



Napa County Beekeepers' Association Newsletter - January, 2026 issue #23

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

A few words from Martin



Happy New Year and welcome to 2026! December's weather was an interesting way to end the year for the bees in the Napa Valley. A very long and foggy cold spell, followed by substantial rains kept them

mostly inside for most of the month, but once the sun and dry days returned, they were out foraging again with gusto! The weather isn't the only change for the hives this time of year. With the Winter Solstice now behind us, we will begin to see the first signs of queens increasing their daily egg production. Check your monitoring boards and watch for larger deposits of bee dirt and wax cappings relative to the colony's size in the few weeks prior. This season's mustard bloom is also off to a very early start and it's giving the bees some much needed forage for these early winter days. Mustard's bright yellow pollen will also likely be visible on the trays. What else will the tray reveal this time of year? Hygienic uncapping behavior, Varroa mites, hive beetles, perhaps even a frog!? Taking weekly photos of the monitoring board is a great way to "see inside" and track your hive's life cycle at this time of year. It also comes with the added benefit of not disrupting the brood nest or hive box, which is especially important during these colder months. Taking photos also allows us to really zoom in and see details up close.

It's only January but things are moving right along, and since we already have those brand new calendars out, let's add some club events to it! We are looking forward to holding our **first meeting at the Napa Grange, 3275 Hagen Rd, Napa, on Monday, Jan. 12 at 6 pm.** Join us as we discuss mid-winter beekeeping

tasks, discuss monitoring boards, and begin to plan for the upcoming spring swarm season. We are welcome to bring food and drinks to the Grange, but just like when on a hike, we need to pack out what we pack in.

And speaking of swarm season, we will be holding our bait hive building workshop on the morning of Saturday, January 24, 10am - 12:30pm at BOCA (see **NCBA Save the Date** for more details). Bring a cleaned hive box with a full set of cleaned or new frames and a warm drink as we build swarm traps! With it, you can hopefully catch your very own swarm of local and FREE bees. The club will have some tools and other supplies on hand to help with construction. The rains have made driving a vehicle all the way out difficult, so we'll be walking in from the gate - bring those mud boots. While it might sound as if it's a bit early to be thinking about spring swarms, last year's first swarm call was on February 13, so let's get those boxes built and ready to go.

We at the NCBA are looking forward to another fantastic year of events, education and workshops. On behalf of Christine, Rob and I, we can't wait to see all of you along the way!

- Martin Podell

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Save the Date - NCBA Happenings

JANUARY 2025 NCBA MEETING *NEW LOCATION*

When: Monday, January 12 from 6 - 7:30pm

Note this is January's 2nd Monday since MLK Jr. Day falls on the usual 3rd Monday.

Where: Napa Grange, [3275 Hagen Road, Napa](#)

Focus: The unseen and dramatic activity of a January hive preparing for spring



JANUARY BAIT HIVE WORKSHOP

When: Saturday, January 24, 10am - 12:30pm

Where: [BOCA \(parking lot; see right and notes below\)](#)

What: Hands-on workshop learning how to put together a bait hive (swarm trap), make it alluring, and locate it for optimum swarm capture

Read: Tom Seeley's instructive article on [Bait Hives for Honey Bees](#)

Listen: Beekeeping Today podcast [Piping Hot Bees](#) (also Seeley), examines the mechanisms behind swarming.

Bring: [See below](#) ↴

BAIT HIVE WORKSHOP

Bring the supplies below to make your own bait hive to take home. We will also demo the construction of a bait hive on site so that you can see how it's done.

Ideal supplies:

- old 10-frame hive box (don't go buy a new one; we have a limited supply of extras, if needed)
- scrap plywood (two pieces, each 19-7/8" x 16-1/2", or big enough to cover top and bottom of the hive box)
- 9 deep frames without foundation plus one deep frame with clean, drawn-out comb. If you don't have any frames with drawn-out comb, just bring any comb you have - we can rubber band it into one of your frames.
- screws (~1-1/2 inch) and drill plus bits for drilling and driving
- wood glue
- if available, bring a cordless screw gun, cordless circular saw, with fully charged batteries
- other helpful tools: screwdriver, hammer, tape measure

Other notes, including parking:

Feel free to bring snacks and something to drink, and be sure to wear water/mudproof shoes or boots.

