



Napa County Beekeepers' Association Newsletter - October, 2025 issue #20

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. The NCBA's first Master Gardener's Fall Fair participation was a smashing success! We met with other beekeepers and even saw a few club members moonlighting for other involved organizations. Thank you to everyone who came together to make this possible. In the spirit of keeping the momentum going, we

have a couple of events lined up for October. We will be hosting guest speakers from the Napa County Ag Dept at our club meeting on Monday, Oct. 20 to learn about the BeeWhere program and what's going on at the county and state levels regarding honeybees. We will also be holding a hands-on, dead-out workshop at BOCA (Oct 18). Join us as we demonstrate how to harvest and clean the remnants of a hive that is no longer occupied. Lastly, if the weather holds, we are looking for volunteer(s) to host an end of season hive dive at which we'll focus on a final mite check and preparing the hive for overwintering.

With the Equinox now behind us, shorter hours of daylight and cooler temperatures have signaled autumn's arrival here in the Valley. These corresponding shifts are also becoming noticeable inside hives. In stronger colonies we're seeing a population reduction, a hopefully-even brood pattern that will yield the winter bees, and the backfilling of open cells with whatever nectar and pollen is still available as bees prepare to overwinter.

Unfortunately, this is not the case for the weaker hives.

The negative effects of Varroa parasitization are becoming more apparent. Inspections and mite load tests (107 mites in a half cup of 300 bees is the "winner" so far!!) reveal hives without the stores needed to overwinter,

comb with spotty and snotty brood, curly wing virus visible on newly emerged bees, and ultimately, absconding and colony collapse.

As disappointing as it is to see a hive failing, let's remind ourselves that these are also natural parts of the honeybee's life cycle. Not all the bees will, or should, make it to next spring. By allowing the weaker genetics to fall out of the greater community, room is made for healthy genetic traits to take their place. And in a strange twist, the loss of a colony can also bring a few final gifts. Honey that otherwise would have been needed to overwinter the colony can be collected, and propolis and wax processed. Empty gear gets cleaned, repaired and stored for next year. The lack of an active colony to manage can also free up some time for other opportunities. Take a moment to slow down and read one of the numerous books that can help you become a better beekeeper. Plan and make changes to the layout and location of your apiary should they be needed, plant some of those wonderful native plants to help feed our greater pollinator community next year. Lastly, take a moment to *thank the bees* and ask yourself, "How can I become an even better bee-centric beekeeper next year?"

- Martin Podell

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Save the Date - NCBA and Local Happenings

OCTOBER CLUB MEETING

When: Monday, October 20, 6 - 7:30pm

Where: Location to be announced

Focus: We sit down with guest speakers from the Napa County Ag Dept to talk about the [BeeWhere California](#) program and other autumnal topics.



OLD MILL DAYS AT BALE GRIST MILL HISTORIC STATE PARK

When: Sat, Oct 11 and Sun, Oct 12, from 10am - 2pm

Where: Location and directions to [Bale Grist Mill State Historic Park](#)

What: Step back in time at Old Mill Days and experience life as it was in the 1800s. Try your hand at traditional farm chores like corn husking, wheat threshing, butter making, and apple pressing. Watch skilled artisans demonstrate historic trades, including blacksmithing and lace making, and meet volunteers and reenactors in period-correct attire. Admission is \$5 per person; children under 2 are free.

For more info, visit: [Old Mill Days — Napa Valley State Parks Association](#)

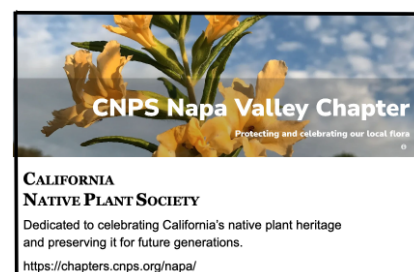


CNPS's ANNUAL FALL PLANT SALE - don't miss this!

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. Over 2500 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.



DEAD-OUT WORKSHOP

When: Sat, Oct 18, 9-10:30am

Where: [BOCA](#), 1125 Golden Gate Drive, Napa - behind Walsh Vineyards Mgmt ⇒

What: What to do with a hive that has failed or absconded? How to clean, sanitize, and store equipment so that it is ready to roll come spring.



