



# The Buzzz

The Monthly Newsletter of the Gilroy Beekeepers Association

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Volume 54

June 2017

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## Apiary Photo of the Month



**Our display at the Santa Clara Valley Orchid Club show and sale**

**Editors Note:** A big thanks to those of you who have submitted pictures. Keep them coming and I will feature your apiary.

# President's Message

by Dave Stocks

There's a lot happening in the Gilroy Beekeepers Association right now. The good news is that a lot of it involves you, the members.

The Gilroy Demonstration Garden folks are again sponsoring a farmer's market. They've made some major changes which hopefully will make the market successful. This year, the market will be held on Friday from 3:30 to 7:00 PM. The location will be near the intersection of 5th and Monterey Streets, the same location as the Friday night music series and the food trucks. The market begins June 2nd. We, the GBA, have been invited to have an information booth where we can talk to the public about the importance of bees. In order to do that, we need volunteers to staff the booth. Everything you need will be provided in advance. You don't have to be an experienced beekeeper. The beginning novice knows more than 90% of the general public! We will be passing around a signup sheet at the June 6th meeting. If you're interested, but can't make the meeting, please email me at [dave.stocks@yahoo.com](mailto:dave.stocks@yahoo.com)

Just so you can plan ahead, there's a change in the date for our July meeting. Because the 4th falls on the first Tuesday, our meeting date is changed to July 11th. This will be our annual bar-b-que. Thanks to the generosity of Andreas Olbring, we will gather at Syngenta Seeds. More information will follow.

Not all GBA news is good news. We put a lot of effort into putting together a series of classes with Les Crowder about topbar beekeeping after members expressed an interest in topbar beekeeping classes. Unfortunately, the first class in that series was cancelled due to lack of actual enrollment. Les has agreed to continue with the next two classes, August 5th and September 30th, but we need to have the genuine enrollment numbers. This is the second time we've had to cancel a class this year. If it's something we're doing wrong, by all means let me or another board member know. On the other hand, please don't sign an interest sheet lightly.

## News from the Bee World

Articles courtesy of The W.A.S. , Bee Culture Magazine and ABJ

### **Urgent message from Marian McNabb, National Garden Club Butterfly Chairman**

Warning! Home Depot is selling Milkweed plants that are treated with Neonicotinoids that have been implicated in the decline of Pollinators including Bees, Butterflies, Moths, etc. Please pass this information to all your members and if you see this in a Home Depot or any other garden center PLEASE contact the manager and let them know the issue. NGC has contacted Home Depot headquarters to express concern and request that they remove the plants and replace with chemical free plants

### **Governor Brown's Budget Proposal Eliminates Future Farmers of America and other CTE Funding**

Galt, May 17, 2017 - In his 2017-18 State Budget released earlier in the year, Governor Brown proposed the complete elimination of funding for the Future Farmers of America program and other programs in Career Technical Education serving students throughout California. Also included in these cuts were the elimination of Partnership Academy Programs, the University of California Curriculum Institute for recognizing CTE courses for admission purposes, and Professional Development Activities for CTE instructors.

These programs have been funded by \$15 million in CTE Pathway monies that were provided to the California Department of Education for supporting statewide Career Technical Education activities and programs. The Governor's proposal for this year would eliminate this source of funds, directing them instead to the Community College Chancellor's Office to supplement other workforce development funds already in existence.

"We are extremely disappointed that Governor Brown has proposed eliminating Career Technical Student Organizations like the Future Farmers of America and other CTE funding in California" said Jim Aschwenden, Executive Director of the California Agricultural Teachers' Association. "The loss of these components of Career Technical Education will have a devastating effect on programs and teachers statewide. CTE programs remain vitally important to the economic well-being of our state, and this proposal eliminates highly effective programs that have proven their worth over time. We think this is a terrible mistake."

Call your legislators and voice your support for CTE funding

### **How Varroa Mites Grow And Spread**

Honeybee pest takes advantage of managed beekeeping practices

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — As the managed honey bee industry continues to grapple with significant annual colony losses, the Varroa destructor mite is emerging as the leading culprit. And, it turns out, the very nature of modern beekeeping may be giving the parasite the exact conditions it needs to spread nearly beyond control.

