



SWEET STUFF

NIBA NEWSLETTER – AUGUST 2023

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Noel Williams

Hi Everyone,

April and I look forward to attending the McHenry County Fair each year. We get there early to check out the 4H club winners in the animal buildings. Our favorites are the rabbits. Some of them are huge! The vegetable winners, crafts, sewing and art displays are interesting. We visit the Conservation tent. I make sure there is time before our shift to stop at several food booths. Corn dogs, steak on a stick, gyros, french fries. All my favorites are there!

We also look forward to our time at the NIBA booth. It's fun to spend a few hours with fellow club members and swap stories. Wide eyed kids excitedly try to find our display hive queen before their siblings do. Fair visitors ask about beekeeping, share tales from their yard and buy honey after carefully inspecting the various labels and picking their favorites. Oh, since our booth is right across from the ice cream stand, I'll get a scoop before we leave for the evening.

There is a sea of yellow out in our garden. Grey-Headed Coneflowers, False Sunflowers, Brown Eyed-Susan, Compass Plant are in full bloom. A few purple flowers dot the landscape: Blazing Star, Bee Balm Monarda, Ironweed and Purple Coneflowers. It is entertaining to pull up a chair and watch the variety of pollinators who come to visit. Our garden attracts people too. We often see folks on their evening walk stop to admire the blooms. Last night we had a visit from Skyler (who is an entomologist) and her parents who were checking out plants they wanted to add to their native pollinator garden. Even though her specialty is not bees, Skyler had a lot of questions for me about our apiary.

Our bees are doing well. Honey production is slowing down. We combined a weak hive with a strong swarm hive we captured in our yard a few weeks ago. The combined hive with additional feeding should be strong going into winter. Like our bees, we are enjoying the cooler temps this week.



To help you get your bees ready for the colder months, our August 10th meeting will feature a presentation by Mr. William Werning of Wisconsin Honey Producers entitled *Prepare Your Hives for Winter*. This presentation is a 'don't miss' for anyone hoping to improve the over-winter survival rate of their colonies.

We are still looking for a NIBA member willing to take over the publication of the Sweet Stuff newsletter. Marianne Hill will be hanging up her printer's apron after many years of devoted service to the club. If you have been thinking you would like to get more involved with NIBA, this could be your opportunity! Please contact me at 847-902-2684 or nwilliams1250@yahoo.com if you are interested in helping out.

Please take advantage of this nice weather. We hope to see you at the McHenry Country Fair!

Noel

NIBA SMOKER COMPETITION

Kristen Mueller

Imagine this: it's a gorgeous sunny day, and you're taking your time inspecting your hives, the bees are getting aggravated. You reach for your smoker and give it a few puffs. Nothing comes out but a little ash and hot air. You may as well be blowing raspberries in the bees' faces.

It seems that no matter how diligently I layer my smoker fuel, or how strongly I get my fire going, my smoker rarely lasts as long as I need it to. I only have two beehives, so what am I doing wrong?



The Northern Illinois Beekeepers Association held its annual picnic in early July, and one of our traditions is the smoker competition. All members are invited to participate by bringing their own smoker and fuel. Contestants are only allowed matches to light their smoker, and once

the smoker gets going, the smokers are left alone to see whose smoker lasts the longest.

I reached out to the smoker competition contestants to learn a few tricks. Ralph Brindise, Al Fullerton, Phil Webb, and Stephanie Slater shared with me their techniques and smoker strategy. These members are small-scale beekeepers, managing between 5-12 hives. Most shared using a combination of sawdust, pine

needles, and shredded newspaper. Some use small chunks of wood sold for smoking meat. In comparison, I use a combination of wood shavings, meat smoker pellets, strips of burlap, and rolled up cardboard.

To get the smoker started, Stephanie first lights a small piece of newspaper, then slowly adds fuel until there is a good flame, then adds more fuel. Phil also lights a small piece of newspaper at the bottom with a lighter, puffs the smoker, then adds the smoker wood chunks, then layers with more newspaper and wood chunks. Al mostly relies on pine needles, lighting them at the bottom, waiting for them to catch, pushing them down, then adding more pine needles. Ralph uses a similar method with pine needles and saw dust. Everyone reminded me to puff the smoker regularly throughout the inspection to keep it going.



