

THE MARIN BEEK NEWS

Vol 16 Issue 01

February 2026

 Join Us This Thursday – Marin Beekeepers Meeting

 Thursday, February 5, 2026 – 7:00 PM

 American Legion Log Cabin, 20 Veterans Place, San Anselmo, CA 94960

Join us this Thursday for a timely, very short visual presentation, then a participatory round table discussion regarding the beginning of Spring, brood expansion, making walk away splits the successful way, and generally what to be working on right now for heading off early swarms, and maximizing early honey production.

Feel free to come a little early and hang out with fellow beeks in the downstairs bar.

CLUB NEWS

A Message from the President - Jennifer Berry

I'm writing to you not just as the president of Marin Beekeepers, but as someone who has cared deeply about this group and the people in it.

Over the years, this organization has supported hundreds of beekeepers. If you've been part of the club for any length of time, chances are you've benefited in real ways: education that helped you keep healthier colonies, connections on the Buzz that made the hard parts easier, access to our extraction equipment, or the opportunity to collect a swarm through the Swarmlist. We've supported a number of community projects, helped educate the public about bees, built pollinator gardens and worked to keep beekeeping safe and legal. For many people, the club has also been a place to find connection and camaraderie around our shared love of bees.

Those things don't happen automatically. They happen because members volunteer their time,

energy, and leadership to keep the organization running.

I've had the pleasure of serving Marin Beekeepers governance for over a decade and as the president for the last three years. As much as I love serving the community, it's time for me to pass the torch and find new leadership. At the same time, several other board roles are opening, so we've decided to hold early elections for the following positions:

President
Treasurer
Secretary
Membership Director

These roles are vital to how the club remains functional, ethical, and able to offer the programs and resources our members value. Community organizations only continue when members are willing to share responsibility. Without that, even well-loved institutions cannot survive.

If this organization has supported you — through education, mentorship, equipment, swarm calls, or community — I ask you to pause and consider whether this might be the moment for you to give something back. Terms are for 2 years, and we don't require perfection or expertise, only willingness, reliability, and a desire to help sustain

something that has mattered to you and others. And we actually have a lot of fun, too!

If you are willing to volunteer, ask questions about a role, or nominate yourself or another member, we encourage you to step forward and send us a note at board@marinbees.org. Support and transition help will be provided, and no one is expected to carry the load alone.

The club has been meaningful to many people, myself included. What happens next depends on whether members are willing to step into leadership and help shape its future.

With gratitude,

Jennifer Berry

MBCA President

Winter into Spring - Robert MacKimmie

More than any time in recent decades, this “winter into spring” has been the longest, and in some ways, slowest Springtime launch. It has been a diverse, and long brood development period, with each hive’s status being based on individual hive location. Most noticeable is hive build up, and growth.

December gave us an extremely cold duration that went on for weeks, followed by an early January that was dry, and remarkably warm, resembling summertime for about two weeks. Now it’s back to more normal cold evenings, cold shade areas in morning, followed by warm and sunny mid days, even hot afternoons, going back to cold evenings as soon as the sun goes down.

How does this impact your Beekeeping right now? It means that each hive is completely based on location, hive health, hive strength, the bee response to all the factors of winter, and where the amount of brood sits right now. Remember that brood makes brood - a small amount of brood can only make a small amount of new bees, while a large population with lots of Brood can make lots of new brood for incredible hive strength, and early.

To share the range of what was recently seen in the hives, a single deep box hive was opened, and the first frame pulled from the middle of the brood section had a gigantic, and beautiful, Queen Cell. It was the only queen cell, so likely a supercedure cell. The laying queen was present, and still laying, so the brood frame with the Queen Cell was placed in an available Nuc box. A second brood frame was added, and it included a mixture of brood phases. Making sure that the queen was not on either frame, an additional frame of honey with pollen stores went at an outside position in the Nuc box. Two additional frames of drawn comb were added for the soon to be hatched queen to lay in, or for the bees to store honey in.

January just ended. Hopefully the queen has gone on mating flights. I already confirmed that the queen hatched out. Will I have a laying queen in the first week of February?

With the odds and ends at the turn of the year, several older queens went into startup boxes, and they were not accepted, but the frames to support those startup efforts had eggs on them. When they rejected the old queens, they used the available bee eggs to make their versions of early walk away splits. I will also be checking for laying new queens in the first week of February. Other hives are in early stages of spring startup, and are benefiting from the tuning up of frame availability for the queen’s laying. Expansion into the next month of growth can be made possible by adding a medium super above the mostly full brood chamber, so the rapidly laying queen can march right in to the medium box of drawn comb, and start laying like crazy.