In an article to be published next week in the Entomological Society of America's Environmental Entomology, researchers argue that the Varroa mite has "co-opted" several honey bee behaviors to its own benefit, allowing it to disperse widely even though the mite itself is not a highly mobile insect. The mite's ability to hitchhike on wandering bees, the infections it transmits to bees, and the density of colonies in managed beekeeping settings make for a deadly combination.

"Beekeepers need to rethink Varroa control and treat Varroa as a migratory pest," says Gloria DeGrandi-Hoffman, Ph.D., research leader and location coordinator at the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Service's Carl Hayden Bee Research Center in Tucson, Arizona, and lead author of the research.

In the wild, bee colonies tend to survive despite Varroa infestations, and colonies are usually located far enough apart to prevent mites from hitching rides to other colonies on foraging bees. Wild bee colonies' natural habit of periodically swarming—when the colony grows large enough that a portion of its bees splinter off to create a new colony elsewhere—also serves as a mechanism for thinning out the density of mite infestations and their associated pathogens. In managed honey bee settings, though, these dynamics are disrupted, DeGrandi-Hoffman says. Colonies are kept in close proximity, and swarming is prevented.

DeGrandi-Hoffman, USDA-ARS colleague Henry Graham, and Fabiana Ahumada of AgScience Consulting, conducted an 11-month study of 120 honey bee colonies in one commercial bee operation, comparing those treated with mite-targeting insecticide (miticide) in the spring and fall with those treated only in the fall, and they found no significant difference in the results: more than half of the colonies were lost across the board. This aligns with what has been seen by beekeepers and researchers alike in recent years: Varroa populations continue to grow even after being treated with effective miticides. But why? The answer may be in its dispersal mechanisms.

The researchers also conducted mathematical simulations of Varroa mite population dynamics to examine the effects of both migration of foragers between colonies and swarming. When bees can wander into other colonies—either to “rob” them of their honey or because they’ve simply lost their way—Varroa populations across colonies climb. Likewise, prohibiting colonies from splintering periodically via swarming also leads mite populations to rise.

In the wild, DeGrandi-Hoffman and her colleagues note, driving a colony to collapse is against Varroa mites’ own interest; if the colony dies, the mites die with it. But in commercial beekeeping settings, increasing infestation of a colony activates the dispersal mechanisms the mites need to spread. Weakened foragers are more likely to wander to other colonies, and weakened colonies are more likely to see foragers from healthy colonies visit to rob them of honey. In both cases, mites can hitch a ride from one colony to another.

It all adds up to a critical point for managed honey bee industry. The researchers cite the need for new integrated pest management strategies to treat Varroa destructor as a migratory pest, as well as for further research into the specifics of Varroa dispersal.

“Colony losses in the U.S. are at unsustainable levels for commercial beekeepers. These beekeepers supply colonies for the pollination of crops that represent one-third of U.S. agriculture and are essential components of heart healthy and cancer-prevention diets,” says DeGrandi-Hoffman. “This research provides evidence that the tried and true ways of controlling Varroa are no longer feasible, and that new methods that are designed for control of a migratory pest are required.”

—Entomological Society of America

<https://www.morningagclips.com/how-varroa-mites-grow-and-spread/>

### **Study: Wildflower Plantings Near Almond Orchards Beneficial -**

Research published in Environmental Entomology says wildflower plantings near almond orchards does not cause fewer honey bees to visit the orchard. A team of researchers sought to explore whether alternative forage flower plantings near orchards would distract the bees from the crops. The team discovered the almond blooms and wildflowers may increase foraging activity overall, and not detract from one crop.

“The high honey bee visitation rates to the flower plantings suggest benefits of wildflower plantings for honey bees,” says Ola Lundin, Ph.D., one of the researchers and an author on the paper. “Such benefits may include the ability to support or increase bee population sizes before and after almond bloom and increased resistance to harmful effects of pesticides and pathogens through a more diverse diet.”

<http://www.beeculture.com/catch-buzz-study-wildflower-plantings-near-almond-orchards-beneficial>

## **Neonic Pesticides Threaten Wild Bees' Spring Breeding, Study Finds**

*University of Guelph*

Neonicotinoid pesticides hinder wild queen bumblebee's reproductive success, according to a new University of Guelph study.