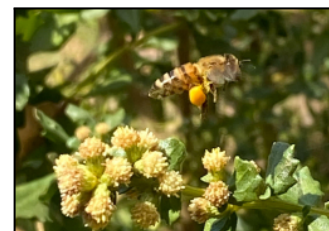
NOVEMBER NCBA GATHERING

Instead of a third-Monday meeting, let's gather for a Saturday potluck!

When: Saturday, November 15 - stay tuned for time & further details

What: Time to celebrate a sweet and successful year together as a community. Bring a dish to share, invite family members that wonder who you're hanging out with on third Mondays, and let's toast to a strong and vibrant beekeeping community that we are co-creating!

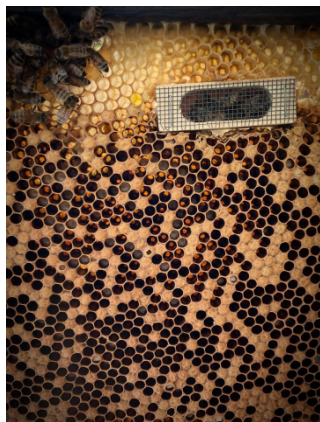
DECEMBER: *No meeting in December. Bees are staying warm and tucked in at home, and so shall we!*



Beeco's Bee Talk



This time of year, I start to see my biggest colony losses. Not many dead-outs just yet, but plenty of parasitized colonies with high mite loads. I used to pride myself on saying we push bees through winter with way higher loads than the conventional guys who claim that six mites per 300 bees are goners. I still think that number is low, but after two years of testing, there are definitely a few indicators that suggest bees won't survive to spring if left to their own devices.



Far left above: If you see a colony of bees that have a ton of open cell pupae and CWV (curly wing virus), I'd definitely test. Most colonies that have tested 30+ mites are probably dead bees walking, it's just a matter of time. I have pushed bees through with 50 mites per 300 bees (16.7%), but they don't look too great come spring.

Second from left: Pretty spotty brood and sure enough, ~45mites (15%) - pretty high, so we caged the queen.

Second from right: Just because you see an increase of mites on your monitoring tray doesn't necessarily mean the bees inside the hive are struggling. Slow down, relax your eyes, and look for any mites that are moving. Also look for the lighter colored, grayish, younger mites. A lot of young mites indicate that your bees may have varroa sensitive traits and are interrupting the early development of the mites, which is a good thing.

Far right: A great example of the uncapping-recapping mechanism we're seeing bees exhibit - see the cell that is partially open dead center. Bees are recognizing the cells that have mites living and reproducing in them. They chew open the cell, exposing the family of mites and interrupting their development. They leave the cell uncapped for about 10 days, then recap the cell and the bee larva finishes its development. The three cells with purple-eyed pupae at the top of this image are in the process of being recapped. Fascinating stuff! Sadly I'm not seeing a whole lot of correlation between mite loads and this behavior.

I'm a big advocate for going into your hives now and examining the brood for indications of mites. If you're seeing questionable brood, test them. How many mites in the picture to the far right? I count 18.



On the log hive front, I am seeing a bit more survivability. Logs *are* amazing and uber-insulated, and certainly what the bees have chosen to live in for millennia, but in many ways, not the end-all, be-all answer. I prefer windows in mine so that I can open up the log and get an idea of what's going on inside.



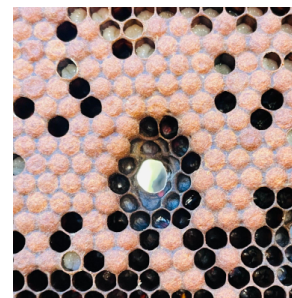
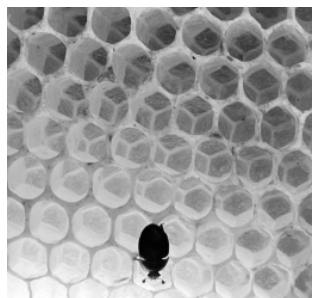
More autumnal thoughts...

