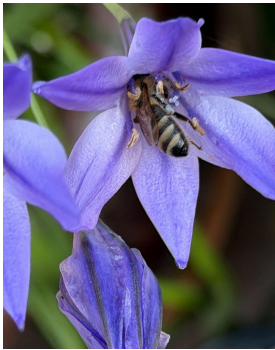


Napa County Beekeepers' Association Newsletter - June, 2026 issue #28

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! Spring is quickly coming to a close as we prepare for the Summer Solstice, June 21. Speaking of, please join us later this month as we celebrate our First Annual NCBA Summer Solstice Potluck. Details on page 2, and don't forget to pre-order a limited edition Club

shirt of your own (see page 6)! As we head into June, let's hope that the nectar and pollen flows continue a bit longer, thanks to some late season rain. This added moisture could help mitigate what is predicted to be a strong El Niño year, leading locally to a hotter and drier summer than we have experienced the last few years, but only time will tell. In the meantime, we can do our best to prepare our hives for what may be a difficult year. *If needed*, giving the colony a boost with some supplemental feeding can lessen their workload for raising the hive's population that normally peaks along with the summer solstice. This "extra workforce" of bees can then work to backfill the hive with stores as the Queen naturally slows down laying in the later summer months.

Now is also a good opportunity to make any Queen manipulations to the hive that can become more precarious later in the season. A mite test can provide a baseline number, to be compared with mite counts later in the season. Our Club sponsor hive, for example, has already been showing signs of heavy mite loads. Inspections revealed frames with large numbers of "bald faced" cells, uncapped by the bees who detect that the larvae inside are compromised by

Varroa mites. Other signs include nurse bees avoiding the brood nest, curlywing on young bees, and mites on the monitoring board, all of which tell us that there is a serious problem inside this hive, but a mite test gave us the real numbers - a mite load of 23%! A mite load this high is something we'd normally expect in the fall, not in the last week of May, but this also tells us we have a few, if limited, options to still turn things around. Caging the Queen to interrupt the brood cycle can give the bees time to clean out the parasitized larvae and reduce the overall mite population, but this is just a band-aid. Other options include pinching the current Queen and allowing the hive to rear a new one who, once mated, can hopefully bring in some stronger genetics, but this will only replace half of the genetics inside the colony. And as we learned from Randy Oliver, "*Wishful thinking in beekeeping doesn't work.*" Our best option is a full requeening with a Queen from proven mite resistant stock. This can be done by introducing a caged and mated Queen, adding a capped queen cell, or letting the colony raise new queen cell(s) from less than 3 day old worker eggs taken from another, strong colony and placed inside the

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(A Few Words from Martin, continued from page 1)

hive. Each of these methods has its own pros and cons, but with a hive in this condition, action must be taken soon. Otherwise, I can GUARANTEE you a (unplanned) honey harvest this year!

In addition, we would like to say thank you to Major Branzel for his presentation at last month's meeting. It is always good to hear from different beekeepers and clubs. A thank you to Shawn Brynildson, as well, for hosting our first member hive dive of the year. It was interesting to see how two different hives, properly spaced in the same apiary, can be doing so differently. The first hive we opened was strong, well stocked and populated, and from our inspection looked to be one of the healthiest hives I've seen this year. The second hive was the complete opposite - very small population, close to no brood, some cells with two eggs, and no

stores to be seen. We recommended immediately feeding that colony. It will be interesting to find out if that action was able to help the hive right itself.

Lastly, during a brief stop to feed and check on the club hive, I had some extra time to sit with the bees. It was wonderful to watch the goings on, foragers loaded up with deep orange and yellow pollen returning to the hive. Having just added a proper bottom board and moved the hive entrance, the bees were a bit out of sorts, but it was fascinating to observe them sorting things out. I encourage you all to make extended observation sessions a priority, too. Simply sit down by a hive and spend some time, undistracted and uninterrupted, with the bees. Much can be learned in these moments if we take the time to allow it.