The study is the first to link exposure to thiamethoxam -- one of the most commonly used neonicotinoid pesticides -- to fewer fully developed eggs in queens from four wild bumblebee species that forage in farmland.

"Queen bees will only lay eggs when the eggs are fully developed," said Prof. Nigel Raine, holder of the Rebanks Family Chair in Pollinator Conservation.

If queens need to use energy to clear pesticides from their system instead of investing in eggs, then fewer fully developed eggs will result, he said.

"This will likely translate into slower egg-laying rates, which will then impede colony development and growth."

The study was conducted by Raine, along with Mark Brown and Gemma Baron from Royal Holloway University of London.

Neonicotinoids are one of a number of factors contributing to the decline of bees and are currently being phased out or restricted in several countries including Canada.

The researchers examined the impacts of exposing queen bumblebees to thiamethoxam during the spring when they emerge from hibernation and are preparing to lay their first eggs and establish a colony.

"Given the vital role spring queens have in maintaining bumblebee populations, we decided to focus on assessing the impacts at this stage in the life cycle," said Raine, a professor in the School of Environmental Sciences. "These spring queens represent the next generation of bumblebee colonies."

Worker bees from those first eggs are needed to clean and guard the nest, find food and tend to the next batch of eggs. Without those workers, the colony will likely fail, said Raine.

In this study, about 500 queen bees from four species were caught in early spring and for two weeks were fed syrup treated with pesticide doses similar to levels found in pollen and nectar in the wild. They were then observed for another two weeks before they were frozen, dissected and examined.

The researchers found that across all four species the queen bees that were given higher doses of thiamethoxam had smaller, less-developed eggs than the queens not exposed to the pesticide.

Raine suspects the metabolic costs associated with the detoxification required from pesticide exposure results in a reduced amount of nutrients available for other biological processes such as egg development.

The researchers also found queen bees from two of the four species ate less nectar after being exposed to thiamethoxam.

"If their feeding rates drop off, the queens go into a dormant state," said Raine. "They won't have enough energy to fly or to collect pollen to feed their larvae. They may not even have enough resources to lay eggs."

The fact that queen feeding behavior was impacted by exposure to thiamethoxam in only two of the four bee species highlights the reality that sensitivity to pesticides differs among bee species, added Raine.

"Most of the work to determine levels of toxic exposure to pesticide has used honeybees as a model pollinator. But our findings show that bee species vary in their level of sensitivity to pesticides, which is important information that should be factored into regulatory decisions on these chemicals."

### **Sick bees explode across the landscape -**

The importance of controlling varroa populations especially in areas of relatively dense bee colonies was stressed by Dr Dennis vanEngelsdorp at the BBKA Spring Convention earlier this month.

A sick colony explodes into the landscape and infiltrates surrounding apiaries, he said.

He identified the three key risk factors to bee health as varroa mites and associated viruses; pesticides in the field and in the hive; and poor nutrition.

Of these varroa is the biggest threat – and he and a research student soon expect to publish a paper showing that varroa mites feed off the fat rather than the haemolymph of honeybees – a factor that is of considerable importance for bees going into winter.

<http://www.bee-culture.com/catch-buzz-sick-bees-explode-across-landscape/>

## Common Pesticide Damages Honey Bee's Ability to Fly, Research Finds -

Study provides the first evidence that a broadly used pesticide alone can harm bee flight.

Video available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYTNyNoP3P4>

(full resolution: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzlpJXJvUCqfWmhJaFpaVWEtQTg/view>)

Biologists at the University of California San Diego have demonstrated for the first time that a widely used pesticide can significantly impair the ability of otherwise healthy honey bees to fly, raising concerns about how pesticides affect their capacity to pollinate and the long-term effects on the health of honey bee colonies.

<http://www.beeeculture.com/catch-buzz-common-pesticide-damages-honey-bees-ability-fly-research-finds/>

## Bees face heavy pesticide peril from field edges, drift, long residue chemicals...from nearly everywhere - Blaine Friedlander, Cornell University

Honey bees – employed to pollinate crops during the blooming season – encounter danger due to lingering and wandering pesticides, according to an analysis of the bee's own food.

