



Napa County Beekeepers' Association Newsletter - February, 2026 issue #24

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! We're only a month in, but 2026 is already ramping up here at the NCBA. We kicked the new year off with our first meeting at the Napa Grange and it was a smashing success! We welcomed many existing members and new-bees alike. And at our club event last weekend demonstrating how to build your own bait hive, we

were joined by beekeepers of all skill levels. Only time will tell what sort of swarm season we will have here in the Valley, but with a head start getting gear ready, we set ourselves up to hopefully catch those early spring swarms. With early season apiary prep in mind, at our February 23rd meeting (one week later due to President's Day), we will be focussing on moving bees into a new hive, how and when to expand the space inside the hive box, and what to watch for if a colony is preparing to swarm. We will also be holding a short demonstration on hive gear and terminology for all the folks new to beekeeping or thinking about getting their first hive. In addition, please join us on the morning of Saturday February 21 at NCBA member Emmanuelle's beeyard for a workshop on cleaning your gear and how to get that old grungy smoker puffing like new.

Breaking News, this just in: The Napa County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution at their January 27 meeting to continue waiving the **BeeWhere** registration fee for hobbyist beekeepers with nine or fewer colonies, so log on and get your hives registered today! Not only is it the law and the responsible thing to do as mindful

beekeepers, but registering will also inform you if products that are harmful to bees are going to be sprayed near your hive(s).

The recent lack of winter rain has made for an interesting January. Toss in multiple days in the upper 70's and it can be easy to think that spring has arrived and the colonies that made it through winter are now on easy street. But this can lead a beekeeper into a false sense of security. While hive populations are definitely increasing right now, colonies are still relatively small. The bees can easily lose the warmth needed to maintain the brood nest with an ill-timed hive inspection, requiring a lot of resources (aka honey) to reheat the hive. Monitoring trays are still the best and least invasive way to get a picture of what is happening inside the hive right now. Dropped pollen, mites, and bee dirt will all be present, along with the tell-tale "wheat flakes" of newly uncapped drone cells. Spending a few minutes observing the hive entrance is also a great way to see what the bees are up to. Are they bringing back pollen and nectar? What color is the pollen? Do you see any drones flying yet? Are workers pulling sick bees out of the hive? All this

continued page 2

Newsletter Contents

A Few Words from Martin	1-2
Save the Date: NCBA Happenings	2
Beeco's Bee Talk	2-3
In the Pollinator Garden	4
Tales from the Club Hive	5
BeeWhere Hive Registration	5
Beekeeper Bites	6
T-Shirt Orders	6
NCBA Membership & Contact Info	7

A few words from Martin, continued from page 1

information can better help you understand the inner workings of the hive without opening it up. But, if you must open the hive, don't dawdle! A quick peek under the inner cover or dropping in a new empty frame to add a little space is about all you'll have time for. The full spring hive inspection will need to wait a little longer.

The bee populations aren't the only thing that have been growing in numbers lately. The NCBA added 48 new members in 2025 alone! To streamline our efforts, we'll be making a few changes to how we manage our membership and renewals. By shifting to an annual renewal date of March 1st, membership is greatly simplified. We'll be reaching out to let you know how that affects your particular membership, especially those of you who joined after March 2025 - but no worries, we will make sure any past paid membership fee covers at least one full year or more.

With this on-going financial support of our members, the Napa County Beekeepers' Association will continue to grow, provide materials for workshops and events, maintain our website, pay our rent, and bring in even more wonderful guest speakers! Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, our Venmo account is still acting a little squirrely, so check or cash is the easiest method for membership and donations. We deeply appreciate your understanding and support for local and treatment free beekeeping. See you soon!

- Martin Podell

Save the Date - NCBA Happenings

CLEANING & SANITIZING WORKSHOP

When: Saturday, February 21, from 10am - 12noon

Where: Emmanuelle's Beeyard - RSVP to napaco.beekeepersassoc@gmail.org for address and directions.

What: Learn how to clean, sanitize, and prepare your tools and hive woodenware, *plus* we'll give a demo on how to clean your creosote-caked smoker, *plus* a demo on how to assemble and wire up a frame, use starter strips, and insert 100% beeswax 'foundation' (per request).

