

CENTRAL COAST BEEKEEPING ALLIANCE

Mission Statement: In the San Luis Obispo County, California bioregion, to foster the health and well-being of honeybees by supporting best beekeeping practices through networking, education and raising public awareness.

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Club Updates

-New leadership

*Have an hour or two a month to help out? Send us an [email \(sloccba@gmail.com\)](mailto:sloccba@gmail.com) or attend the next meeting.

*Upcoming meeting to discuss the future of the club.

-Have a Swarm?

Please report it via [this link](#)

(Scroll to the bottom of the page)

-Want to catch a swarm?

Fill out [this link](#) OR Contact:

Coastal Areas:

Bruce Terry 805.459.0762

North County:

Tim Ball 805.714.7142

Upcoming Events



August:

Tuesday, August 23, 6 PM Meeting

Topic: Varroa Mite treatment

Apiary visit at the [Paso Bamboo Farm](#) (5590 N River Rd, Paso Robles) Organized by Mike Lindsey/John Chestnut

September:

TBD

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What to expect in your hive in August?

The following is drawn from [Jeremy Rose's](#) book "Beekeeping in Coastal California" with permission.

What the bees are doing?

- "August 15th is an important day for overwintering hives in California because the size and strength of the hives at this point will often closely match the size and strength of hives at the beginning of the following February, at least if all problems are controlled during the fall." (115) In most areas there is a pollen and potentially a nectar dearth as well as increasing mite loads, which may stress the bees. The bees are raising important brood, which will be the caretakers of the next few generations of winter bees. They must be pampered. It is unlikely the hive will grow after August 15; it will likely decline in population as it saves its resources for winter.

What the beekeeper may want to do (based on a two-deep brood box hive)

- IT IS CRITICAL TO CONTROL FOR VARROA IN AUGUST (if you are new, reach out to someone in the group).
- Add [sugar syrup](#) (click here to see how) and pollen supplements if needed. Ensure clean water is present
- Combine weak hives (four frames of bees or less)

Common Problems

- Varroa mites
- Starvation, Malnutrition
- Increased aggression and robbing (often because of a lack of food)
- Argentine Ants, Wasps



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Hack of the month Feeding bees sugar syrup

Ensuring your bees do not starve

Depending on your location you may have to feed your bees in the fall and winter. While folks who live in town can count on their neighbor's roses, sage and lavender, those who live in rural locations, especially in North County, will likely have to help their bees along.

Why use sugar syrup?

Although sugar syrup is not an exact replica of the sucrose and fructose bees obtain from flowers, it is a very good and simple substitute. Some beeks add essential oils or supplements to their syrup, although this is not necessary.

What is sugar syrup and how do you make it?

Sugar syrup is simply the granulated white sugar (found at any grocery store) mixed in warm/hot water (but not boiling). Don't be too worried about exact measurements. All flowers have different levels of sugar content in their nectar.

Have a hack you would like to share? Please send to: sloccba@gmail.com

Recipes For Sugar Water	
Can be measured by volume or weight	
1:1 (one to one) equal parts of pure cane sugar & warm water EX: 1 cup of sugar/1 cup of water 1 # of sugar/ 1 # of water	2:1 (two to one) 2 parts of pure cane sugar & 1 part warm water 2 cups of sugar/1 cup of water 2 # of sugar/ 1 # of water
Use to promote brood rearing in new colonies	Promotes honey storage for winter

How do I feed the bees?

There are many different ways to feed bees. However, before you begin think about the following:

- Robbing-Open or accessible sugar syrup will invite robbing of the hive you are trying to help (See [John Chestnut's article](#)). Be sure that only the one hive has access to the syrup.
- Ants-Recognize that ants want the syrup to. Do not place it where bees will have to compete with ants.

Some common ways of feeding include internal feeders (see picture above), external feeders (not recommended), entrance feeders, insert feeders, hive-top feeders, and baggie feeders. You can review different types at the [Mann Lake](#) website.

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When is sugar syrup used?

The two most common uses of syrup are to support a new colony (such as a swarm or a package of bees) and to strengthen an existing colony during a dearth or going into winter. New colonies receive a 1:1 recipe and an existing colony can be provided with a 2:1 recipe of sugar to water ratio.

Some of this information was drawn from a Carolina Honey Bees article
([https://carolinahoneybees.com/feeding-bees-sugar-water/#What is Sugar Water How You Make It](https://carolinahoneybees.com/feeding-bees-sugar-water/#What%20is%20Sugar%20Water%20How%20You%20Make%20It))

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Have a question? Ask the club

What is Robbing? How can it be prevented?

By John Chestnut

Have a question?
Send questions to
sloccba@gmail.com

Why does robbing occur?

Robbing is a natural effort by one hive to find and take resources from another. A strong hive may take advantage of a nearby weaker hive (smaller colony, unprotected entrance, a collapsing colony due to varroa or virus, a colony without a queen) to save up stores for the winter.

What does it look like?

Bees attack and rob honey from other colonies in the dry and hungry days of autumn. Colonies that are being robbed show fighting (curling in a C shape attempting to sting the other robber and falling off the landing board together) at the entrance, bees hovering along every crack and seam of the box, and shredded wax crumbs spilling out the entrance. Another sign of robbing can be found upon opening the hive and experiencing a flight of a couple of hundred bees fly off strangely without explanation.

A colony can change from normal activity to catastrophic robbing in just hours. Colonies with uncontrolled robbing succumb quickly or abandon the hive (absconding). Robber bees will continue to visit a “dead out” hive until all honey and propolis has been carried off. Wax comb is eaten back leaving rough jagged edges and piles of wax “dust”, but very little if any wax is hauled away by robber bees. A dead out colony will also be visited by yellow jackets which consume the “bee bread” pollen and leave behind a powdery dust. Beekeepers often mistake the post-collapse visits of robbers for normal live colony activity.

