



St. Clair Beekeepers Association

Bee Buzz

Monthly Newsletter of the St. Clair Beekeepers

March 2016

**Thinking about
leaving home...**



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Next SCBA Meeting will be held:

Friday, March 25, 2016, 7:30 p.m.

St. Clair County Farm Bureau

1478 Rte. 15, Belleville (Just east of Eckert's)

This month's topic is:

***"All About Swarms -
How to Attract Them,
How to Catch Them,
How to Keep Them, and
How to Prevent Them."***



Interesting, Fun or Useful Websites:

Pesticides to Avoid: http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/files/pesticide_list_final_59620.pdf

The Trouble with Lawns: <http://www.mnn.com/your-home/organic-farming-gardening/blogs/why-ill-never-have-lawn-again>

The video here is a tear-jerker: <http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/animals/blogs/honey-nut-cheerios-save-bees-campaign-brings-all-feels>

This Month in Beekeeping

by Charity Davis-
Woodard, SCBA
Program Chair

In an attempt to provide our members with seasonal guidelines for managing honey bee colonies we are introducing a monthly calendar as a regular feature of Bee Buzz. When reading these guidelines please keep in mind the following:

The information is written with our general climate in mind, but there are many environmental variations within that climate. All beekeeping is **local**, and the conditions for hives on a sunny south-facing hillside in Monroe County will be different than for hives in a low meadow with shade trees that allow for only 5 hours of sunlight in northern Madison County. ***Always bear in mind the location of your hives when using these guidelines or any advice you get from other sources.***

This information is a composite gleaned from many researched sources and personal experience. In the future as this calendar matures the guidelines will incorporate advice from seasoned beekeepers in our membership in order to increase the value of the information.

As stated in an online resource referenced for this month's information: *"The reader should use the calendar in the same fashion that he/she uses a long-term weather forecast. Expect each forecast to be more-or-less accurate and more-or-less prone to error."* The guidelines are general predictions and suggestions; use your good judgment seek advice if the "forecast" seems off.

MARCH

Watch the entrance for foraging activity (pollen is especially recognizable).

Inspect all hive bodies for food stores and brood health on a warm (55+), calm day when the bees are flying. Check queen's brood pattern; although it may not be up to full steam she should be laying mostly worker brood with an increasing number of drone cells late in the month.

Remove bottom box to clean if not being used by the bees. Clean the bottom board of debris and place brood chamber on top. Place bottom hive body above the brood chamber to provide empty comb (and some honey if available) above the brood nest.

Feed colonies low on stores with sugar mush or syrup (1:1) can be fed with an inside feeder during a sustained warm spell (preferably above 50°). Once syrup feeding is begun it should be continued until the bees quit taking it. Otherwise you have stimulated brood production and then left them without a source of "nectar"

Supplemental pollen feeding is not generally needed in our area since there is so much natural pollen available, but may be used to stimulate brood production. BUT - this stimulation can lead to swarming!

The HIVE and the BEEKEEPER

Spring is the busiest time of year for the bees and a season of great excitement for the beekeeper. The colony responds to the longer days with the queen increasing her rate of egg laying. The brood area can expand rapidly and the cluster continues its slow movement upward, with stored honey moved from remote areas of the frames in toward the cluster. More brood means more honey and pollen is consumed. Nectar and/or fresh pollen will be collected during the month from maple, elm, alder, willow and many other native and early blooming ornamentals, but may be not enough to provide the estimated 7-10 lb needed without adequate stores in the hive.



This Month in Beekeeping (cont.)

Now is the time to make and execute management decisions that will determine the direction of colony growth. Are you interested in making increase (i.e. more hives) or in honey production? Knowing your goals in March is key to reaching them later in the season. Unmanaged colonies will probably swarm (even well-managed ones may swarm), and swarms are far less likely to survive the year than bees in a managed colony. Colonies can sense as early as March the lack of expansion room and congestion in the brood area that sets in motion their biological drive to reproduce by casting a swarm. In our area this begins typically in mid-April and can last into June. Early spring is also the time to assess colonies that did not survive the winter and to deal responsibly with the equipment to prevent the spread of disease. Close up and isolate any dead-outs until the cause of mortality can be determined; check with your Illinois Apiary Inspector for assistance.