Below far left: Watch for small hive beetles. I'm not sure what's up this year, but I'm seeing a lot more, both in Napa and Sonoma. The bees do a good job of corralling the beetles up into top feeders. Per Christine Kurtz's practice: if you're seeing beetles in your hive, get a wooden top feeder (not the black plastic insert type), put lavender stems in both wells (where you'd normally put syrup), and check in a week. I betcha' see beetles.

Second from left: Common occurrence if you're not checking your bees enough. I'm not saying you need to deep dive all the time, but I'd say popping your lid and pulling your tray should be a twice monthly thing.

Second from right: In the bottom box you should see a lot of pollen. The hope is that your bees are preparing themselves for a period of rest. This time of year I like to see a crown of honey above and pollen being hoarded below the brood.

Far right: I'd call this a pretty decent brood pattern.



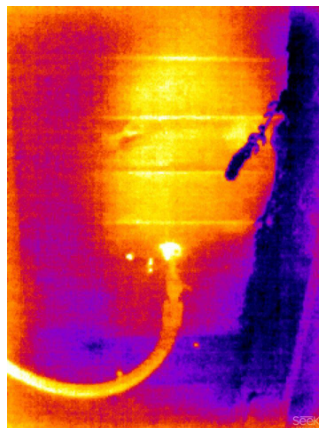
Pic to right: There are no definitive statements in beekeeping, seriously. If you had asked me a week ago if bees could be building wax right now, I'd say no way, we're long past that time of year. Then you have these gals out at the Carneros Resort who have busted out these two small new combs last month out of the blue - go figure.



Final observations...

Below left: This year I'm really hedging on robbing screens. Last year almost all the hives at the school had them and I didn't see a huge difference in mite loads. If anything, the hives with robbing screens had higher mite counts. I even think one of our highest testing colonies of the year came from a Montessori screened hive. Then explain this: the Stag's Leap hive below on which the screen was inadvertently left on all year is carrying two mites per 300 bees (0.6%).

Below right: Here's a thermocam image of a colony living in between an interior and exterior wall, behind a spigot and garden hose down by the Napa River. Anyone cutting bees out of structures this late in the year isn't doing the bees any favors. Com'on - it's nearly the Winter Solstice and *highly* unlikely the bees would survive such a traumatic experience now. Kick that bee-can down the road until spring. - Rob Keller

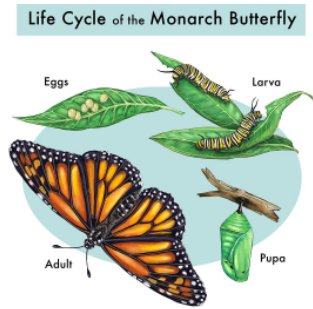


Tales from the Club Hive

		
Late August: When we last checked in, the new Queen was laying and the colony was healthy and building up its population after the brood break.	September 6: The Queen continues to lay a steady and consistent brood nest. The original capped brood in the center of the frames have emerged and new larvae are already being raised in those cells. The capped brood is now on the outer edges of the frames and some pollen stores are being built up.	September 24: Short inspection and mite test. The colony looked healthy, no curly wing seen on young bees, and there was more stored pollen under capped honey cells. Small, but Very Tight Nest! A mite test found 7 mites in 296 bees. Overall, a very positive situation for a colony that had a natural, late summer re-queening. To bee continued! - Martin Podell

In the Pollinator Garden

All you pollinator lovers and gardeners, this is a much anticipated time of the year, the ideal season for planting natives in our gardens and landscapes! While above-ground growth will appear minimal in the next few months, below the soil surface there is *loads* going on. Roots are sinking down into the earth, following water and nutrients. This deep root structure is notable among California native plants which are adapted to our hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. At the upcoming Oct 18-19 plant sale, held by our local California Native Plant Society Chapter, over 2500 plants (~185 species) will be available for purchase (see **Save the Date** for info).