Here is the link to the [BOCA parking location](#). As you arrive, proceed into the lot and down the right hand side of the Walsh Vineyard Management building where you will see cars parked and some signage (see map above).

We will have a couple of wagons or an ATV with trailer on hand so that materials are easier to get to the site.

Go through the gate and follow the path to the left until you come to the bee yard.

CLEANING & SANITIZING WORKSHOP

When: Saturday, February 21, from 9am - 12noon

Where: [BOCA \(see above\)](#)

What: Learn how to clean, sanitize, and prepare your tools and hive woodenware, *plus* we'll give a demo on how to clean your crusty, creosote-caked smoker.

FEBRUARY NCBA MEETING

When: Monday, February 23 from 6 - 7:30pm

Note this is February's 4th Monday since President's Day falls on the usual 3rd Monday.

Where: Napa Grange, [3275 Hagen Road, Napa](#)

Focus: Bait hives and swarm retrieval

Other Events of Interest

ANNUAL MLK DAY OF SERVICE - NAPA RIVER TRAIL

When: Monday, January 19 from 9am - 12noon

Where: Napa River Trail (meet between 2448 and 2450 Shoreline Dr., Napa)

What: Join folks from Napa City Parks and Rec. and Napa Resource Conservation District (RCD) for this satisfying morning of working on an ivy removal project along the River Trail. All ages and abilities welcome. This is a fantastic opportunity for youth, families, and community members to come together, give back, and honor the spirit of MLK Day.

For more info: <https://naparcd.org/events/mlk26/>

FILM: GIANTS RISING!

When: Monday, January 19 at 5pm

Where: [Cameo Cinema](#)

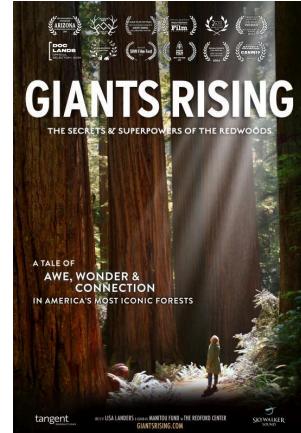
1340 Main Street, St. Helena CA

What: The film *Giants Rising!* will take you into the heart of America's most iconic forests to explore the secrets, superpowers and saga of the redwoods. Through the voices of biologists, artists, Native communities, and others, discover the scientific wonders of redwoods, our deep cultural ties to them, and the efforts underway to help these iconic forests overcome the legacy of logging that nearly wiped them out.

Presented in conjunction with Sustainable St. Helena (supporting St Helena's very own Community Forest), this special screening of *Giants Rising!* will be followed by a discussion with film-maker Lisa Landers and St. Helena Community Forest founder Paul Asmuth, moderated by naturalist and Napa County Supervisor (and NCBA member) Amber Manfree.

Cost: \$10

For more info: <https://ticketstripe.com/SH-Community-Forest>



CALIFORNIA MASTER BEEKEEPING PROGRAM (CAMPB) COURSE OFFERINGS

When: Saturday, January 24, 9am - 1pm: '*The Science of Honey Tasting*'

Sunday, January 25, 9am - 3pm: '*The Science of Mead Tasting*'

Where: HIVE Tasting Room and Kitchen, Woodland CA (UC Davis campus)

What: Participants in '*The Science of Honey Tasting*' will explore how each honey's unique flavor, aroma, texture, and color are shaped by floral sources, chemistry, bee biology, and beekeeping practices. Learn what research tells us about enzymes, antioxidants, microbial properties, sugar ratios, moisture content, and crystallization—then apply that knowledge through intentional, structured honey tasting.