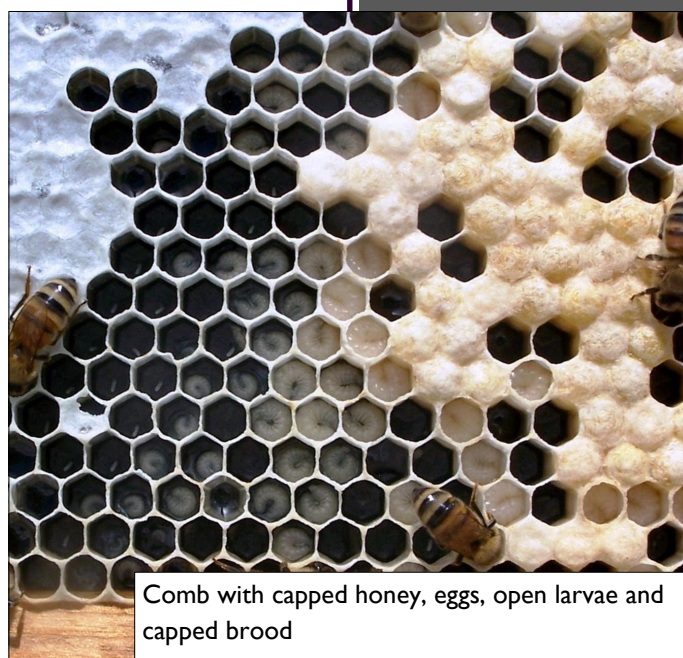
SPRING INSPECTIONS

March usually offers the first opportunity for a thorough spring inspection. Begin by looking for the basic colony elements of brood, food stores, and equipment condition. If using deep Langstroth equipment the brood sphere will most likely be in the upper box and may range from 1 to 7 or even 8 frames of brood (capped brood, eggs and larva), depending on the balance and vigor of the queen and colony. You should expect to see 2 to 5 frames of brood in an average colony. After assessment the top box can be set aside on a spare bottom board or empty super to keep it off the ground. If windy or cool a towel or sheet can be placed over the brood chamber to protect the brood from chilling.

Typically there will be far less activity in the bottom chamber, with little if any honey, and often no brood. There may be a good supply of leftover beebread that can be relocated to the near-center positions in what will

be the top box. Remove the box from the bottom board and clean the board. One method of providing room for the hive to expand during this time of rapid growth is to place the top brood chamber on the cleaned bottom board, leaving the brood frames in their same configuration but flanking them with a couple of frames of open comb to provide room for the laying queen. Place frames of pollen and honey on either side of the empty comb. Topping this box with another brood chamber of empty comb interspersed with honey and beebread will provide more room for expansion and may help prevent the swarm impulse from starting (if it has not already!)

If you have not already cleaned used equipment and assembled and painted new equipment this is the time to do so. If you are expecting new packages of bees to arrive in April or intend to make splits or nucleus colonies for increase, swarm control or to sell, March is the month to be preparing your equipment. Beekeeping suppliers are handling many orders at this time of year, so it is not too early to be ordering more honey supers and frames to assemble. April and May will find you spending more time in the beeyard and less in the workshop. Take advantage of these cool days in March to do indoor chores.



Comb with capped honey, eggs, open larvae and capped brood

Successful Swarm- Catching by Bonnie Summers, Millstadt

Last year I decided to make my own swarms traps. I wanted something lightweight and easy to store. I read Thomas Seeley's book, *Honeybee Democracy*, and was amazed at the results of his decades of research on honeybee swarms. On page 56 of his book he has a chart of nest site preferences for honeybee swarms. Since wooden box traps are too heavy and awkward for me to handle, I looked for other options. I found a video and blog that described traps made from plant fiber pots.

I ordered 10 fiber pots from GrowOrganic.com which was enough to make five traps. Before assembling the swarm traps I waterproofed the pots with Thompson's Water Seal (not eco-friendly but what I had on hand). Each pot has four drain holes – I filled all but one of the holes with Big Gap Filler - a foam sealant that comes in an aerosol can.

For the bait I moistened both ends of a cotton swab with lemongrass oil and put it into a zip lock bag and then cut three small slits in the bag. Tape the bag to the inside of the trap because if you don't it will end up in your hive when you dump your bees into your hive body. I also put in a piece of honey comb.

My husband helped with assembling the pots. We used #8x1-1/2 cabinet screws. The GRK brand has a star bit included-3 or 4 screws will fasten the two pots together. We marked around a couple of screws on each trap with a Sharpee so that we could match the holes up when re-assembling the traps. We made a top handle by drilling two holes and attaching a 3/8 inch wide zip tie.

Check out this blog for the rest of the instructions: <http://beekeeperlinda.blogspot.com/search?q=+Homemade+swarm+trap>.

The swarm traps were hung in the trees around the third week in April. The average height for placement was 12-15 feet. I caught six swarms within three weeks.

I wasn't sure if the traps were durable enough to last more than one season considering all the rain we had last spring. I had to pour water out of them a few times. They look fine this year and one has already been roped up to the same branch it was on last year.

When a swarm is caught all you have to do is lower the trap to the ground, remove the screws (we use a cordless screwdriver because it's faster) and tap the bees out into the hive. Leave the rope in place, re-bait your trap and pull it back up into place the next day.

Here are two photos: I'm holding the trap with one finger-they are really light weight! I was standing in our yard when the bees swarmed this trap. It was quite a sight to see.

Good luck to everyone this swarm season!



The Importance of Pollinator Forage

by Barbara Beal, SCBA Info Officer

Bees on Autumn Aster



Many newer beekeepers (myself included) were first attracted to beekeeping in order to “help the bees.” We had read and heard about colony collapse disorder and the ongoing loss of pollinators and thought we could help by becoming backyard beekeepers. Of course, the idea of having our own honey didn’t hurt.