Researchers used 120 pristine honey bee colonies that were placed near 30 apple orchards around New York state. After allowing the bees to forage for several days during the apple flowering period, the scientists examined each hive's "beebread" – the bees' food stores made from gathered pollen – to search for traces of pesticides.

In 17 percent of colonies, the beebread revealed the presence of acutely high levels of pesticide exposure, while 73 percent were found to have chronic exposure, meaning that 90% were pesticide challenged.

<http://www.beeeculture.com/catch-buzz-bees-face-heavy-pesticide-peril-field-edges-drift-long-residue-chemicalsfrom-nearly-everywhere/>

## How Varroa Mites Take Advantage of Managed Beekeeping Practices

*Closer colonies and less swarming allow mite populations to grow and spread*

Entomological Society of America

Annapolis, MD; May 3, 2017--As the managed honey bee industry continues to grapple with significant annual colony losses, the *Varroa destructor* mite is emerging as the leading culprit. And, it turns out, the very nature of modern beekeeping may be giving the parasite the exact conditions it needs to spread nearly beyond control.

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own benefit, allowing it to disperse widely even though the mite itself is not a highly mobile insect. The mite's ability to hitchhike on wandering bees, the infections it transmits to bees, and the density of colonies in managed beekeeping settings make for a deadly combination.

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The researchers also conducted mathematical simulations of **Varroa** mite population dynamics to examine the effects of both migration of foragers between colonies and swarming. When bees can wander into other colonies--either to "rob" them of their honey or because they've simply lost their way--**Varroa** populations across colonies climb. Likewise, prohibiting colonies from splintering periodically via swarming also leads mite populations to rise.

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## Drippings from the Extractor

by Dave Stocks

I think one of the most important skills a beekeeper needs to develop is the power of observation. When faced with a problem, the beekeeper then needs to take those observations and translate them into at least a hypothesis of what happened. Equally important is slowing down enough to really see what's going on! Let me give you an example.

About six weeks ago, I moved a colony from a very isolated location west of Morgan Hill to my backyard. It was a strong colony and my longest lived. I can trace its origin back to a Russian Queen I purchased in 2012. For the first couple of weeks all seemed well. Then one sunny afternoon I heard the all too familiar sound of a swarm. Checking, it was easy to determine the bees had come from the newly arrived hive. Fortunately, or so it seemed at the time, the swarm landed on a fence, still in my backyard. It was easily captured and placed in a new box at a different location. Within a few days, I began to notice a few dead bees on the ground within about a fifteen foot radius of the hive. It didn't cause a lot of concern as this can be normal. Mortuary bees, as they remove dead bees from the hive, can deposit them out away from the hive. As the days went by, the number of dead bees increased. I also began noticing bees that seemed disoriented, sort of wandering around aimlessly. A closer examination was called for.



Dead bees near the entrance to the hive

The bees wandering on the ground had abnormally positioned wings, a condition referred to as "K" wing.



Abnormally positioned wings

My suspicions are that these bees are suffering from chronic paralysis virus which is transmitted by the varroa mite. Giving me some hope in my conclusion, a couple of friends have agreed with this diagnosis. So now what?

Some literature suggest that the bees might out grow it. Some suggest that by giving a probiotic the overall health of the colony can be improved, increasing the chances of survival. Other contacts have suggested re-queening. And of course the old fallback answer is, if you control the mites, you will control the virus.

What am I going to do? In this case, upon opening the hive I found it to be queenless with no brood. Not wanting the remaining bees to drift off to another hive, I closed off the entrance. In a week's time, I'll go through the hive and remove all the old comb and foundation. I need to reevaluate my beekeeping practices. I want to remain treatment free, but I also need to consider what I need to do to make my bees as healthy as possible. Stay tuned!

# This month in the Beeyard

By Serge Labesque

## Not-by-the-book honey super management

Come mid-spring, colony propagation and queen rearing are pretty much under control. Our attention drifts away from the brood chambers to the honey supers as, given favorable conditions, strong colonies produce honey in excess of their needs. There are many ways to first of all help them along and, a few weeks later, to harvest and process this surplus honey.