Let's talk butterflies, though, specifically Monarchs whose population is in genuine trouble. The annual Western Monarch Count for winter 2024-25 reported a population of 9,119 butterflies - a stark contrast to the millions reported in the 1980s when the population was considered stable. Milkweeds, as many of you know, are essential for the survival of Monarchs. A female butterfly requires milkweed as her 'host plant' on which to lay her eggs. The larvae/caterpillars hatch out and feed on those milkweed plants - they cannot eat other plants at this stage. Once they have metamorphosed into the adult butterflies, they can drink the nectar from both milkweed and other nearby flowering plants. The nectar fuels the butterflies for their adult stage of life, including their lengthy migrations. Habitat loss, use of pesticides, and the disappearance of milkweed have all contributed to Monarch declines. How can you help, both butterflies and bees? *Plant milkweed, needed for egg-laying and larval food, and pollinator plants, needed for nectar.* Both are required to support their full life cycle. Here is a Xerces link to recommended [Monarch Nectar Plants: California](#).

There are many species of milkweeds. To support Monarchs *in our region*, it is essential to plant native milkweeds - see below for the two species most highly recommended. (Non-native or tropical species will do more damage than good.) Milkweeds are best planted in groups of at least 3-12 plants. October through November are the best months for transplanting seedlings. Ideally those milkweed plants are accompanied by blooming pollinator plants that will provide the adult butterflies (and the bees) with nectar. Think entire life cycle!

Last note, when you take a look at milkweed plants this time of year, they will appear *very* underwhelming and even quite scraggly. As with many of the autumnal native plants, though, the action is below ground. Come spring, your seedlings will have developed a strong enough root structure to put on their leafy growth. - Christine Waskowiak



Narrow-leaf Milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*)

Perennial herb, winter dormant

1½ - 3 ft tall x 1 ft wide

Successful in clay soils. Deer resistant.

Full sun; water max 2x per month in summer once established

Flower color: lavender, white * Bloom period: June-October

Often stems are covered in aphids, but this is not a concern.

One of the most important species for Monarch conservation.

Calscape link: [Narrow Leaf Milkweed](#)



Showy Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*)

Perennial herb, winter dormant

1½ - 6 ft tall x 4 ft wide

Prefers well drained soils. Considered deer resistant as well.

Full sun; can tolerate more moisture than narrow-leaf milkweed.

Flower color: pink, white, purple * Bloom period: June-July

Our largest milkweed, suitable for much of the Alexander Valley and Santa Rosa Plain.

Calscape link: [Showy Milkweed](#)

Beekeepers' Bites

Healthy Pumpkin Bread

credit to [Healthy Pumpkin Bread Recipe - Cookie and Kate](#)

Ingredients

- ⅓ cup melted coconut oil or extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup honey
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup pumpkin purée
- ¼ cup milk or water
- 1½ tsp pumpkin spice blend
(or ½ tsp cinnamon, ½ tsp ground ginger, ¼ tsp ground nutmeg, plus ¼ tsp allspice or cloves)
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ½ tsp salt
- 1¾ cups white whole wheat flour or regular whole wheat flour
- Optional:* ½ cup mix-ins, like chopped walnuts or pecans, chocolate chips, raisins, chopped dried fruit, etc.
Pinch of ground cinnamon, for sprinkling on top



Instructions

- 1) Preheat oven to 325°F and grease a 9×5-inch loaf pan.
- 2) In a large bowl, beat the oil and honey together with a whisk. Add the eggs and whisk until blended. (If your coconut oil solidifies on contact with cold ingredients, simply let the bowl rest in a warm place for a few minutes, like on top of your stove, or warm it for about 10 seconds in the microwave.)
- 3) Add the pumpkin purée, milk, pumpkin spice, baking soda, vanilla and salt, and whisk to blend. Lastly, switch to a big spoon and stir in the flour, just until combined. Some lumps are ok! If you're adding any additional mix-ins, gently fold them in now.
- 4) Pour the batter into your greased loaf pan and sprinkle lightly with cinnamon (optional). If you'd like a pretty swirled effect, run the tip of a knife across the batter in a zig-zag pattern.
- 5) Bake for 55 to 60 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean (typically, without any mix-ins, bread is done at 55 minutes; with mix-ins, it will be closer to 60 minutes). Let the bread cool in the loaf pan for 10 minutes, then carefully transfer the bread to a cooling rack to cool for 20 minutes before slicing.

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.



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:



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



Napa County Beekeepers' Association

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