Perhaps I need more fuel, more patience, or more intermittent puffs of my smoker throughout the inspection. Perhaps I should try some pine shavings. I like the idea of lighting a wad of newspaper at the bottom of the smoker. Thank you to all who participated in the Northern Illinois Beekeepers Association smoker competition! To all the beekeepers out there, may your smoker never run out when you need it.

MCHENRY COUNTY FAIR IS IN FULL SWING



Hello Fellow Beekeepers:

There will be no Mentor sessions in August or September. The next Mentor session is scheduled for October 15th.

A Mentor session will be scheduled for Saturday, October 15th -10:30 am. How to wash and melt beeswax cappings, etc....”

If John Leibinger is willing, we'll schedule a session in November for Oxalic Acid dribbles. That will complete this year's NIBA Mentor program.

If you have a particular beekeeping activity you think would be a good topic for a future mentor session – please let me know. It is difficult to identify topics of interest that would increase member participation, as we all have different objectives and levels of experience. Your input would be helpful to ensure a mentor program that meets your needs and interests.

Thank you.

Regards,

Bob Hillman

CHORES OF THE MONTH – AUGUST

THE DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

John Leibinger

Like the bees we study, we accomplish more together.

What's happening in the hive?

The colony population will have reached its peak and will likely start to decline slightly later in the month. Nonetheless, you should be observing lots of bees and still see brood at all stages being raised to replace the older bees in the colony. The rate of laying of the queen will be tapering off significantly from the rate that has been experienced in the spring and early summer. The rate of change is typically a factor of the race of bees that you have. It is typically a function of declining resources for bees as plant growth tapers off in the heat of summer. You may even experience a time when the queen seems to shut down laying altogether. Don't necessarily interpret this as a need for a new queen. This is all part of the annual cycle and is an element of 'normal'. Also, it is likely that some portion of the bees that will be raised later this month will be the start of the winter bees (diutinus bees) that will get the colony through until next spring.

You will likely see a lot of 'bearding' occurring on hot August evenings. I am sure most of you saw some of this in July during our heat wave. If you are a new beekeeper, don't panic, this is all part of the bees' thermo-regulation process and is another element of 'normal'.

You may start to find your bees have developed some 'attitude' as we get into the month. Reduced resources often lead to robbing behaviors and if your colonies are on the wrong side of the thief-victim equation, they can start to be a bit defensive. The same behavior can be true when **you** are the 'thief' during harvesting.

Temperatures are heating up so ventilation and available water sources are 'must haves' for your bees.

The bee population is no longer expanding, but the Varroa mite ratio to bee population likely is**. You must monitor their growth by doing regular mite checks (monthly sugar roll or alcohol wash, see below in General Info).

** Or at least will appear to be the case. Some new research by Dr. Zachary Lamas raises some questions about how beekeepers check for mites...or rather, which bees we check for mites. See the General Info section below for a link to an interview with Dr. Lamas for additional insight.....quite interesting and thought provoking.

For All Beekeepers, it is time to:

Maintain the space around your hive(s). Your bees work hard at thermoregulation of the hive. Help them out. Trim weeds and grass to allow maximum air flow as the temperatures rise. Maintaining a clear flight path to the hive also helps with their foraging efficiency.

Provide additional ventilation to assist the bees in maintaining proper hive temperatures. This can be in the form of ventilated inner covers or as simple as propping the outer cover to allow more air circulation. The additional ventilation is also helpful in the conversion of nectar to honey. Better ventilation eases the job of moisture removal from the stored nectar.

Make sure the bees have a water source as we move into the heat of summer. Bees collect water to help cool the hive as part of their thermoregulation efforts. There are numerous ways to provide water. A quick internet search will provide some alternatives. I have been using Boardman feeders for providing water and I am amazed at how much water they utilize. (I am using the feeders in an attempt to mitigate the bees encroaching on neighbors and it seems to be working).

Monitor for Varroa Mites monthly and take action if needed (See General Info section below for references to mite checking procedures).

It is very important to get the mite loads under control now. The brood that will be raised as winter bees will be coming just around the corner. To maximize the strength of these winter bees, you need great nurse bees to raise them.

