

Applegate Valley Beekeepers tend bees organically

BY SHANNA ROSE

Bees are responsible for one-third of the food we eat. Without bees, we could be faced with a world also without avocados, lemons, apples, melons, berries, and many other foods.

The demise of bees worldwide is not news to anyone. CCD, or Colony Collapse Disorder, is a multi-faceted, poorly understood problem with a variety of causes. Neonicotinoids, a common ingredient in pesticides, are directly responsible for the death of bees and other pollinators. They also disrupt bee navigation, which is crucial to survival of a bee colony. Neonicotinoids are already banned in the European Union, and many US states are considering a similar ban.

Other possible causes of CCD include lack of proper amounts and types of forage (flower nectar and pollen), environmental toxins, erratic weather patterns, and commercial migratory beekeeping, used for California almond pollination, which can transfer diseases and the varroa mite to various locations. The varroa mite is a relatively new but destructive parasite that some beekeepers fight with chemicals and medications that can further weaken bees. Meanwhile, the mites may adapt and become resistant to the miticides.

By discouraging certain practices and advocating others, the Applegate Valley Beekeepers help hobby and backyard beekeepers keep their bees strong, healthy, and better able to withstand mites and other diseases. Hope lies in the beekeeping renaissance of backyard and hobby beekeepers and small farm apiaries. The Applegate Valley Beekeepers and similar groups that practice natural, sustainable, and organic methods of beekeeping could be the link that keeps bees a vital part of our ecology.

Some beekeepers harvest honey in the fall and feed their bees sugar or corn syrup for the honey that would otherwise be their winter food. The Applegate Valley Beekeepers advocate waiting until

spring to harvest honey and then taking what is left from the bees' winter supply.

Beekeepers who love to garden may find more ways to keep bee populations healthy. Planting herbs like oregano, thyme, basil, rosemary, and mint may help control mites. Growing sunflowers or buckwheat can provide bee forage in July and August, when blackberry blossoms, the primary summer nectar source in the Rogue Valley, are no longer available. In early spring, willow, crocus, poppies, and fruit-tree flowers, like cherry and plum, will help the bees during their expansion period. In summer, squashes, melons, and cucumbers provide forage for bees, who, in turn, provide pollination for higher yields of vegetables.

When apple and plum trees are cut down to make room for vineyards, bees lose important forage. As bad as star thistle is for pastures, it is an important nectar plant for bees at a time of the year when little else is available. Knowing that bees use invasive plants like blackberries and star thistle to make delicious honey makes those plants easier to tolerate!

Beekeepers feel that bees repay them well for the care they take of them. They find peace in the buzzing of the hive or the frenetic movements of a swarm. To not disturb or accidentally crush bees during a hive inspection, beekeepers must learn mindfulness, moving slowly and purposefully. Beekeeping is a balm to the multitasking mind. Stings are a small consequence of learning how to work with bees—a reminder to be more present.

The Applegate Valley Beekeepers are a good support for the backyard or hobby beekeeper who chooses to tend bees in a more natural and sustainable manner than is generally done with commercial operations. With a range of experience, members help one another as mentors and students, farmers and homesteaders, working professionals and friends.

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Laird lights off the syrup season.

Sap tap wrap

This year we had four days of sap tapping weather—January 28 - 31—with temperatures ranging from the high 20s to the high 40s. I set 25 taps in 23 trees and collected a total of 75 gallons of sap. One tree with two taps produced seven gallons in four days!

I was able to use my barrel-stove evaporator for the first time, and it performed at least as well as my propane range. With the evaporator in operation six or seven hours a day, I was able to keep pace with the incoming flow. The syrup was finished on the propane stove with the temperature kept below the boiling point. After a final filtering, I was able to bottle five quarts of medium-dark syrup with a great flavor.

All in all, it was successful, though short, season.

If you are interested in tapping our local big-leaf maples next season, give me a call.

Laird Funk • 541-846-6759

Give back to nature—plant native!

BY SUZIE SAVOIE

The Applegate Valley is located in the Klamath-Siskiyou Ecoregion, which contains more than 3,500 plant species, of which 280 are endemic, meaning they are native here and grow nowhere else on earth. A biological assessment by DellaSala and others (1999) ranked the Klamath-Siskiyou as the fifth richest coniferous forest in the world in terms of species diversity.