- Martin Podell

Save the Date - NCBA and Other Happenings

JUNE NCBA CLUB MEETING - not a meeting, but a *SUMMER SOLSTICE POTLUCK*

When: Monday, June 15 from 5 o'clock on

Where: Napa Grange, 3275 Hagen Rd

Bring: Food and/or drink to share, plus your own utensils, plates, cups, etc.

Consider bringing: some of your apiary's honey for tasting

Families and friends are welcome!



NCBA Hive Dive

What: Join us as we take a look inside Amy Z's one-year old hive, established from a swarm caught last summer. Amy set up a bait hive and then waited, and waited, and waited... patience paid off!

When: Sunday, June 7, 10 - 11:30am

Where: 5249 Biava Lane, Napa

Bring: your own protective gear



Learning From the Bees Conference

For those interested in a real bee adventure... the *Learning from the Bees* conference is coming to the U.S. for the first time, following three celebrated conferences in Europe. Explore a combination of bee wisdom, research, and Indigenous teachings - through talks, interactive workshops, and experiences that will deepen your connection to nature and one another, learning regenerative ways to care for bees, all while honoring the land we tend.

When: September 25-27, 2026

Where: Spikenard Farm Honeybee Sanctuary, Floyd, Virginia

For more info: [Learning from the Bees](#)



Beeco's Bee Talk



Just off the [HoneyLove.org](https://www.honeylove.org) Zoom lecture with Paul Sheppard, a super engaging speaker who founded *The Honeybee Steward* at [Regenerative Beekeeping](#) and posts on the [Natural and Regenerative Beekeeping Facebook group](#). If you're on Facebook, you should look him up. This group shares the same values and hive management practices as our club. I get a little tripped up using the word 'regenerative' because there aren't any real clear guidelines for 'regenerative beekeeping'. Sure, if you're looking for all the other aspects of regenerative farming, you can turn to the Rodale Institute and I'm sure they'd have you covered, but for some reason (probably because it is so complex), neither Rodale or other organizations offer a regenerative beekeeping certification or recommendations. Without specific guidelines, it makes things a little muddy. What might be regenerative to one person may not be to another. I get it though, we're running out of words: organic, sustainable, natural, biodynamic, holistic, or even the newest word out there, wilding. I can't keep up, so basically I just say I'm a bee-centric beekeeper, meaning that the bees come first in my management approach.

Given my own bent, the lecture this morning didn't have any real new take-away points for me. Just shows how we're super simpático, and all our members should consider checking out one of the links above. For real, I was overwhelmed and proud of where we fit in as a club, it's pretty validating. Paul's regenerative group came up with about 20 different practices or ideals they feel are beneficial when managing the species. As a community, not only have we been practicing all twenty, but for years we've been heavily advocating for them despite the push-back from mainstream conventional beekeepers. Even the books Paul recommended, we've been talking about at the meetings. It's all about *At the Hive Entrance*, let's go Storch! Not only that, I was wholeheartedly inspired by Paul's unapologetic approach to disseminating the information. Basically he's all "*This is the way we should be doing it, and if you don't like it, too bad.*" For someone like me that's been at it for years, trying to get people to understand this style of keeping bees and why it's so important, this was a real breath of fresh air and I applaud him for that. Often I feel a little like Tiny Tim tiptoeing through the tulips so as not to hurt people's feelings or insult anyone. And well, you do catch more flies with honey than vinegar, so let's see how this goes:

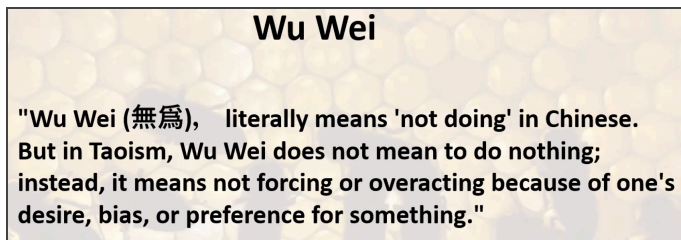
Being a beekeeper in Napa Valley automatically ties you deeply to Napa Valley agriculture. For better or worse, they are intrinsically linked. If at all possible, it's imperative that all beekeepers become gardeners, and more gardeners must plant for bees and other pollinators. I get asked all the time, "How do you see the future of the species playing out?" That's a tough one... it's kind of like the never-fully-answered question, "What's killing the bees?" I usually respond with, "What do you think?" C'mon, it doesn't take a neurosurgeon. I believe this will be one of the hardest hitting questions we'll be faced with in the next decade. Too much depends on it.

For me, the bee issue is about all I can take on. I mean, really... how can one person manage to be involved with all that is happening with the planet right now? If isn't the bees, it's the water, air, oceans, soil, wildlife... it's non-stop. We're in a dire situation right now and sadly, I don't have the answer. I don't have a cure, a silver bullet, or a magic flute that I can play, with all the bees following me out of town to safer pastures. All I've got is the hard hitting data that shows it ain't a pretty picture. My immediate advice coming out of a very slow-swarm spring would be that we all come together as a community and focus on our shared values and what's important for the bees. Paul also explicitly spoke to this - how important it is to talk amongst ourselves *and to others* about our practices, then collaborate on strengthening our local bee populations. As he said at the beginning of his talk, the problem is not the varroa mite, it's our beekeeping practices. Collectively it would be great to come together next year and do some selective queen breeding from our longest lived, treatment-free colonies - you bring your Hank Aaron and I'll bring my Willie Mays. Had we some locally adapted queens on-hand this spring, it would have really helped out some of the beekeepers in the club. A number of you out there ended



up ordering packages this year because you weren't able to catch one of the very few swarms that dispatched this spring. Perhaps we can emulate what the Italians say best: *"Una sola ape non è un'ape,"* or *"a single bee is not a bee."* Phew, think about that for a few minutes. We're all in this together. Be patient, read a book, or it's even okay to just do nothing sometimes.

One final piece shared by Paul:



See you at the potluck!
- Rob Keller

Birds & Vineyards are Mutually Beneficial

Wild Farm Alliance partnered with the [Vineyard Songbird Research Team](#) and Napa Valley wine grape growers to showcase the results of a multi-year project to determine what insects songbirds are eating in vineyards and how to best support them.

Learn how songbirds can be pest control allies when given places to nest and factors to consider when installing nest boxes. This short, 18 minute film recently premiered at a special event at the Cameo Cinema in St. Helena and is now available to view on YouTube: [Research Shows: Birds & Vineyards are Mutually Beneficial - Wild Farm Alliance](#). Along with other Napa Valley folks in the grape and wine business, our very own NCBA member Kristin Belair (Honig Winery) is a featured participant in this study and film.

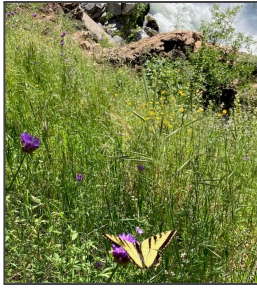


Ishi's DCA

A few meetings ago, Martin explained the phenomena of DCAs, aka drone congregation areas. A honeybee DCA is where the drones will gather in large swarms in the same location, year after year. Who has seen this phenomenon with *Apis mellifera*? It may be a rare sight. Species of native bees also congregate in DCAs, but we know less about them. Birds also exhibit this behavior, most famously the male Sage Grouse who gather and trumpet loudly to attract mates. In the birding world, these areas are known as "leks" and the locations are fixed through time immemorial. The term "lek" can also be used to describe a wild bee DCA, perhaps preferably so. But the most important feature of a lek, of either birds or bees, is that they have fixed locations that are forever the same, unless destroyed by human activity.