When is robbing most likely to happen?

Late summer and fall. Our region has a crushing dearth (scarcity of water) and large numbers of migratory colonies move into the area in the autumn. These factors combine to stress the resident colonies which are naturally depopulating to winter size coincidentally with the arrival of strong, heavily fed commercial colonies into the territory. It usually ends by Thanksgiving.

How do I prevent robbing?

A key approach to robbing is to prevent it from ****starting****, because once a colony has been targeted the robber bees are relentless and difficult to dissuade.

Condense the hive-Since the bees are on a natural population decline, boxes should be removed so there is no excess space.

Seal cracks and gaps-Assess your colony stack, gaps and cracks, or boxes that don't quite fit, leaving gaps, which provides a “back door” for robbing bees and yellow jackets. Blue painter masking tape can be used to seal box cracks, bees and yellow jackets will chew through blue tape in time, but the small entrances are often adequately defended. Duct tape can be applied and isn't chewed through, but often peels off in the sun. I use a staple gun to further fasten duct tape to prevent it from peeling.

Combine colonies-Assess if there is any sign of weakness due to mites or virus, such as bees crawling away from the colony, or lethargic bees with swollen abdomens, bees with “crinkly” deformed wings (K wing). These diseases will cause the population to drop quickly and leave the bees with little motivation to defend the colony. If the colony is weak, combine it with another.

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Reduce the entrance-Bees can accommodate themselves to quite small entrances, as long as direct sun heating on the colony boxes is avoided. Unless there is a persistent “beard” of bees forming, the entrance is adequate. I reduce entrances on the fly in this season with twists of dry grass or blocks of wood squeezed under the entrance. Skunks are also active in the fall, and they will tear out the blocks if they are loose. I use a borehole entrance for nucs and single boxes. If robbing is intense, I will protect the borehole with a screen through which I have poked just one single “fat pencil” sized hole.

What do I do if robbing is occurring while I am at the site?

There are a few options: 1. Take the lids off all of the hives. The bees will return to their hives to “defend” it and stop the attack; 2. Remove the hive and place it in an outyard at least two miles away; 3. Place a wet towel or sheet over the hive entrance, leaving a little space on the sides for residents to find their way out and back in.

Dos and Don'ts During Robbing Season

Feed bees carefully. Feeding bees must be done with absolute sanitary care, leaving syrup drops and drips will attract robbers. In robbing season avoid “scenting” the syrup with any additives. Popular sites often promote adding vinegar or other substances, this is a catastrophic mistake in our region in the fall, nothing draws robbers to hive faster than scented syrup. I fill my feed bottles at home and rinse the outside in a water bath. I do not use the entrance “Boardman” feeders, as these often drip and provide as short cut to bees entering the hive.

Don't set out “sticky” honey supers for bees to clean up near your colonies. This attracts the bees in a robbing frenzy which is difficult to curtail.

Add Robbing/Moving screens- Robbing/Moving screens are sold in the catalogs and can be copied and home built. A fold of window screen or mesh can make an effective robbing screen. For window screen leave a vertical creep fold up and away from the entrance and staple down all the other edges. More permanent framed screens can be installed to protect the entrances.

Mesh or screen robbing screens work by releasing the “scent” of the hive through the screen, and robber bees target the odor. The actual physical entrance is 3 or 4 inches above the screen, protected by a creep hole path. The house bees memorize and guard the path entrance, but the robber bees just persist following the odor.

See the following page for photo examples of robbing screens.

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Robbing Screens to protect hives

Figure 1: The theory of the robbing screen: the robbers target the scent of the hive coming out the screen, the house bee learn a creep hole exit

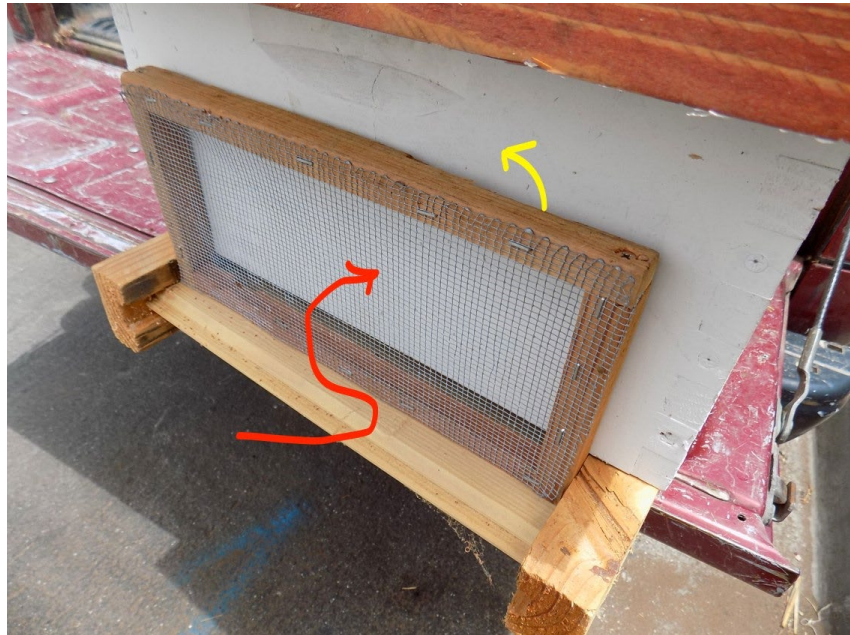


Figure 2: A stapled fold of screen with an opening pointing up can prevent robbing



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