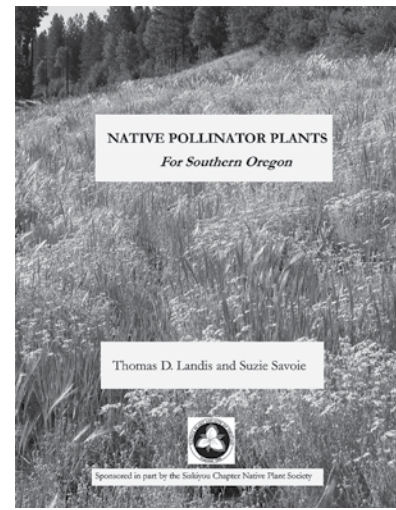
Much of the plant diversity we see in our region is a result of pollination of flowering plants by a variety of pollinators, including bees, moths, butterflies, beetles, flies, hummingbirds, true bugs, ants, and spiders, many of which have co-evolved with the plant species they pollinate. Co-evolution has created specialization—90 percent of the insects that eat plants can develop and reproduce only on the plants with which they share an evolutionary history. A commonly known example of this is monarch butterfly caterpillars that eat only milkweed plants.

The evolution of pollination has created mutualistic relationships between plants and pollinators with shared benefits. For example, a bee gets protein in the form of pollen from a plant's flower, and, in return, the plant gets a mechanical pollen transfer from a pollinator, aiding in the sexual reproduction of the plant. Because most of these mutualistic relationships are highly specialized, conservation of native plant diversity is extremely important for the protection of native pollinator populations.

Co-evolution and specialization have benefitted pollinators in many ways, but with specialization comes risk. If the larval host plant or floral food source that a pollinator is reliant on disappears, so does the pollinator.

Once common along the Oregon coast, the Oregon silverspot butterfly fell to only four populations by the 1990s due to habitat loss and degradation. The Oregon silverspot has only a single larval host plant: the blue violet (*Viola adunca*). Without the rearing program at the Oregon Zoo, it is likely that the Oregon silverspot would be extinct. Landscaping that includes blue violet instead of other exotic ornamental plants would help this species recover within its historic range.

Examples of host plant larval specialization for butterflies in the Applegate include wild parsley (*Lomatium spp.*) for Anise swallowtails; deerbrush



Local guidebook written by Tom Landis and Suzie Savoie.

and other *Ceanothus* for California tortoiseshells; bleeding heart (*Dicentra spp.*) for Parnassians; stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) for red admirals; pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis spp.*) or pussytoes (*Antennaria spp.*) for American painted ladies; and canyon live oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*) for California sisters.

The small amount of protected habitat in the United States is not enough to ensure the survival of native plants and pollinators. Our own backyards and properties need to provide habitat as well. Lawns in the US are estimated to cover 63,000 square miles, about the size of Texas. Most people landscape with ornamental plants that have very little, if any, ecological value for native species. By planting natives we can turn our lawns, backyards, or back forty into habitat for wildlife and pollinators.

The task of transitioning a yard, garden, or large piece of property back to native plants can seem daunting. Thankfully, southern Oregon has many resources to help you learn how to create beneficial habitat. The Siskiyou Chapter Native Plant Society, the Siskiyou Field Institute, and the Oregon State University Extension Center's Land Steward Program are great places to learn about native flora and land stewardship.

Folks who just need a little introductory information to get started should check out this local guidebook: *Native Pollinator Plants for Southern Oregon*. Through our mutual work with Southern Oregon Monarch Advocates, Tom Landis and I wrote this guide to feature practical native plants that can be found in local nurseries or through native seed sources. The guide provides information on plant form, nectar resources, bloom time, host-plant status, and propagation methods. Printed copies of the guide are available by emailing klamathsiskiyou@gmail.com, or you can view or download the guide for free at klamathsiskiyouseeds.com. Special thanks go to the Siskiyou Chapter of the Native Plant Society for providing funding for the initial printing of the guide. The second printing has been paid for through support from Southern Oregon Monarch Advocates and donations from native plant and pollinator enthusiasts such as you!

This spring, give back to nature—plant native!

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