



Napa County Beekeepers' Association Newsletter - September, 2025 issue #19

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 been zipping along, and what a season it has been for the NCBA. We've held half a dozen hive dives, with one more on Sept. 7th (sign up asap). We hosted multiple guest speakers, most recently Dr. Elina L. Niño and Wendy Mather from UC Davis. A very big thank you to them for sharing their work with

us. A lot of information was covered, ranging from the CA Master Beekeeper Program to the research on new chemical Varroa mite treatments. Although we advocate for treatment-free beekeeping, it's important to be aware of what is going on elsewhere in the beekeeping world. One of my biggest take-aways was the research revealing how much a colony's long term health is improved when they have *diverse* sources of nutrition, especially at the beginning of the year.

In addition, much gratitude to the folks at *American Solutions for Business* for presenting the NCBA with a very generous donation! And lastly, thanks to all of you, our new and continuing club members. Your involvement and support allow us to continue growing, host more guest speakers, and share our happenings with an even greater audience. Don't believe me? Check out our new [NCBA website](#) where you can access the club event calendar and our newsletters, report swarms, and delve into assorted resources. The 'best practices' section is being finalized, so stay tuned for that as well.

With the autumnal equinox on September 22, fall is on its way and it is time to begin shifting our focus. This can be

a difficult time of year for bees as they prepare for winter. Weaker colonies are at risk of being robbed out by other hives, what appears to be a strong healthy population during one inspection can quickly succumb to Varroa mites by the next, and forage is limited. Toss in a little wildfire smoke and that's a tall ask for bee survival. So what's a beekeeper to do? Reduce the size of the hive entrance and seal any gaps in the hive boxes (if bees haven't already done so) to help prevent robbing. Continue to ensure that hives have shade and access to water. An alcohol mite wash and count can provide insight on how well a colony is managing its mite loads. High mite counts (30+ mites per 300, or ½ cup of bees) is an indicator that the colony may be suffering from the assorted viruses and stressors that Varroa brings.

Lack of forage is a little more complicated. A small but strong hive might benefit from a short period of feeding sugar syrup to help build up stores for the winter. In severe cases, longer feeding is also an option, but beekeepers must then also ask themselves, "*Should I be working to artificially sustain this hive over winter? What is my plan for them in the spring?*" Fortunately there is a second (long term) solution for those nutritional concerns - ***plant more forage!*** It is not the easiest or fastest way to help bees and other pollinators, but it is the most beneficial in the long term. Luckily for us, we are just about to enter the perfect time of year for planting all that native forage. More about that in the Events and In the Pollinator Garden sections below.

Until then, enjoy these last remnants of summer and we'll see you soon!

- Martin Podell



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Save the Date - NCBA and Local Happenings

NCBA HIVE DIVE & MITE TEST

When: Sunday, September 7 at 3pm

Where: RSVP for address/directions to club member's home

Focus: End of summer hive check and demo of alcohol mite wash

RSVP: martinp.ncba@gmail.com

SEPTEMBER CLUB MEETING

When: Monday, September 15, 6 - 7:30pm

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

Focus: Bring questions, observations, stories - a casual meeting with Christine W. over pizza and drinks

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 NCBA will have a booth at the event!
Please consider helping out at our table - contact Christine at christinewask.ncba@gmail.com.

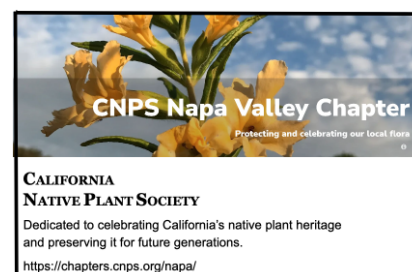


CNPS FALL PLANT SALE

When: Sat, Oct 18 (10am - 3pm) and Sun, Oct 19 (10am - 2pm)
(*CNPS members' early access on Sat, Oct 18 from 9 - 10am*)

Where: Skyline Wilderness Park, 2201 Imola Ave, Napa
(*free admission to Skyline Park for sale customers*)

What: Sponsored by Napa Valley Chapter of California Native Plant Society. Close to 2000 native plants for sun and shade will be available for purchase. Experts will be on hand to help customers choose plants. Visit the adjacent Martha Walker Garden, as well - a great opportunity to see mature native plants in a landscape setting.