These are the bees we are trying to protect now. Protect the bees that raise the winter bees. Come out of winter with healthy hives raring to go for 2024. This is a great step towards sustainable beekeeping.

Know what you have and keep records. Keep mite growth in check by utilizing a miticide, organic acids, drone comb culling, a combination of IPM methods, or a brood break. Pay attention to labeling instructions when using treatments and be mindful that you cannot leave honey supers on for all methods of treatments. The only treatments currently approved for use while honey supers are on are Hopguard 3, Mite Away Quick Strips (MAQS), and Formic Pro and maybe Oxalic Acid. See the July 'Chores' for a brief explanation of the status of Oxalic acid approval. Read the label for instructions on their use. Specifically be aware of temperature ranges for use. If you have already harvested your honey for the year, there are several other alternatives that have wider temperature ranges for use. Your specific approach will be influenced by your personal goals and philosophy, but, if you have a mite problem, doing nothing is not an acceptable answer if you want your colony to thrive and survive the winter.

Harvest honey appropriately. Don't overharvest, there are some lean weeks ahead for your bees. Be wary that the bees might be getting a bit defensive so dress accordingly. Do not be careless in your harvesting habits. Don't be sloppy with burr comb that you scrape from the frames. Pick up those wax scraps which are often laden with honey. In lean times the bees, being the opportunists that they are, will jump at the chance to start robbing unprotected honey and sweet scrapes laying around. **You do not want to incite a robbing frenzy.** Do not leave frames of honey open in the bee yard or wherever you store them while awaiting extraction (extraction should occur as soon as you can arrange the time after removal from the hive). I have seen beekeepers lose many, many pounds (potentially all) of their honey by storing it in a garage that they thought was 'bee tight'. It happens remarkable fast. Prepare ahead.

Return freshly extracted frames or supers late in the day to reduce stimulating the robbing urge among your colonies. If you are not returning them to the hive for refilling, but rather storing for the winter, you should consider putting the super of wet frames back on the hive above the inner cover (regular inner cover, not a ventilated inner cover) and below the outer cover (some beekeepers add an empty super box (no frames) between the inner cover and the wet super). The benefit will be twofold. First, the bees will come up and remove all the remaining honey and store it in frames below the inner cover. Second, the bees will 'refurbish' the comb and leave it dry for storage. When you do go to store them, some sort of action to prevent wax moth infiltration may be appropriate. Though I have not experienced much of an issue with wax moth in supers that have never had brood in them, the general recommendations are that you store frames with paradichlorobenzene (PDB) crystals (**Do Not Use Moth Balls or Moth Crystals Containing Napthalene**), spray them with a product called Certan, or freeze the frames to kill any moth eggs/larva and secure in an airtight (moth tight) container. There has been some research to indicate that PDB may get absorbed a bit by the wax, so do your homework and decide on your path. Before reusing these supers next year, you will need to air them out for several days to a week to dissipate the PDB odor.

Be very aware of robbing. It happens quickly and can be devastating. Reduce entrance openings to the smallest size on your entrance reducers, or alternately, install robbing screens. If you do not use screened bottom boards, it may be advantageous to use the robbing screens instead of the significant reduction in reducer opening during the extreme heat so that you can maintain maximum ventilation. There are many types of robbing screens, some very simple and some a bit more 'inventive'. Check the internet for robbing screens and you will get an abundance of ideas. You will have to use your judgement on the direction you take.

Make sure that you keep records. This is a very important element of the learning process...whether you are a first year beekeeper or a forty year beekeeper...you should always be learning something. Record inspection dates, time and temp and weather conditions, quantity of bees, bee behaviors, signs indicating the presence of the queen (eggs, young larvae, actual sighting), number of frames of brood and stores, brood pattern and frame/comb condition, available laying space, observations of signs of swarm preparation, pollen coming in (color, type if possible), drone production, Varroa Mite count, presence of Small Hive Beetle or other pests, and a number of other issues. Record anything else that is outside of 'normal' once you learn what 'normal' is. Take notes in the bee yard. You will be

surprised at how easy it is to get confused over what was observed and which hive it was observed in if you wait to record info after the fact.

