, but ragweed wins the prize. A single ragweed plant can produce billions of pollen grains in one season... and don't many of us know it! Ragweed pollen has been found more than 15,000 feet in the air and has been carried as many as 400 miles out to sea - yikes.



Photo Gallery

Thank you, George Altobell, for building the hive stand for the NCBA Club Hive, complete with plans for others to use!



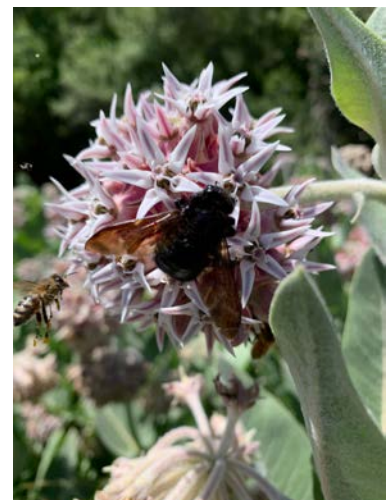
Part of 4x4 is cut away so that it nests with outer frame (see drawn plan for details).



Finished stand - can accommodate hanging frames



Martin with Club's strong colony



Showy Milkweed with Honey Bee and Valley Carpenter Bee (photo G. Giorgi)



Christine at Carolyn Parr Nature Center Pollinator Day with tabletop observation hive.



Acmon Blue Butterfly (*Icaricia acmon*) on Rosy Buckwheat (photo Waskowiak)



Yellow-faced Bumblebee on Phacelia & Bulbine (photo K. Belair)

Beekeepers' Bites

Sopapillas with Honey

Ingredients

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| 2 cups all-purpose flour | 1 tsp ground cinnamon |
| 2 tsp baking powder | ½ cup granulated sugar |
| 1 tsp salt | honey |
| 2 Tbl shortening | |
| ¾ cup warm water | |
| 2-4 cups oil for frying (such as canola) | |



Instructions

- In a large bowl, sift together flour, baking powder and salt. Cut in shortening until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Gradually stir in water until dough pulls together. Cover bowl with damp cloth and let rest for 15-20 minutes.
- Divide dough into 5 equal pieces. Roll out each piece of dough on lightly floured board into an 8-inch diameter circle. Cut each circle into 4 wedges.
- Heat oil in a deep frying pan to about 365-375°F. Add a few dough wedges at a time. Fry until golden brown, turning over to ensure they are golden and puffed on each side.
- Drain well on paper towels. While warm, coat each sopapilla with the cinnamon-sugar mixture and/or serve with honey to drizzle on them.
- NOTE: Sopapillas are best served fresh and hot! If needed, you can keep them warm in a 200°F oven for up to one hour.

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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