Moving on to answering beekeeper questions, it’s informative to observe how a beekeeper works a hive: seeing how the hive is set up, and also how a particular beekeeper handles the frames. Each beekeeper’s manner provides great insight, and possibly some explanation about each hive’s temperament. Many beekeepers take several of the top boxes off, setting them next to the hive on the hive stand. Not the best working method. One common complaint is that the hive can be too high when pulling off top box filled with honey. The height of the stack can be caused by

a high stand. Built hive stands are often nominal for a single deep box, but as soon as additional boxes are added to the stack it becomes a height issue, and it also becomes the perfect opportunity to destroy one's back by picking up the box, rotating, blowing out one's vertebrae. So the question becomes, what is the best hive stand for a sizable hive stack? One of the simplest and easiest solutions to this issue has been to use cement construction cinderblocks, which measure 9" x 9" x 16" long. Being made out of concrete, they can handle any amount of weight as the boxes go as high as the beekeeper can manage. With the cinder block configuration, the front door of the hive ends up being 10 inches high off the ground, and is a perfect height to discourage skunks from snacking on bees during evenings. That low configuration of the bottom box usually permits a sizable hive stack to be configured, with up to six boxes being workable, anything beyond that being poor management.

Next is the issue of how a beekeeper approaches a hive. Having learned from a very experienced local commercial beekeeper, the way you work a hive is to smoke it, wait at least a full minute, then take off the top box, setting it on its end a few feet away from the hive. Returning to the hive stack and removing the number two box from the top, stacking it in sequence next to the first top box, the beekeeper returns to the hive to pull the number three from the top box, stacking it in sequence next to the other boxes, until the sole remaining bottom box is in place. At that point, most of the bees are in each individual box, and just doing their daily work. Some of the field bees may fly back to the front entrance, but most stay with the individual boxes, reducing the number of bees that the beekeeper will interface with. It makes it easier, less hostile, less problematic, and overall much calmer when going through the essential bottom box brood frames. By going through the bottom box, one is looking for evidence of the queen's laying, being sure there is space for the queen to be laying an expanded workforce, there should be honey at the edges of the box, pollen on the second-in frames, and the middle six or so frames that should be properly

configured for the queen's expanding brood nest. If those frames are plugged up with pollen, are overly populated with drone size cells, or if they are plugged with honey that the bees will not be relocating to the upper boxes, the beekeeper should probably be swapping out some of those honey bound frames, and especially moving out old drone or dark combs that are looking pretty ugly. This is your moment to clean up Fall and Winter issues, replacing old combs with freshly drawn frames, or sometimes placing foundation frames that the bees can then draw out with the spring nectar flow. Once you've gone through the bottom brood box, confirmed the location of the queen, affirmed that she has plenty of open space to lay, you can go pick up the number two box, and put it back on top of the bottom box. The beekeeper can now work through the number two box with very little interference from the bees, minimal hostility towards the beekeeper's actions. A little bit of smoke once in a while will keep everybody under control because the number of bees in that two box configuration is still relatively minimal. If there is brood through any of the other boxes, they can be swapped out, moving the brood frames down to this number two box, concentrating the brood in the lowest parts of the hive stack. If the hive stack is heavily populated and heavily active, perhaps adding a medium box of empty drawn comb in the number two spot would be the most beneficial growth technique for the queen at this time of year, so that she has unfettered and vast areas where she can lay without hesitation. By having plenty of space for the queen to lay, you avoid swarming which is generally caused by the queen not having any space to lay. With this configuration, the bee population can increase rapidly so they are ready for the arrival of Spring in another month or so, though the early spring this year has nectar coming into the hive like crazy. Once you have configured the number two box on the stack, providing space for the queen to lay and just enough honey to supply the nurse bees, you can take the third box and return it to the hive stack, placing the excluder above the third box. The beekeeper should always be making sure that the queen is in the bottom box, and if the queen is not there, pulling the first box

and putting the second box on the bottom of the stack so that the queen ends up in the bottom box helps. This will simplify all issues about spring growth, and where the queen is laying. By always making sure the queen is at the bottom of the hive stack on each visit, beekeeping and housekeeping will be simplified. Once you have clarified and resolved all of the broad chamber areas, and placed the queen excluder screen on, if you use one, then you can go and pick up the next box putting it above the excluder and then quickly going through to check the frames to see if the bees have filled them with nectar, cured them down to honey, or if they are frames that are ragged, old and dingy or mostly drone comb, dingy comb should be removed, and melted down. This is your opportunity to clean up the comb for the year, replacing it with drawn comb from minimized hive stacks, or dead out stacks that provide a bounty of equipment to be used this time of year. This is a period of massive and rapid growth of the population, so it's best to set them up for success with all top notch, drawn comb of the right size cells. Once you reach the top of the stack, the beekeeper can determine if honey needs to be pulled and spun out, because with our relatively mild winter, there is likely a lot of finished honey on the hive stacks, and we are at the very start of spring. They should be filling as much open comb as possible, and if space is not available, would very soon run out of space to put incoming nectar. When the top boxes are full, it forces the bees to take the nectar lower in the hive, which would then conflict with the queen's needing to use that space for laying new eggs. By removing and spinning out the honey, you are able to put those drawn, empty medium boxes back onto the hive, placed for greatest advantage.