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

Beeco's Bee Talk



Happy spring, bee people! It's only the first of February and spring has definitely sprung. I always move very cautiously this time of year because it could easily snap back to cold weather and any heavy handed manipulations could be problematic for the bees. It's a double-edged hive tool because, regardless of the weather outside, the bees are so keyed into the solar calendar and their photoperiod, they keep moving forward. You can see it on your monitoring trays, drone caps, wax flake, and the expanding amount of worker dust. Even during the last few days of inspections, I've seen more than one colony initiating swarm response. I'd venture to bet we see the first

swarm of the year before you've even read this. Nothing is 100%, but giving them a little space to grow right now can slow their urge to propagate.

I believe expanding hives is one of the more challenging things for beekeepers to wrap their heads around. How to do it, when to do it, and why you are doing it are the big questions. From what I'm seeing right now, most of my colonies could use a small expansion (see pics at right),





meaning I'll offer them a little room to grow, but not so much that it will interrupt their ability to cluster at night when the temperature drops. I generally do it on populous hives by adding a frame *without* foundation dead center in the brood. I wouldn't advise expanding the size for a colony that's not occupying at least 5-6 frames. As you can see in the picture to the left, I put a disc of wax about the size of a quarter, fitted snugly in the topbar groove (see pic at very top for one of my more creative 'discs'). I place the frame dead center in the brood nest where the population is most dense. It's one of the few times of the year where I'd advocate this interruption to the nursery. It feels right that we should be looking at that space as being sacred to the colony and be super intentional about any manipulations in that area. If you are going to use this technique, make sure to do it using only an empty frame with a starter disc/strip. If you were to insert a full frame of foundation, plastic or otherwise, it acts like a wall and would bisect the nursery, preventing the bees from having full access to the brood nest and keeping that cluster with all the young larvae warm. If we bisect that brood nest, I've found that the bees go to one side or the other, depending on which side the queen is located. Then the other side tends to get neglected and you'll see problems with chilling. Using an open frame with a small wax disc eliminates that scenario, and the bees build down from the starter disc, filling the frame with comb. (Note - there are many other types of 'starter strips' that beekeepers use, such as tongue depressors dipped in beeswax and wedged into the frame's top groove, or by cutting and inserting a narrow strip of pure beeswax foundation across the top of a frame.) See pics below - look how fast the bees build out this comb!



4 days after putting wax starter disc in hive



Then 6 days later

The other option for providing a bit of expansion room this time of year is to add frames to the *outer edges* of the brood box using the more gentle Christine Kurtz method. She puts two empty frames with starter strips on the *outer* part of the hive box, giving the bees a little elbow room to expand into the space from the sides. While my technique delivers a straightforward "get started here" message to the bees, you have a little more wiggle room with Christine's method if using foundation because you'll be working beyond the nursery where clustering isn't as important.



Mark date added to hive on frame itself Keep good records!



Both these methods require you have the available space to add frames. I try to front load my technique back in the early fall by removing one frame from each box, creating the room to *add back* a fresh frame in the spring. Remember to push the remaining frames back together, leaving only the $\frac{3}{8}$ " beespace between them, with follower boards on each side. This method works because by fall most of the wax building has shut down and there's no worry of bees jumping the follower boards and building wax in the void, so why not prepare early? With any hive manipulations, make sure to keep accurate records, whether making notes on the frames themselves and/or keeping a hive notebook.

Next month we will go over how to expand upwards using follower boards if your brood box is already maxed out and full of frames, but you need to offer your bees more space into an additional box. Happy spring and prepare yourselves - it's about to get busy, really busy...

- Rob Keller

In the Pollinator Garden



Whether strolling through your neighborhood or hitting the trails, one of California's most ubiquitous plants is currently putting on its annual 'ringing of the bells' show. Manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos spp.*) begin flowering as soon as late autumn, but most of the ~95 species found in California wait until winter and early spring, a huge boon for pollinators during a time of year when nectar and pollen are still scarce. Manzanitas' flowers are brilliantly designed little bells with waxy, fused petals hanging downward to prevent rain from falling into them. As with all flowering plants, pollination of these blossoms is essential for production of seeds and the plant's reproduction. And, as with many plants, pollination represents an "exchange of services" - pollinator species (bees, butterflies, moths, hummingbirds, etc.) receive a sweet meal and often a protein-rich pollen snack (needed especially for rearing of young) while the plant is assured of successful reproduction.

