



SWEET STUFF

NIBA NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2024

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tom Allen

We're in the homestretch of winter although it's hardly seemed like winter at times. It seems when we get snow, we get a lot of snow at one time and when it's cold it's really cold. With our temperatures in the mid to high 30s in the last couple of weeks you might have taken the chance to open up your hives quickly and added some food for them. Tim Wilbanks from Heritage Honeybee told us during a presentation that we shouldn't be afraid to open the hive quickly in this kind of weather to put food on them because the alternative is to let them starve. They can overcome being chilled for a minute or so but they can't overcome no food. It looks like we have warm weather for the next few weeks so look for evidence of cleansing flights around the hive. Remember that the colony might need help removing the dead bees from the bottom box so turn a metal coat hanger or something else into a device to reach into the hive and pull those dead bees out.

I want to give Ralph Brindise a big congratulations on being named the 2024 NIBA member of the year!! Ralph has done a lot of work over the years at the NIBA mentor hives and his help at the McHenry County Fair and other events can always be counted on. Ralph and I have done presentations together over the years at libraries, assisted living places and garden clubs. I count Ralph as one of my best friends and I'm a much better beekeeper because of his knowledge.

Tom



Northern Illinois Beekeeper Association (NIBA) Mentor Hive Partnership

The Northern Illinois Beekeepers Association (NIBA) is celebrating their partnership with the McHenry County College (MCC) Student Farm. The NIBA mentor beehives sit adjacent to the Student Farm at McHenry County College (MCC). The Student Farm provides hands-on learning in horticulture and agriculture, while the NIBA mentor hives provides hands-on learning in the hive for our members. The MCC Student Farm Stand proudly sells NIBA honey alongside their student grown crops to both students and the public -- all mentor hive honey sale proceeds go back to NIBA. These sale funds go toward learning opportunities and resources for NIBA members. This year's NIBA mentor hive honey sales at the MCC Farm Stand totaled \$2,167.

Emily Zack, the Coordinator for the Center of Agrarian Learning at McHenry County College says that having the NIBA hives at MCC is "great!" She believes that the Student Farm benefits from the NIBA honey bees' pollination. Emily also reports that the beehives are a source of inquiry and learning for her college students and provide a talking point to community members who tour the farm. Additional learning opportunities provided by the NIBA mentor hives include the popular "A Week with the Honey Bees" educational summer camp for kids in grades 7-9 through the Kids and College program at McHenry County College.

The NIBA mentor beehives bring a multitude of benefits to our members, students of all ages, the community, and to all who taste our honey.



Kristen Mueller
Secretary
Northern Illinois Beekeepers Association

Life and Death in the Apiary

Larry Kregel



I often arrange my bee yards in groups of four hives. They sit on landscape timbers that sit on cement blocks. The hives tip gently forward to let any collected water run out. These hives were prepared for winter by wrapping them in a single wrap of double reflective insulation. Inner covers were set above an Imrie shim (basically a one-inch ring providing space for adding winter feeding sugar). Ridged foam insulation was placed above the inner cover limiting the heat that leaves the hive through the roof. A telescoping cover and a brick finished my winter prep. This

is how my hives were prepared going into this winter.

In this photo Mother Nature has nicely added another layer of white insulation.

Last week a knock on each hive was answered by a hum in three of the four hives in the picture. The fourth? Perhaps they were oversleeping or hummed too quietly to hear or perhaps the cluster was on the other side or... they may be dead.

A thought about the hive that might be dead... I have occasionally been fooled. Sometimes making plans to replace a colony assumed dead in February – ordering a nuc or package, ordering a queen to make a split from a surviving colony – turns out to be unnecessary. Foragers arriving on the landing board with their pollen sacks packed full after visiting the early maple bloom can provide a nice March surprise.

In my bee classes I point out that exceptionally good beekeepers have hives die, especially in the winter. That comes with keeping bees. C. C. Miller, our famed local beekeeper a century ago, always for (and never found) the solution to winter deaths. Though it is hard, don't take it too personally. Looking for a way to learn from the experience is more useful and will make one a better beekeeper.