Beeco's Bee Talk



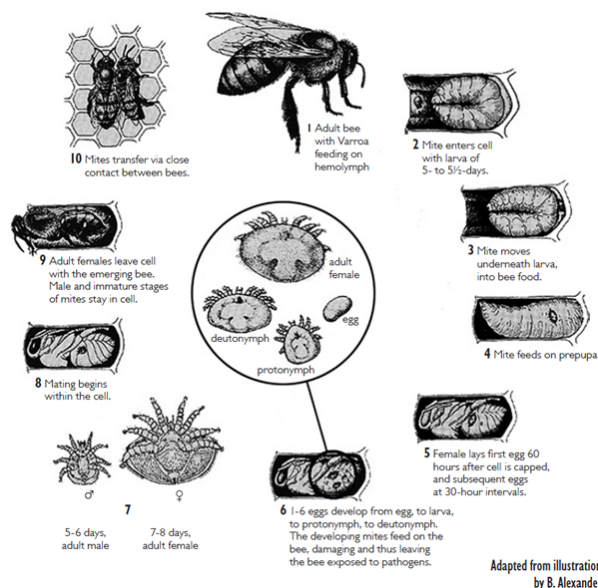
I see this as the final piece in a three part series: the first part was in last month's newsletter with photographs of what you might be looking for this time of year in terms of Varroa impact. For the second part, we held a hive dive where we demonstrated how to do an alcohol wash test for mites if you suspect large Varroa loads based on the pics in the newsletter. Now there is another chance to participate in a mite test - **next weekend's hive dive, Sunday, Sept 7 at 3pm**. If you have any questions about Varroa mites, testing methods, and how elevated symptoms present themselves, I'd highly recommend you attend.

The third part of the series is arguably the most difficult to understand and to implement. You have to remember there are a number of different ways to manage mites. Our club stance is that we prefer not to treat the bees for Varroa. Although we're talking about the long game, we would rather look at ways to help the bees manage the mites on their own rather than hold them up artificially through the use of miticides. It just gets a little tricky managing high mite loads this late in the year - there just aren't a lot of options to do that treatment-free. Mite loads and the stressors they bring are best caught early on.

If you understand the complex symbiotic relationship between Varroa and the bee and how their early developments are closely linked, it makes sense to control the mites by breaking the brood cycle. The easiest way to slow down the mites is to isolate the queen in a cage so that she has no access to open cells in which to lay her eggs. Once the queen's laying is put on pause, it leaves nowhere for the mites to reproduce. Sure, just like everything else in beekeeping, there are a lot of things to consider with heavy hive manipulations. This time of year, she really *needs* to be laying nurse bees that will eventually be looking after the winter bees, those longer-lived bees that will maintain your colony through winter. Breaking the brood cycle, however, is probably your best treatment-free option if you don't have any other colonies to work with. In the future, as a club, it would really behoove us to do a little selective breeding earlier in the year so that we would have a number of small colonies we could now utilize to requeen hives having heavy Varroa loads. You'd still have to cage the queen for a month to lower your mite loads first, but the goal would be to requeen the colony with new genetics, that is, with a queen that is a direct descendant of a long-lived colony that has survived without Varroa treatments.

No one ever said this style of beekeeping would be easy. Quite the contrary, it's far more involved than just throwing a strip or two of miticide in your hive and letting the chemicals take out the mites. It takes a lot more time, involving thoughtful inspections, a deep understanding of bee biology, and a willingness to take a little loss initially for the long-term betterment of the species. But, I'm here to tell you, it can be done. *I'm doing it*, and it only gets easier the longer you stay in the game. By staying committed to bee-centric, treatment-free beekeeping, focusing on locally adapted stock, my apiaries have evened out. I am seeing far fewer losses each year *and* I'm doing my best for the species.