Before beer, before wine, there was mead. Made from honey, water, and yeast, mead is among humanity's oldest fermented beverages. Participants in '*The Science of Mead Tasting*' will explore how fermentation transforms honey into mead, and how yeast selection, sanitation, chemistry, and technique shape aroma, body, balance, and flavor expression.

Cost: These courses may be taken individually (\$200 each) or bundled for a discount (\$350 for both).

For more information:

[The Science of Honey Tasting | California Master Beekeeper Program](#)

[The Science of Mead Tasting | California Master Beekeeper Program](#)

Beeco's Bee Talk



Looking ahead to 2026, loads is happening beyond the hive that will eventually impact the bees. For right now, though, I'd say it's still too early to think about opening your hives. Be patient, the colony is still super dinky compared to what it will look like two months from now. Sure, they are starting the preparations for spring growth and the Queen may have even initiated drone production, but the colony doesn't have the critical mass to build up the heat released from the hive due to an untimely inspection based sheerly on curiosity. Remember, once the Queen starts egg laying, the furnace kicks on and they *must* keep the internal core of the brood nest between 92-98°F for the developing baby bees.

While too cold for deep inspections, I'd say your bee time right now would be better served by just pulling and reading your monitoring trays and making external observations. While the tray is out, look from underneath at the screened bottom, too. On a nice day when temps exceed 60°F, it's probably alright to briefly pop your lid and see how they are doing by looking at the inner cover oval, but that's it, I wouldn't go any deeper. Focus on getting your swarm traps ready, building your new woodenware in preparation for hive expansions next month, and continue to cherish this winter downtime with a good bee book, podcast, or in my case, a natural history museum visit. Soon enough it will be 'go time' and all we can do to keep up.

My big take home from recent time at the Los Angeles Natural History Museum was how everything is all so interconnected. Around here, it's easy to focus on just one minute piece of a much bigger picture, but our management practices and lifestyle choices are far reaching if we look closely enough. I was really struck by a Wendell Berry quote I saw while trolling the museum bookstore: "*We cannot know what we are doing until we know what nature would be doing if we were doing nothing.*" That's pretty profound and I get it. Berry wrote that back in 1987 and A LOT has changed since then. Given the current state of affairs, I'm not sure we can take the quote and fully run with it, but it sure feels right to use as a springboard for how we might approach our hive management - less invasive inspections, preserve the brood nest, cherish and conserve our locally adapted stock, and offer abundant, native habitat valley-wide.



Look forward to seeing you all at our new meeting place that feels so appropriate to who we are as a club. Viva the Napa Grange #791!

monitoring tray debris



looking up thru screened bottom



quick peak at inner cover shows a decent population



2026 BeeWhere Registration

At NCBA's October club meeting, we were pleased to have Julius Mueller of the Napa County Ag Commissioner's Office who gave a detailed presentation on the importance of California's BeeWhere hive registration program. We hobbyist beekeepers in Napa County enjoy a very positive, collaborative relationship with our local Ag Department. Their staff make a notable effort to understand the needs and concerns of local beekeepers, and we likewise strive to engage and promote responsible beekeeping practices for the health of our colonies, other pollinator species, and agriculture in the Valley.



As part of our own best practices and *in accordance with California state law*, this entails annual registration of our hive(s) with [California's BeeWhere Program](#). The online registration process takes just a few minutes and until at least January 31, **the \$10 fee for Napa County beekeepers is waived**. Registration "enables communication between beekeepers, pesticide applicators, and county agricultural commissioners to reduce pesticide incidents with bees." Upon registration, the contact info you provide is the means by which you will be notified at least 48 hours prior to planned agricultural pesticide application within one mile of your apiary (see [ca.gov/laws - notification to apiary operators](#)). Important note - no one outside the agricultural commissioners has access to hive locations - these are kept confidential.

➤ To register your hive(s): <https://beewhere.calagpermits.org/Beekeeper>

For more information regarding the BeeWhere program, see the [BeeWhere Explanatory Flyer](#) and [BeeWhere California | Help](#). You may also contact the Napa County Agricultural Commissioner's Office at 707-253-4357.