In the era that ended with the arrival of the varroa mite in North America, a good beekeeper would expect 15% losses during a winter. Even before varroa, colonies of bees failed to survive winter. In more recent times the varroa/virus difficulties have made bee survival more difficult.

Should three of these four colonies be alive in March, I will be beating the national average. That's OK.

I will be adding spring feed to the surviving colonies, likely about the third week of March. Feeding thin sugar syrup, I hope to simulate the arrival of a nectar flow. The queen's egg laying is related to the presence of a nectar flow. More nectar.... Lay more eggs. My goal - in simulating the presence

of a nectar flow - is to encourage the queen's laying before the natural nectar flow hoping I will have a strong force of foragers when the blooms arrive.

In recent years there has been a move among beekeepers to use pollen substitute patties to provide protein for the spring brood. I generally don't find this necessary. Bees in my bee yard go into the winter with a good supply of natural pollen and fresh pollen (especially from maples) is available for the early season brood rearing. Nothing wrong with adding pollen substitute patties. I just don't find it necessary or advantageous.

February is a time of patience, planning, and preparation. For the beekeeper winter tasks still call, but most of them are not in the bee yard.

The Beekeeping 101 class at McHenry County College begins on February 7.

Larry



2023 NIBA Member of the Year

The 2023 recipient of the NIBA Member of the Year was awarded at the January, 2024 NIBA meeting. There were several outstanding members nominated including Christy Binz, Ralph Brindise, Carl Christiansen, Al Fullerton, Bob Hillman, Larry Kregel, John Leibinger, Stephanie Slater and the team of Ralph Brindise and Terri Reeves.

The 2024 recipient is Ralph Brindise who currently serves as the club treasurer now into his 8th year. Ralph works tirelessly to manage the bank account and provide the treasurer's report and has facilitated the bee order, picked up and dropped off bees, keeps track of membership and any deposits or bills to be paid. He is a great liaison between the ISBA and NIBA on behalf of our members. He volunteers at the McHenry County Fair every day, keeping track of the finances, etc.

Ralph has been a mentor, last year taught the Kids in College Bee class at MCC, co-presented several seminars for local civic groups and is a great resource for new and experienced beekeepers alike. Whenever a Newbee calls, he is willing to set aside whatever he is doing to listen, give counsel or just chat about the joys of beekeeping! Truth be told, he has answered many calls while on vacation.

Ralph believes in continuing his education by attending conferences, seminars and reads and studies to improve his knowledge of beekeeping.

Ralph is a man of integrity, dedicated, hardworking and loves bees and beekeeping. This is a well-deserved honor.

Terri Reeves



NIBA 2024 PACKAGED BEE ORDER FORM

ORDERS MUST BE RECEIVED BY MARCH 15, 2024

*Name(s):		*Phone:	
*Email:			

***Required Fields**

Please read and initial below – checks will be returned if not initialed.

The undersigned acknowledges that NIBA will transport bee packages from the supplier in Wisconsin to a drop-off point in Illinois. The undersigned agrees that NIBA is not responsible for any damage to the bees or cages during the transport and distribution of the same. The undersigned understands that he/she remains at all times, free to order and pick-up bees from alternate suppliers of their choice.

I agree with the above statement regarding NIBA’s Packaged Bee delivery: _____ INITIAL HERE

NIBA is pleased to offer this group bee order as one of the benefits of membership. Therefore, your 2024 NIBA dues must be paid prior to your order being processed, **please use separate checks for bee orders and membership**. Mail your membership forms to the designated address. We will return orders received from non-members. We will order 250 packages of bees and 100 nucleus colonies (NUCs). **Orders will be taken on a first-come first-served basis until all 350 units are sold.**

- Package Price: \$135 each, package contains approximately 3 pounds of bees and a queen.
- 5-Frame NUC Price: \$170 each

Order Information:

My package order preference is given below. I understand the actual delivery timing is determined by many factors including weather and producer availability.