Many pollinator species will visit manzanita flowers, but pollination is largely credited to visits from native bees, including bumble bees. However, take a look at those bell flowers' openings - at a mere 1 mm wide or so, they are far too small for any but the smallest of pollinators to enter. In a fascinating example of symbiosis and adaptation, the bumble bee has come up with a unique approach. It clings upside down to a manzanita flower, forelegs firmly grasping the blossom, and vibrates its wing muscles to a pitch of middle C! (Incidentally these are the same wing muscles that honey bees vibrate to generate heat inside the hive.) This vibration, referred to as "buzz pollination" or "floral sonication", causes the pollen grains to fall from the anthers (male reproductive flower parts) onto the bee's fuzzy abdomen. As the bumble bee moves from plant to plant, it fertilizes the stigmas (female reproductive part) of other flowers with the pollen clinging to its belly. Win-win for bumble bee and plant! Bumble bees, like honey bees, also pack some of that pollen into bundles on their back legs and take it back to their nests for feeding their developing larvae.



Speaking of honey bees... they *also* would appreciate a manzanita-nectar feast, but they are not buzz pollinators nor do they have the long tongue of a hummingbird or the tiny body of many native bees. Instead honey bees, as do carpenter bees and certain wasps, bypass the flower's narrow opening entirely and use their strong mandibles to chew a small opening at the base of the flower, giving them access to the nectar. Call it cheating?! Perhaps, but the bountiful flowering of a typical manzanita results in ample food for many.

Final note - once those bell flowers are pollinated, they develop into manzanita fruits (manzanita means "little apple" in Spanish), satisfying the appetites of many *other* wildlife species - bears, coyotes, foxes, raccoons, squirrels, mice, turkeys, quail and more. If you do not yet have a manzanita in *your* yard, perhaps it's time to consider this very wildlife-friendly plant. There are loads of varieties to choose from: those that grow into trees, remain as small shrubs, spread as groundcovers, or shine as specimens in containers. Each will enhance your own landscape AND help the critters we share our outdoor spaces with.

- Christine Waskowiak



Tales from the Club Hive

January 7: Large increase in the size of the hive debris on the monitoring tray. Most of the brood nest is still small and centered, but the colony is bringing in stores to adjacent frames. Mold and condensation were also on the tray from the heavy rains on the previous days. Mites and hygienic uncapping debris were observed.



January 15: Following a week of warm dry days, the inspection tray was mold free. Brood nest continues to grow in size and number of frames. Clean pollen from the mustard bloom, but still a high number of mites. Checked the feeder box - some condensation, but the lavender was still dry and clean. After a quick look under the inner cover, added a J-frame to both the brood and upper box. Very noticeable increase in the hive population from the prior inspection.



2026 BeeWhere Registration

One more reminder... as part of our own best practices and *in accordance with California state law*, it's time to register our hive(s) with [California's BeeWhere Program](#). The online process takes just a few minutes and **the fee for Napa County beekeepers with 9 hives or fewer is waived**. Registration "*enables communication between beekeepers, pesticide applicators, and county agricultural commissioners to reduce pesticide incidents with bees.*" 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. 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.

Beekeepers' Bites

Miso Honey Chicken and Asparagus

[Recipe from New York Times Cooking](#)

Preparation time: 20 minutes, plus marinating

Serves 4

- 3 Tbsp white miso
- 3 Tbsp mild honey
- 3 Tbsp soy sauce or tamari
- 1 Tbsp rice vinegar
- 2 tsp finely grated fresh ginger
- 2 tsp finely grated garlic
- 2 tsp chile-garlic sauce or other hot sauce
- 1 Tbsp plus 2 tsp neutral oil
- 1½ to 2 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 1 large bunch asparagus (~1 lb), trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced
- Cooked rice (optional), for serving



- 1) Make the marinade: In a bowl, whisk together the miso, honey, soy sauce, rice vinegar, ginger, garlic, chile-garlic sauce, 1 Tbsp oil and 1 Tbsp water. Refrigerate half the marinade for serving.
- 2) Place the chicken in a shallow dish or zip-top bag and pour the remaining marinade over the top. Toss the chicken until coated and let marinate in the refrigerator for up to 30 minutes. (A longer marinade may dry out the chicken.)
- 3) When you are ready to cook, heat the broiler with a rack set six inches below it. Line a large baking sheet with aluminum foil. Remove the chicken from the marinade, scraping off and discarding any excess. Place the chicken in a single layer on one side of the baking sheet, with the flatter side up. Place the asparagus on the other side. Drizzle the asparagus with remaining oil, then season the asparagus; toss to coat.
- 4) Broil until the chicken is cooked through with some charred spots and the asparagus is browned, about 10 minutes.
- 5) To serve, top the chicken with a drizzle of the reserved marinade and a sprinkle of scallions. Serve with rice, if desired.

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 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.



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:

 [NCBA Membership Levels & Form.pdf](#)

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



Napa County Beekeepers' Association

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