In the Pollinator Garden

Many gardeners, including yours truly, appreciate the availability of free or low-cost wood chips for mulching our gardens and paths. Besides suppressing weeds, retaining soil moisture, and simply defining planting areas, the mulch eventually breaks down, making available nutrients to the plants. A host of organisms help with this process of decomposition, such as earthworms, beetles, millipedes, slugs, bacteria, and of course... fungi! With winter's rain, the gardens and woods are bursting with fungi, many in kaleidoscopic colors and shapes. Mushrooms have loads of medicinal and culinary qualities and the majority of them are non-toxic, but the few that are poisonous warrant extreme care to avoid eating or having around children and pets.



Neither a plant or a vegetable, fungi are their own biological kingdom. The mushroom itself is the fleshy, spore-bearing fruiting body of a fungus, while the main fungal organism is a vast, underground network of thread-like filaments called mycelium. At the forefront of much mind-bending research these days are mycelium and mycorrhizae, a specific type of mycelium that forms a symbiotic relationship with plant roots. In this relationship, materials are exchanged: the fungus receives sugars from the plant, while the plant receives water and minerals through the mycorrhizae associated with its roots. This complex, powerful relationship has been dubbed the "wood wide web." So the presence of mushrooms in your mulch and gardens is generally a very positive sign of a healthy, biodiverse ecosystem.

One last note, however, on behalf of our native pollinators... around 70% of our *native* bees are ground nesting. They, and other invertebrates, are tucked away in the leaf litter during the winter. This is not the time to lay down a new, heavy layer of mulch as it will create a barrier for the springtime emergence of those winter sleepyheads. Wait until late spring to apply that fresh layer - the moths, butterflies, beetles, and native bees will be most grateful!

- Christine Waskowiak

Tales from the Club Hive

With December's cold temperatures and rain, it's been monitoring board inspections only this last month.

December 6: Several weeks since the last hive inspection. No activity at the hive entrance. This was expected due to the cold temperatures and late afternoon inspection. Small hive cluster with hygienic uncapped cells, dropped pollen, bee dirt and a lot of Varroa mites.



December 13: Very cold day, no activity at the hive entrance. Same hive debris as the last inspection, but less of everything from a week before. Photo of the hive cluster from underneath the screened bottom.



December 27: Warm, early afternoon inspection - loads of activity at the hive entrance! Lots of bees bringing in mustard pollen. Several more frames of activity seen on the monitoring board. Wax cappings, dropped pollen, some mites, and a few hive beetles. Moisture build-up and condensation from the heavy rain the day before.



Beekeepers' Bites

Honey and Pine Nut Brûlée

Preparation time: 20 minutes, plus chilling

Cooking time: 30-40 minutes

Serves 6

Ingredients

8 egg yolks
1/3 cup honey
2 1/2 cups heavy cream
1 lemon, grated zest only
1/3 cup pine nuts
3 Tbsp sugar, to finish



Directions

Use a fork to mix together the egg yolks and honey in a bowl. Pour the cream into a saucepan and bring almost to a boil. Gradually beat it into the egg yolk mixture.

Strain the custard into a bowl, then stir in the lemon zest. Arrange six ramekins in a roasting pan, divide the pine nuts among the dishes, then top with the custard. Pour warm water into the roasting pan to come halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Bake in a preheated oven at 325°F for 30-40 minutes or until the custard is set with a slight jiggling softness at the center.

Leave the ramekins to cool in the water, then remove and chill in the refrigerator for 3-4 hours. About 15-20 minutes before serving, remove from frig. Sprinkle the tops of the desserts with sugar and caramelize with a blowtorch. (And yes, you can use your beekeeping torch if careful!) Leave at room temperature until you are ready to serve.

NCBA Membership - sign up now!

The Napa County Beekeepers' Association has an active membership program. In addition to covering various administrative and website expenses, membership dollars enable us to offer you:

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

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 pick up at an upcoming NCBA meeting.



Napa County Beekeepers' Association

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