The bees always finish the top honey boxes first, so the very top box is generally the box to be pulled and spun out. It is normally an incorrect move to simply continue adding additional boxes to the top of the hive stack. If you rotate the stack by pulling all the boxes off and then reassembling the stack as you work the hive, you can make the addition of empty drawn comb easily at the right location of the stack for the greatest advantage

for the bees. The number of frames in each box can be an individual preference, with many brood boxes always having 10 frames, kept very tight to minimize the propolis clogging up the endbars. Once the honey super frames have been drawn out with comb, it's common to start running each of those 10 frame boxes with only nine frames in them. By equalizing and hand spacing the frames within that box, the bees can build slightly plumper frames, making it much easier to cut the surface veneer of honey off for harvest. You will get just as much honey, or potentially more honey, from running nine frames than you can from running 10 frames in the same space. You always want to adjust the frames by hand so that they are uniform and parallel. In that way, by making sure that the frames are always neat and tidy in relation to one another, the bees will always build beautiful flat surfaces on the comb instead of crazy contour comb, caused by the beekeeper if that person is sloppy with frame placement. You should always be an excellent housekeeper by keeping your frames lined up in parallel. It helps the bees so much, but in reality, it helps the beekeeper even more when the bees make a beautiful flat set of combs that are easy to open up and extract.

The described method of pulling off all the upper boxes and getting to the bottom brood chamber is the biggest guarantee of having mild mannered bee interaction, and if your combs are in good shape, and the frames are well managed within each box, the bees will not have to fight the infrastructure to make things right, and you'll find their mood is greatly improved on that count. By setting up the Bees extremely well in terms of their comb and frames, and by taking the bees box stack apart in a logical and reasonable way, what were once perceived as nasty or cranky bees may just have their lives made simpler, easier, and any amount of nastiness or crankiness may just disappear. In essence, it may have been the beekeeper setting up the bees poorly, and the discomfort of having to work around the beekeeper may be what has caused the bees to be cranky in the first place. Once you have the hive stack beautifully set up, then you can really tell the difference in the temperament

of the bees. You will find out which bees are cranky for real, and you might be surprised at how few bees are anything other than gentle, sweet, and loving critters. Quite often I have worked other people's hives and found the bees to be cranky, then returning to my hives within the hour, to find my bees as sweet, gentle, and trouble free. It may be of no surprise to people to hear how amazing it is to work bees that are gentle, passive, diligent in their work, and generally happy with life. It is a much greater pleasure to have happy bees, so I do all that I can as a beekeeper to make their lives be optimal.

Special Request for Members To Attend This Meeting, Thursday, February 5th, 7pm - Robert MacKimmie

With the information about the need to replenish organizational management positions, it would be very beneficial to have all potentially interested members to attend the February 5 meeting, this Thursday, so that we can have an open discussion about where we each would like the Marin bee organization to focus, and what direction we would like the organization to pursue. By having a common sense of purpose, we can more easily shape the direction of programming, and especially the focus of special interest areas such as bees bred for mite resistance, bee stocks that we can make accessible from within the clubs efforts. By knowing the special interest areas of people within the group, we can actually organize to accomplish some very significant advances in our bee genetics, coming up with specialized bee stocks that actually can survive with minimal or no mite controls. Hardy, mite resistant bee stocks do not occur by circumstance or accident. Bee successes are generally the product of an organized and persistent bee breeding program that focuses on particular genetic stocks. We have a very good foundation that focuses on VSH bees, Varroa Sensitive Hygiene genetics. The difference between good genetics, where there are strong, powerful hives at this time of year

versus more general bee stocks that get weak, sick, collapse, or have potentially died - the difference is huge. It is so much more a pleasure to have bees that are strong, healthy, and capable of immense prosperity instead of needing lots of beekeeper help. If anyone is interested in this particular focus area, and would be interested in learning more about it, participating in the production of mite resistant bee stocks, our goal can be to have our area saturated with bees that are healthy and productive with minimal inputs from the Beekeeper. Anyone who is interested, if you could attend the meeting so that we could have a discussion about our desires for the organization, and where we should be focused, it would be extremely helpful for the organizing and transitioned to a new set of Marin Bee organization management. There is plenty of thankless work required to make our bee organization function, but with a good group of similarly focused, positively spirited beekeepers, the amount of work can be minimized, and the productivity of the group maximized. Please come participate in the meeting so that we can pursue a successful next phase for the organization.

Club Equipment - David Peterson

The club has electric extractors for harvesting your honey. Each extractor comes with an extraction kit that includes uncapping bin, electric knife, and a scratcher.