A little bit about queen cages... I prefer to use a cage that allows the bees to access the queen while she is being isolated. It really helps if they can rub up against her and spread her pheromones throughout the colony, not only to maintain the bees' overall sense of well-being, but it also prevents them from thinking they are without a queen and building emergency queen cells. The rectangular



one above is a type of communication cage - the worker bees can get in and around the queen, but the bars' spacing doesn't allow her to slip out.

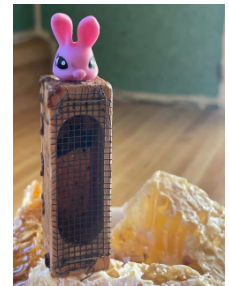


See far left for another good example of a communication cage - we call this a "Put Me in the Zoo" cage. In the second picture, the queen is being released after four weeks in quarantine. In cages like this where the workers are not able to move through the bars, simply put 5-10 attendants into the cage with the queen. The bees *outside* the cage will feed the attendants and the queen through the screen.

Lastly, we often use the wood and wire cages seen below to isolate queens. They are the most readily available and easy to use.

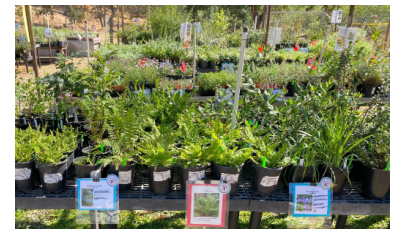
Hope to see you at the September 7th hive dive or one of our other events coming up!

- Rob Keller



In the Pollinator Garden

September continues to bring toasty days. Getting into the garden early is the name of the game. After watering, picking berries and walnuts, doing some judicious trimming and tidying up, perhaps slipping into one of the hives for a quick inspection, the rising temperatures finally drive me indoors to attend to various projects, one of which is preparing for...



The annual Fall Plant Sale, put on by our local California Native Plant Society chapter!

As noted in the Events section, it will be held the weekend of October 18-19. I hope to have two of my latest, favorite plants for sale - see below. Both are in full bloom now and pollinators love them.



Monardella villosa (Coyote Mint)

- To 1-2'T x 2-3'W, this lovely mint-scented perennial does well in our heavier soils.
- Full sun. Fairly drought resistant, although it does enjoy occasional summer water.
- Flowers attract bees and butterflies, especially in late summer when nectar becomes scarce.
- Calscape link: [https://calscape.org/Monardella-villosa-\(Coyote-Mint\)](https://calscape.org/Monardella-villosa-(Coyote-Mint))



Monardella macrantha 'Marian Sampson' (Marian Sampson Coyote Mint)

- To 6-12"T x 1-2'W, this more prostrate perennial monardella prefers decent drainage and some shade in our hotter areas.
- It does beautifully potted up in gravelly soil with pretty regular watering.
- Calscape link: <https://calscape.org/Monardella-macrantha-'Marian-Sampson'>

See you at the plant sale!

- Christine Waskowiak

Tales from the Club Hive

When we last checked in, the hive population was shrinking, there wasn't a laying queen, and the queen cells had disappeared...



August 5: When approaching the hive, there was very little activity by the entrance, not a great sign on a warm summer afternoon. I began by inspecting the top of two boxes: very few bees on the upper frames and the amount and progression of the nectar stores and capped honey looked unchanged. The inspection of the bottom box was much more encouraging. On the second frame in, there was a very small cluster of capped worker brood and young larvae. More brood on the next frame and a very young Queen was spotted! The brood nest was small, but the queen had emerged, returned from her mating flight, and was actively laying. The capped brood informs us that the queen began laying on or a day before the last inspection.



August 10: No real change in the conditions of the upper box, but below, the brood nest had been enlarged and expanded to more frames. Several frames were now almost completely full of capped brood in a very even pattern. This inspection was intentionally very short and mostly to check that the queen was still actively laying as the worker population would not yet have changed much.