Monitor the hives for queen signs. Stuff happens....the queen may be failing and the bees need to replace her. She may have died for some reason. Don't allow your hive to remain queen-less. Doing so will likely lead to a 'laying worker' condition. This is a problem that is not easily resolved and oftentimes results in the death of the colony. You need to know that they have the resources to make a new queen or you will have to provide those resources from another colony. Alternately, you can buy and install a queen though as you get late in the season, queen availability may be reduced.. Going into fall/winter with a healthy hive and a young queen are key elements to successful over-wintering and sustainable beekeeping. Stay ahead of problems and take action when needed.

Return extracted frames to the hives for them to continue to make more honey if you want. There is still a potential fall flow from goldenrod, asters, and other late blooming plants. If you are not interested in harvesting the fall flow, consider starting your winter feeding now (once you have removed your honey crop from spring/summer). Feed 2:1 sugar to water. This has the benefit of allowing additional time for winter stores buildup.

Consider making splits or nucs to raise additional bees for next year if this is part of your goal plan. Regardless of your goal plan, this is a great step towards sustainable beekeeping. There are different thoughts on the timing of this, but in any case do not delay or you can pass for 2023 and plan better in 2024.

General Info

Download the forms to register your bees with the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

<https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/agr/Insects/Bees/Documents/beekeep.pdf> (Ctrl+Click link)

[Dr. Zachary Lamas's views on mite checks.](#) (Ctrl+Click link) Not sure that this link works. If not try one below or type in address below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfzkreMezCI> (Ctrl+Click link) Type in if link doesn't work.

Sugar Roll Method: [varroa mite monitoring - The Sand Hill](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

Alcohol Wash Method: [Alcohol Wash for Mite Control - YouTube](#) (Ctrl+Click link)



Extreme Robbing



Simple Robbing Screen



Another Robbing Screen

HELP WANTED - NEWSLETTER EDITOR

After many years of great service to NIBA, Marianne Hill will be stepping down as Editor of the the club's *Sweet Stuff* newsletter. Thank you, Marianne, for your time and dedication to publishing this critical information source each month.

We are in need of a volunteer to step up and take over monthly publication of the *Sweet Stuff* newsletter. Marianne estimates that it typically takes her no more than six hours each month to collect material, edit, and produce the publication.

Please consider taking on this very important role as Editor of the *Sweet Stuff*. You can contact Noel Williams at nwilliams1250@yahoo.com if you have questions or, even better, are ready to say "Yes, I want the job!".

2023 NIBA PICNIC



2023 NIBA OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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Club Raffle Coordinator - John Leibinger

Snack Coordinator - Sally Willer

Website and Newsletter Submissions

www.nibainfo.org - The Northern Illinois Beekeepers Association website. A wealth of information is available.

Contact board members via email, download the membership form, access copies of the newsletter. Terri is asking for your pictures, stories, etc. to have them highlighted on the web page!

reevestherese@att.net

This is YOUR newsletter. Please feel free to contribute. Or let us know if you have any topics you'd like to see covered. mariannehill1213@gmail.com

Manual Honey Extractor

Did you know that your membership in NIBA includes the opportunity to rent a club manual honey extractor? We have two to choose from. Rental is \$10 for a 3-day rental. \$20 (\$10 for rental and \$10 deposit) is due when you pick up the extractor.

Schedule a pick-up time, extract your honey and return the equipment in 3 days. The \$10 deposit will be returned if the extractor is clean and returned on time.

To reserve a date, **contact Randy by text or email at 847-571-1899 or rmeadtoys@gmail.com.**

NIBA Now has an Electric Extractor

It will handle both sides of 9 frames at the same time.

Club members may borrow it for 2 days for \$25.00 plus a security deposit of \$75.00. The deposit will be returned if the extractor and uncapping equipment are returned on time, clean, and undamaged.

The Extractor comes with everything you need to make the uncapping and extraction experience go smoothly, except of course, the honey frames and buckets.

Pick it up in Cary. To reserve, **contact Al Fullerton by phone or text at 815-382-7139 or email adfhoney@gmail.com**, Note: Al's phone doesn't always give a notification ring (He blames it on the phone or the tunnel he lives in), so if you don't get a timely response, just phone rather than text.

**The queen marking color for
2023 is RED.**