For years my understanding in regard to the honey crop was that beekeepers were to remove entire supers or as many frames of ripe honey as possible from the hives on two or three distinct occasions during the year, usually at the end of spring and summer and sometimes around mid-fall. In order to achieve this, I occasionally had to swap the centermost frames of the supers for the lateral ones during brief manipulations. Doing this opens space in the centers of the supers, which the bees tend to fill first and more solidly than the side frames. In effect, this also stimulates nectar collection. The frames were also carefully spaced apart from each other to facilitate their uncapping. When the honey flows allowed it, the supers finally became evenly filled with ripe honey. This was nice, but there was a catch: Full honey supers are heavy, and there still was a lot more work left to do before all that honey was in jars. Even though I found it exhilarating for a while to load my pick-up truck with honey supers, the “joy” wore off rapidly, as this led to long exhausting nights of uncapping and extracting honey and to days and weeks of back pain. Another drawback was that the bees certainly did not like to be chased off the product of their work! I abandoned this conventional method several years ago.

Now, instead of performing large harvests, I gather honey frames more frequently and in loads that I can handle easily. And instead of using an extractor I simply crush the combs. The management of my honey supers has also become much simpler. In fact, it’s an entire system that has come together, making beekeeping more pleasurable where it used to be grueling work. Better yet, the bees do not seem to object to the imperceptible or minimally disruptive subtraction of a few frames at a time.

There is no longer any need to swap frames and to make sure that their combs are shaped correctly. The centermost frames are selectively harvested when they are filled with capped honey, and the other frames are brought closer together to fill the space that is left open. This is a simple way to prevent the hives from becoming excessively tall. Thick, misshaped combs are not a problem, because they will be crushed. Actually, I purposely insert empty frames between combs that hold uncapped honey or nectar to encourage and accommodate their swelling. Along with these empty frames, which act as spacers, follower boards, which are always present in my hives, facilitate the removal of the thick honeycombs. There is also no need to install foundation or wire in the honey super frames, something I stopped doing more than ten years ago. Evidently, washing and rewashing the extractor, that expensive piece of machinery I regret buying, is a task of the past, because a potato masher and a tub are all the tools that are really necessary. However, I’ll confess that I built a “honeycomb mill” that further expedites the processing of the honeycombs (Maybe this will be the topic of a future article.) After crushing, the frames can be returned to the hives they came from for a refill, without having gone through the

extractor, which may very well be an effective pathogen exchanger, since it processes frames from all the hives.

Admittedly, this is not the way we are told to operate in order to produce honey, but it works well for me, and I'll leave the extractor under its dust cover until I manage to finally get rid of it. Among the benefits of harvesting honey more frequently are that we can enjoy its changing tastes and colors throughout the year and, best of all, our bees are gentler and possibly healthier for it.

## **June in the apiaries**

The wet and cold weather we've experienced this spring has delayed and stretched by several weeks the swarm season, which is the best time of year for colony multiplication and queen rearing. Overall, nectar has been coming in slowly. This, combined with a heightened rate of store consumption caused by the inclement weather and by the large populations, has kept most hives rather light until mid-May. Wax production and comb building were also abnormally minimal until then. Possibly for this reason, and because the low nighttime temperatures forced the bees to form tight clusters, stores were frequently accumulated in the brood chambers, but not to the point of creating honey-bound conditions. Only the stronger colonies managed to significantly expand their activity into the supers.

Due to these unusual weather conditions the results of the first hive divisions of the year were not very good. A high rate of queen failures was recorded for those early splits. This underscores the importance of the measures that help avoid early swarm preparations and that permit the development of the colonies well into the spring. Fortunately, the divides that were produced in late April and in May are much more promising.

With the exception of a few isolated cases of European foulbrood (EFB), colony health is good. The period of broodlessness that will be created in the May divides will be crucial in controlling the build-up of the mite populations this year, as the in-hive conditions have promoted the propagation of this pest during the early spring.

As the hills are turning blond, we can nonetheless hope for a good early summer honey flow, thanks to the favorable ground moisture. Many spring plants are blooming late this year, including the purple vetch. But the California buckeye trees, which can be a threat where no alternative source of pollen is available to the foragers is blooming at its regular time.