August 24: Slightly more capped honey in the upper box. The bottom box was now much more active with bees as most of the capped brood from the last inspection had emerged, and the queen had already begun to lay new eggs in the recently opened cells. The brood nest now expands across the entire bottom box. Not all of the cells in the lower box were shaped well for brood and the colony had begun back filling those with nectar and some pollen.

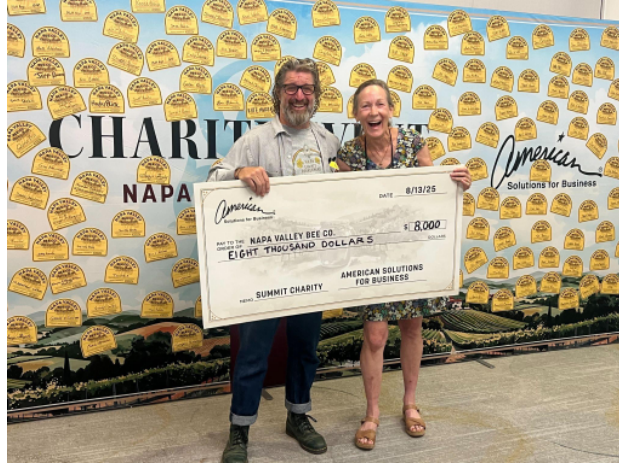
To bee continued!

Follow up from Elina and Wendy

We were happy to host Dr. Elina L. Niño and Wendy Mather at August's club meeting. Below are a few of the resources made available by Elina and Wendy.

- Dr. Niño's presentation on current E.L. Niño Bee Lab research: [Nino EL_ResearchUpdate 2025.pdf](#)
- A 6 ½ minute video that Dr. Niño and her lab helped KQED produce: [Varroa Mites Are a Honeybee's 8-Legged Nightmare](#)
- A link to Wendy's presentation on the CA Master Beekeeper Program: [ShortIntrotoCAMBP_082025](#)
- Elina mentioned this resource, put out by University of California's Agriculture and Natural Resources. This excellent and concise pdf entitled [Bees in the Neighborhood: Best Practices for Urban Beekeepers](#) is great for those who would like to start with an 19-page document before diving into a more comprehensive beekeeping book.

Photo Gallery



Rob & Christine giddy with donation to NCBA!

From hive dive at Emmanuelle & Jean-Marc's apiary:



Brood pattern and population looked good. Alcohol mite wash performed, with subsequent counting of bees and mites to check load.

Beekeepers' Bites

Tequila Bees Knees

Ingredients

2 oz tequila (such as Reposado)
1 oz fresh lime juice
1 oz honey syrup (see recipe)
Sparkling mineral water, chilled (such as Topo Chico)
Cracked ice

Instructions

To make the honey syrup, dissolve 3 parts local honey with 1 part water.
Store in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.

To make the cocktail:

In a Tom Collins or similar glass, combine tequila, lime juice and honey syrup. Gently stir to combine.
Fill the glass halfway with cracked ice and top with sparkling water. Garnish with a lime twist or wedge.
Enjoy responsibly!



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: [PDF NCBA Membership Levels & Form.pdf](#) You may also request membership info and form by emailing napaco.beekeepersassoc@gmail.com.

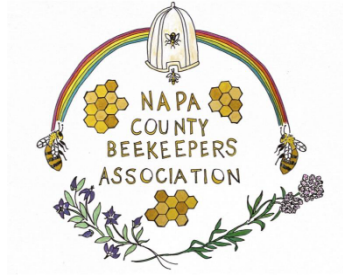
NCBA T-Shirt Orders

Beautifully printed locally by Grapeleaf Graphics with our logo, 100% cotton, available in S/M/L/XL. Choose from short-sleeved (regular or ladies cut, \$25) or *newly available* long-sleeved in grey (\$30). Shirts will shrink a bit, so order a size larger if you like a looser fit.

Purchase with 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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