Order Type	Quantity	Queen Preference/Quantity	Price per unit	Total
3 LB Package Pick Up (Targeting mid-April)		Italian _____ Carniolan _____ Russian/Italian Hybrid _____	X \$135	\$
Nucleus Colony Pick Up (Targeting late April/early May)		Italian Only	X \$170	\$
			Grand Total Due	\$

Make checks payable to Northern Illinois Beekeepers Association (NIBA)

Queen selection provides club direction only; the club will receive queens as provided by producers. I understand queens are available on a first-come first-served basis and I may not receive the queen of my preference indicated above: _____ **INITIAL HERE**. We will do our best to accommodate all requests, but queen availability is determined by package suppliers. You may mix and match your queens.

The exact date and time for delivery and pickup will be communicated via the email address above. If you do not have email, you will be contacted at the phone number you provided above. **Orders must be picked up on day of delivery, NO EXCEPTIONS. You must designate someone else to pick them up if you are unavailable.**

Complete and mail order form and check (**NO CASH PLEASE!!!**) payable to: **NIBA** 517 Northlake Road, Lakemoor, IL 60051. Contact Ralph Brindise at rbrindise@att.net or (847) 970-0669 with any questions.

Bee Club Board Member Use Only
Bees Received: _____

Order No _____
Date received _____
Check # _____ / Amt _____

CHORES OF THE MONTH – FEBRUARY 2024

Like the bees we study, we accomplish more together.

John Leibinger

What's happening in the hive?

Well, December was fairly pleasant, but January left no doubt about it, winter is definitely upon us! Or is it? Looks like the first week of February will bring some milder weather....and that is a good news/bad news situation. Warmer weather means greater consumption of stores which can be potentially bad news. On the other hand, it can offer the opportunity to get a little emergency feed on them if you find that they are getting a little light. No matter the weather, healthy overwintering colonies have already or will start raising small quantities of brood for the coming year so checking on their stores is a prudent thing to do. Late in the month, *if we are blessed with some warmer weather*, some early pollen from willows and maples may be available for early foragers. This fresh pollen along with pollen and bee bread stored in combs will lead to the ramping up of brood production. The brood will require warmth so the bees will be consuming more honey (carbohydrates) for the energy they will require to produce the needed heat.

For Beekeepers with live overwintering colonies, it is time to:

Monitor the food stores available to your colonies. Hefting the back of the hive may give you an idea of the amount of stores still available. A peek inside on a warm day may also provide insight. A sign that the bees may be in need of feed is their location in the hive. If they have worked their way to the top box, just under the inner cover, they may have consumed all the honey in their pathway and may need assistance. On a warmer day, you can check for honey on frames adjacent to the outer edges of the cluster. You can do this visually or you can carefully run your hive tool down this seam scraping against the adjacent comb. If the hive tool comes out with honey on it, there is food the bees should be able to access. If not supplement with sucrose-based feed, e.g. dry sugar, sugar bricks, winter patties, fondant, candy board, etc., to help them through the remaining winter. Later in the month, providing pollen/pollen sub or pollen patties may provide supplemental needed protein for brood development.

Check for activity at the hive on warmer days. Have they been taking cleansing flights? Don't be alarmed at seeing some dead bees on the snow outside the hive. These are bees that likely left the hive for a cleansing flight and were too weak (or they chose a day that was a bit too cold for them) to make it back. This is not necessarily a bad sign. It is a sign that there are likely live bees inside still. If your entrance is plugged up with dead bees, scrape them out to clear the opening so that others can get out for cleansing flights (put back reducers and mouse guards afterwards). Though you may scrape out a lot of dead, it doesn't necessarily mean the colony is dead. Someone pushed them to the front in an effort to clean out the hive, so there is/was life inside.

Consider spending some winter downtime setting up a spare hive with new equipment or some you have recently cleaned up.

Then, when you have a reasonably warm day in late April or early May to do your first complete inspection, you can position this spare equipment next to one of your overwintered colonies and methodically transfer the frames from old to 'new'. While doing your inspection, this gives you an opportunity to evaluate all the frames and replace some as you see fit. It also provides the opportunity to rotate frames from top box to bottom if that is part of your management process. Maybe the colony strength is such that you will downsize to a single box while the colony develops (or continue the season under a single brood box management approach). Anyway, after making the transfer of the first colony to the fresh 'new' box(s), clean up their last year's equipment and repeat the process with your next overwintered colony.