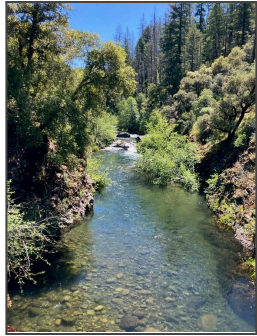


What does a lek have to do with Ishi? We've probably all read the story of Ishi, the last surviving Yahi Indian who came out of the California foothills to a ranch in Oroville in 1911. Ishi's story is told in Theodora Kroeber's book, *Ishi in Two Worlds*. He was purported to be the last truly wild Indian in North America, with his own language which was unknown to any other living human. After Ishi left the wilderness, he was taken away to the Bay Area where he spent the last four years of his life at the UC Museum of Anthropology, in the 'civilized' world.



What does Ishi have to do with the Napa County Beekeepers' Association, other than the Kroeber family having a home here in the Napa Valley? The answer is, yes, *Xylocopa*!

You will remember last month's article about the large black bees that frequent our gardens and live in our redwood fence boards. After a recent hive inspection at Suzan R's house, she showed me a beautiful female *Xylocopa tabaniformis* that she is saving for her entomologically inclined granddaughter. Suzan also told me the familiar story of how you can hear the carpenter bees munching inside your redwood fence. We should now all have "bee eyes" (and ears) for the familiar *Xylocopa*, the most recognizable genus of native bees.

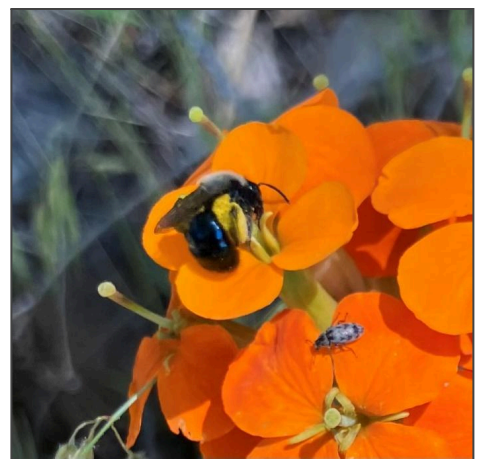


Here is the Ishi connection. On May 15, I was hiking in the Ishi Wilderness which lies in the foothills southwest of Mt. Lassen, not far from Chico. The rough canyons in this area were the last refuge of the Yahi, Ishi's tribe. To really understand Ishi's story, you have to go there. On this day, I was following Deer Creek (left), channeling Ishi as best I could along what felt like the original Yahi trail. One starts to get a feel for the terrain and an appreciation of the wider meadow areas where the Yahi had their lowland winter camps. Today, this land is designated as true wilderness, forever wild and largely unchanged since the days of the Yahi. Along Deer Creek, the only thing missing was the spring run of Chinook salmon.

I found a wide spot in the canyon and some inviting shade. A Yahi campsite, perhaps. It was a place to watch and listen for Ishi. I soon realized that '*something's happening here, but what it is ain't exactly clear*'. I could hear them, and then see them... the *Xylocopa*! There were drones flying very fast and low, amped up on pheromones. It was difficult to see them closely, or catch a photo, but I think it was a different species than the more common *X. tabaniformis* and *X. veripuncta* that we have here in Napa. Most likely, they were *Xylocopa californica*, our third California species.

But the huge buzz? I was hearing more than a few drones here. Then I looked up and I saw them. About 60 feet up, in a dead Incense Cedar snag, there was a mass of *Xylocopa* drones swarming the top which was riddled with holes. It is said that *Xylocopa* drones will hover near the entrance of an active nest, waiting for the emerging queens. Precisely! I had found 'Ishi's DCA'! There were as many as 70 or 80 drones buzzing around like anxious mosquitoes. I had never seen anything like this before, but I'm sure Ishi had. There I was, at the same lek that Ishi had seen over a hundred years before. No doubt that he saw it, because this was his place. He knew every inch of this land and I had stumbled into a living portal that took me back through time immemorial, via the lineage of *Xylocopa*. I would call this a live channel to Ishi, separated only by the generations of wild bees that still fly in Deer Creek Canyon. And one other note of interest – I never did see *Apis mellifera*.