But here’s the thing - all the backyard/hobbyist/sideline beekeepers in the world won’t be able to “help the bees” if their food supply is insufficient. This concern was described very clearly in a post (3/4/16) on the blog Honey Bee Suite, written by Rusty Burlew (<http://honeybeesuite.com/will-more-beekeeping-save-the-bees/>). Rusty believes that *“adding more and more colonies into an already stressed environment doesn’t solve the problem. What needs to be saved is their environment and their food supply. In a proper environment, the bees can take care of themselves.”* She further states that bees, both honeybees and native bees, need a *“healthful environment which includes a balanced and plentiful diet. For that reason every beekeeper should also be a grower, filling fields and flowerpots with life-giving blossoms.”*

So, now that planting season is almost here, here are a few things to keep in mind when planning pollinator forage.

- Look for plants that provide pollen and/or nectar over a longer period of time, especially very early spring and mid- to late fall when forage is scarce. Bees will forage in late winter and very early spring, weather permitting, so be prepared with crocus, hellebore and snowdrops. Autumn is a tough time for bees. Most trees and shrubs have finished flowering as have many fruit, vegetable and ornamental plants. Good sources of pollen and nectar beginning in August are most sunflowers, hostas, milkweed, sumac, coneflowers, sedum, Vitex and zinnias. By the time October rolls around the list dwindles to asters, mums, Shasta daisies, goldenrod and snakeroot, plus whatever herbs are still blooming.
- Don’t forget trees and shrubs. In the early spring elm, maple, willow, red bud, pussy willow and witch hazel provide much-needed resources. An excellent source for bee-friendly trees and shrubs, as well as knowledgeable advice, is Rock Bridge Trees located in Bethpage, TN. Rock Bridge offers plants you probably won’t find at the big box stores and the owners often bring their products to beekeepers conferences, such as the Heartland Apiculture Society. Visit their website at: www.rockbridgetrees.com.
- Since honeybees practice “floral fidelity” (forage one type of flower at a time) it’s better to plant large masses of the same thing rather than small bunches of different plants. However, a pot of salvia or basil on your back porch is better than nothing.
- Try to eliminate the use of pesticides or at least limit them. If they are necessary try the least toxic product, such as insecticidal soaps or horticultural oils that have no residual activity once the spray has dried. If you do have to spray do so in the evening after bees have stopped foraging for the day. Never spray any crop when it’s in bloom and mow the flowers off blooming weeds under plants before you spray them. Check [this website](#) for chemicals to avoid.



Bees on Sedum

The Importance of Pollinator Forage (cont.)

- Consider “going native;” many native plants offer maximum pollen and nectar and may be less invasive than “exotic” plants. Be wary of extremely hybridized flowering plants as over the years they have been bred for the beauty of their flowers and may have lost their nectar capacity. Other flowers have tight, double petals which may be impossible for bees to penetrate. And not all varieties of a flower have equal value; check to be sure.
- Don’t be obsessed with a weed-free yard - bees love dandelions, henbit, deadnettle and clover - all of which would be killed by common herbicides. A perfect “golf course” lawn is just a green desert as far as pollinators are concerned. If you can, allow wild plants to grow, such as goldenrod, autumn asters, wild blackberry and raspberry, wild cherry and (I hate to say this because it’s smelly and invasive) - Ailanthus Tree of Heaven. Consider adding clover to your lawn or planting it in an unused area, or use alfalfa or buckwheat.
- Don’t forget fruits, veggies and herbs. Most fruit trees are bee-magnets as are black locust and tulip poplar. So are many berry bushes - blackberries, raspberries, currants and blueberries. Your vegetable garden can be attractive to honeybees also, especially any of the cucurbits, such as cucumbers, squash, melons and pumpkins. Bees love herb gardens and are particularly fond of basil, borage, thyme, mint, sage, oregano and lavender.



Bee on Apple Blossom

Unfortunately, you can’t tell just by looking at a flower if bees like it (unless there are bees on it) because a gorgeous flower doesn’t guarantee nectar or pollen. In fact, some very common flowers, such as forsythia and petunias are almost completely lacking in nectar and, therefore, useless to foraging bees. There are numerous books and websites that list plants that bees prefer. An excellent resource is *Garden Plants for Honey Bees*, by Peter Lindtner. Lindtner has organized the plants by season so you will know when they bloom. He also rates each plant by the amount of pollen and nectar it produces.

For more information check out [Gardening for Honey Bees](#) or access this comprehensive list of honeybee nectar sources at <http://www.ent.uga.edu/bees/pollination/plants-year-round-forage.html>.

Classifieds:

Barbara Mattatall is looking for empty wine bottles to use in a craft project. If you have any you’d like to get rid of please bring them to the next SCBA meeting and she’ll be glad to take them off your hands.

To publish a classified ad, email it to stclairbees@gmail.com.