David Peterson, in Ross, manages six and 12 frame extractors. He also has a hand crank two frame extractor for those who need the exercise. Mary and Neil Nordquist, in Novato, manage six, 12 and 20 frame extractors.

The six and 12 frame extractors can generally fit into an SUV, station wagon or minivan. The 20 frame extractor requires a pick up truck or something equivalent.

You can schedule a request for use by contacting them at:

dpeterson307@aol.com

neilmary@verizon.net

OTHER EVENTS

Intermediate Beekeeping Class Series (9 hours, \$175) - Bonnie Morse

You've got your colony through winter (or not) – now what? Class sessions will include how to clean up your equipment, expanding hive size for spring, swarm prevention- and if that fails, swarm capture, setting up bait hives for swarms, identification of common pest and diseases and management options for them. Topics will also include dealing with special situations: defensive hives, queen failures, laying workers and more. Field day will include information on how to split a colony, pest and disease ID, and how to deal with a colony that is preparing to swarm. Classroom sessions: Saturdays, February 7 (Zoom) and February 14 (field if weather cooperates, Zoom if not) 9am – 12pm

Field Day: Saturday, March 21, 1:30pm – 4:30pm, location San Rafael (Rain date April 4)

[Register Now](#)

Learn from the Bees - Jennifer Radtke

Intro to Backyard Beekeeping Class

Sundays, Feb. 15th & March 1st, 6-7:30pm, \$50
Recordings: Class is live on Zoom. You will get recordings plus more resources after the class, so you can rewatch.

This class covers the basics of what you need to get a hive (equipment, hive location, where to get bees, & what to do as a beekeeper).

[Click here](#) for more details and to register!

How to Split Your Hive Class

Sundays, March 8th & 15th, 6-8pm, \$65
Recordings: Class is live on Zoom. You will get both video and audio recordings after the class,

so you can rewatch in months to come. Optional in-person splitting of a hive to give you hands-on experience.

Splitting your hive is the number one way to prevent swarming & keeps your hive at a more manageable size. We'll cover easy splits that work for a backyard beekeeper.

[Click here](#) for more details and to register!

Beginning Bee Mentorship

March - November

Includes: 1-2 inspections/month, 2 Zooms/month about what to be doing in your hive & hive advice, & ability to text/email questions

The first year mentorship focuses on building the foundation of inspecting, reading bee behavior, and using the tools to keep the bees calm. Most mentees learn how to see their queen and identify what's in the hive. We also focus on mite management (sugar roll & organic treatments) and preparing and protecting your hive so it survives the winter.

For more information & to apply: <https://forms.gle/8YbMwMgNNme7SmWR6>

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Membership Dues are now \$25.00 for the year for single members, \$40.00 for families.

We need to hear from you. Please renew your membership Online at www.marinbeekeepers.org. There are many benefits from being a member, aside our monthly meetings, where you can chat with guest speakers from all over the beekeeping world:

- Use of the Club's extractors, electric uncapping knives, wax-melter, hive carrier, embedding tool, and other beekeeping equipment;
- Free subscription to the Marin Beekeepers Newsletter (11 issues a year). Back issues on the website are available for background information and beekeeping tips;
- Preferred registration for beekeeping workshops (usually 4 or 5 per year) and special events;
- We have a great library that includes books, magazines and catalogs on everything from starting your first hive or baking with honey to raising your own queens.
- Free admission to our monthly meetings, where we have speakers among the foremost bee experts in the world (normally a \$10 donation);
- Subscription to our "BUZZ" email listserv which is where we converse online about beekeeping in Marin;
- Subscription to our "SWARMS" email listserv which is where we notify members of any swarms that need hiving;
- Subscription to our "Event List" email listserv which is our general notification list of events and workshops.

The best and easiest way to pay your 2025 dues is online at www.marinbeekeepers.org. You do not need to sign in or use a password. Just click on "become a member", fill out the form and submit. Be sure to complete the payment section at the end, which is via PayPal. You do not need to have a PayPal account to pay using a credit

card. There is a small transaction fee added to your dues that is assessed by PayPal.

ABOUT THE MARIN BEEKEEPERS CLUB

We are people who share an avid interest in honey and native bees. We are a mix of hobbyists as well as professional beekeepers. We have a wide range of interests, covering bee biology, pollination, sustainable bee breeding, health aspects of bee products, international beekeeping, and other bee-related topics. We welcome you to attend our meetings and to become a member:

<https://marinbeekeepers.org/become-a-member/>

Monthly meetings are typically on the first Thursday of the month and usually feature a knowledgeable speaker and/or project and includes informal sharing of information by members throughout the meeting (\$10 donation for non-members). Meetings are a good way to learn about beekeeping. Please consider becoming a member whether you have bees or not.