- Chris Cole, contributing NCBA member



Xylo's pollen friends Ceanothus and Wallflower, with DCA and cedar snag (center), in the Ishi Wilderness (photos by C. Cole)

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 long-sleeved in grey (\$40). Shirts will shrink a bit, so order a size larger if you like a looser fit. Purchase with cash or check (see t-shirt order form linked below).

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



Plus a special edition t-shirt for our upcoming Summer Solstice Potluck, available in short-sleeve (\$25) or long-sleeved (\$40). Summer Solstice pic on front, 2026 NCBA logo on the back. Place your order by June 5.



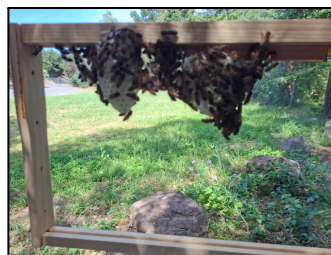
Tales from the Club Hive

May 16: Bait hive was moved back to the Grange. Hive entrance is currently facing north and needs to be repositioned towards the south.

May 17: Club members placed and leveled the new hive stand, then transferred the frames from the bait hive into the hive box. Inspection showed a solid brood pattern, but no stores yet. A jar of 1:1 sugar water was placed ¼ inch above the hole on the inner cover and the hive was closed.



May 24: Feeder jar was refilled with 1:1 sugar water. A solid bottom board was placed under the hive and a strap was added. The hive entrance was moved to face the east. The outermost J-frame shows new wax comb being built and small amounts of stored nectar.



May 27: Feeder jar was refilled with 1:1 sugar water. Bee flight path has reoriented to the new entrance location; hive entrance was shifted slightly more to towards the south. Minimal disruption to flight path with the smaller shift.

May 30: Refilled feeder with 1:1 sugar water and moved hive entrance slightly to the south.