The management of the young colonies we have started and the observation of the performance of the queens that were produced are quite pleasurable and important tasks for the future of our apiaries. These may be necessary to expand our apiaries or to replace hives that are not flourishing or that have aging or failing queens. We provide them with the space, frames, bars and supers they need to develop fully and to gain strength in preparation for next winter. A few hive combinations and some requeening may indeed already be warranted procedures to maintain the health and vigor of our apiaries.

The honey supers deserve more attention now as the early-summer flow arrives. Some of the spring honey may be harvested as it becomes fully capped, and space can be made for the early-summer honey. Yet, as always when removing honey from the hives, we must be sure to leave enough for the bees. A good rule of thumb at this time of year is to leave at least twenty pounds of honey in each mature hive. In places where summer dearth is harsh, leaving more honey is a wise precaution. If the bees don't need it, we will harvest it later, when it's safe to do so. Wet, harvested frames will be returned to the hives in the evening, when the foragers are returning, to avoid creating robbing situations.

As the forager activity evolves with the season, we do well to adjust the size of the hive entrances to facilitate their traffic. This should be done without opening them to the point of placing the hives at

risk of being robbed, a risk that frequently increases during the typical lull in the honey flow, at the end of spring.

Summer and the longest days of the year are upon us. They bring special conditions we want to be prepared for. Let's be careful with our smokers, as there is a lot of grass this year, and this vegetation can be easily set on fire. Sources of water need to be kept provisioned without interruption for our bees. Protecting the hives from direct sun in the afternoon reduces their need for water. Also, orienting the entrances slightly more to the east so that they receive the early morning sun helps the bees come out early and collect nectar before it is desiccated by the dry breeze. Maybe these are details. But together they can make a significant difference.

**In summary, this month:**

- Inspect hives when the foragers are out in large numbers.
- Keep an eye on the health of the colonies.
- Provide adequate air circulation through the hives.
- Be aware of situations and manipulations that can trigger robbing.
- Make sure the components of the hives fit tightly to prevent secondary entrances that might allow robber bees to enter.
- Ensure that sources of water are continuously available to the bees.
- Provide filtered afternoon shade, if at all possible.
- Adjust the size of the hive entrances to match the forager activity and reduce the risk of robbing.
- Follow-up on the development of young colonies.
- Evaluate the quality of young queens. Replace failing or undesirable queens.
- Combine or requeen inherently weak colonies or those that are not developing properly.
- Perform hive divisions and raise queens, where and when conditions are favorable.
- Monitor swarm traps.
- Keep some equipment at the ready to catch the occasional swarm.
- Manage honey supers (add space before it's needed; empty frames facilitate air circulation through the hive).
- Harvest surplus spring honey, making sure to leave enough honey in the hives.
- Discard old and misshapen combs.
- Render wax from discarded frames and from cappings (separately).
- Routinely clean and scorch tools and equipment.

## **Calendar of Events**

### **Meetings**

#### **First Monday of the month**

Santa Clara Valley Beekeepers Guild

6:15 pm

Dwell Christian Church San Jose

**1292 Minnesota Ave San Jose CA 95125**

<http://beeguild.org/>

**First Tuesday of the month**

Gilroy Beekeepers Association

7:00 pm

Old City Hal Restaurant

7400 Monterey Rd.

Gilroy, Ca

<http://www.gilroybees.com>

**First Wednesday of the month**

Santa Cruz Beekeepers Guild

6:30 pm

El Rio Mobile Home Park,

2120 N. Pacific Ave.

Santa Cruz, CA

<http://santacruzbees.com>

**First Thursday of the month**

Beekeepers Guild of San Mateo

7:00 pm

Trinity Presbyterian Church

1106 Alameda de Pulgas

San Carlos, CA

<http://www.sanmateobeeguild.org/>

**First Saturday of the month**

Monterey Bay Beekeepers

8:00 am

<http://www.montereybaybeekeepers.org/>

## **Classes and Conferences**

**Sept 5 - 8:** Western Apicultural Society of North America 2017 40th Anniversary Conference, UC-Davis, CA. Info <http://www.westernapiculturalsociety.org>

**Nov 14 - 16:** California State Beekeepers Association annual convention, Harrah's/Harveys in Lake Tahoe, CA. Info <http://www.californiastatebeekeepers.com/events.html>

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