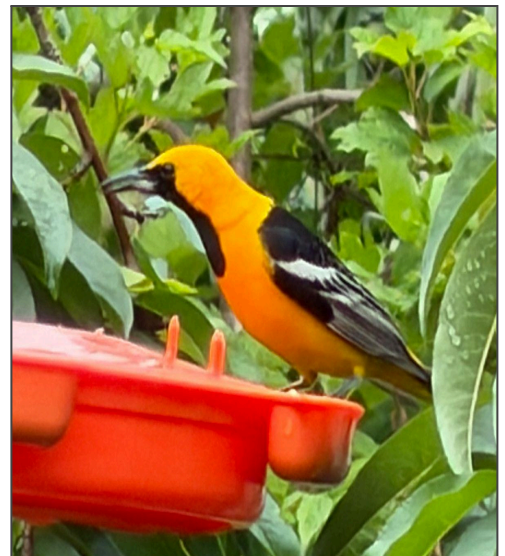
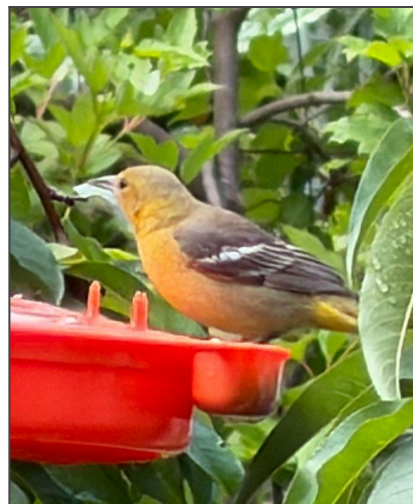
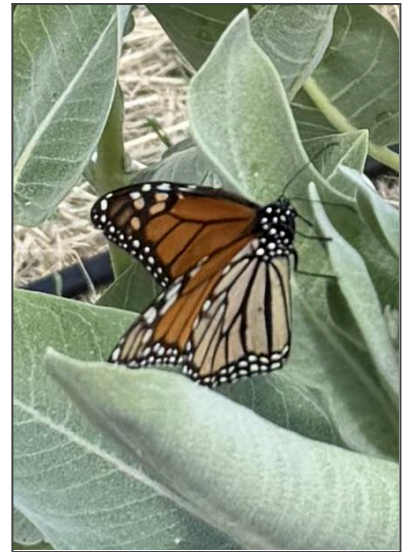
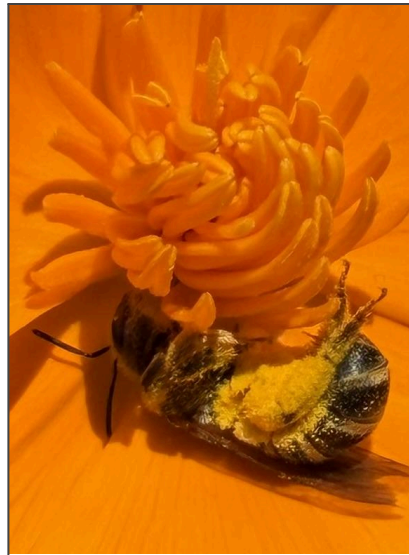
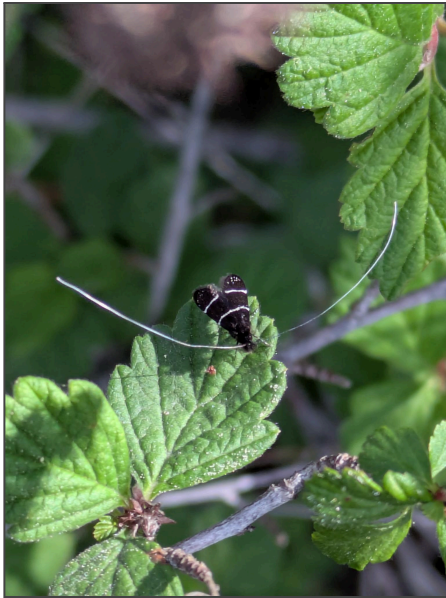
Photo Gallery

Photos: Top row - hive dive at Shawn's apiary (Donna Connelly)

Middle left - *Adela septentrionella* (fairy longhorn moth) (Justin Waskowiak)

Middle center & right - 'pollen-drunk' honey bee & Monarch on Showy Milkweed (Kristin Belair)

Bottom - Hooded Oriole juvenile male (left), female (center) and adult male (right) (Christine Waskowiak)



Bees and butterflies are not the only ones who appreciate something sweet!!

NCBA Membership - we welcome you!

The Napa County Beekeepers' Association has an active membership program. We welcome beekeepers of any level, as well as folks that just enjoy learning about bees and the greater world of pollinators. Your membership dollars enable us to offer the benefits below, In addition to covering various administrative and website expenses:

- Guest speakers on a range of topics
- Hands-on educational events & workshops
- Various swag discounts & freebies
- Individualized mentoring/consultation
- Monthly meetings and seasonal gatherings
- Monthly newsletter

A membership form for the Napa County Beekeepers' Association. The form includes fields for Name, Address, Phone, Email, and Date of Birth. It also has checkboxes for various membership options such as 'I am a new member', 'I am a returning member', and 'I am a life member'. There are sections for 'Member Information' and 'Payment Information'.

You may also submit a membership form online at our website: <https://www.beekeepersofnapavalley.org/form>

Note: a digital payment/donation option via Square is now in place on our website.



Napa County Beekeepers' Association

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