NOTE 1: Be very observant for any signs of disease before making the woodenware transfers.

NOTE 2: Be sure to transfer the frames with brood in the same order/positions that they were positioned in original hive.

For New Beekeepers just getting started this year:

Read, Study, and Learn....Books, Periodicals, Classes, Club Meetings, Podcasts, Internet videos (yes, that also means YouTube videos, they range from poor to great.... reading, attending classes and club meetings and asking questions will help you learn which are good and which are not). All of these resources will help.

Get a Mentor from the Bee Club. You may want to start with mentoring via email, text, phone calls, or for the more tech savvy, video calls before the season starts. Just be aware that there are beekeepers interested in helping other beekeepers. As my beekeeping therapist says...the first step is to ask for help.

Order your equipment, tools, and protective clothing. Try to start with a minimum of two hives. It allows for comparisons. Understanding what 'Normal' behavior is in a colony of bees is an important skill to acquire. Multiple colonies allow you to learn this faster. Multiple colonies also allow you to share resources between colonies if needed (potentially very important) more on this as the year progresses.

Order your Bees. Try to start with a minimum of two hives...see above. Don't get hung up on bee race/stock, i.e., Italian, Carniolan, Russian, Buckfast, etc., they are likely mutts anyway (forgive the sarcasm). Packages or nucs (nucleus colonies)? There are advantages and disadvantages to each. Ask questions and listen to the reasoning provided. For new beekeepers, a nuc provides you with a developed working colony (albeit small) along with some drawn comb which greatly enhances early spring survival. On the other hand, packages offer the opportunity to observe the process of a hive and colony development from ground zero. Keep in mind, whoever you ask will have a bias, so it is just an opinion **here is mine:** since you should start with multiple colonies, get at least one of each and learn something. You will get to experience installing both types. You will get to see the development of each type. If circumstances dictate only getting one colony, it should be a nuc with the drawn comb. It will allow for the greatest chance of success and higher likelihood of getting a first-year honey crop. Next year you can pass on your experience/bias and learnings to the next 'Newbee'.

Assemble and paint your equipment. It's fun and can be creative...on the painting side at least. Don't get too creative on the assembly of equipment. Follow the instructions. The bees will appreciate it.

Start thinking about the location of your apiary.

For Beekeepers with dead overwintered colonies, it is time to:

Breakdown the dead-outs. Pick a pleasant day and start the cleanup process...Doing it early, before much warmth and moisture occurs, will make an unpleasant job less unpleasant and much less smelly. Don't just clean things up. See if you can determine what caused the problem. There is a high likelihood of a mite related problem if you did not rigorously pursue mite load reduction in a timely fashion last year. Look for signs. Take some pictures at several different angles. Consider sharing pictures of a frame or two (brood frames) at your next club meeting. Another beekeeper with different experiences may be able to offer some insight.

For All Beekeepers, it is time to:

Take an inventory.

A) Equipment/Supplies inventory

Make a list of what your equipment, tools, and supplies.

- Do you need to replace frames or foundation (a comb replacement program should be part of your annual routine)?
- Is your equipment in good order?
 - *Is your wooden-ware due for a paint job?
 - *Are your tools in good shape?
 - *How about your protective clothing? Have you laundered your bee wear to be ready for a new season?
- Do you have sufficient (and not expired) supplies, e.g., feed/nutrition supplements, pest/parasite controls, etc.?
- Is your current equipment sufficient to help you achieve your goals for this year (see **B.** below)?

B) Goals inventory – Very Important

What do you want to accomplish this year in beekeeping? You may have multiple goals. What are your priorities of these goals? Here are some thoughts:

- Do better than the state average honey yield per colony? More simply, increase my honey yield over last year.
- Successfully over-winter my bees.
- Successfully make a split.
- Move closer to achieving sustainable beekeeping (not having to buy new bees every year).
- Learn to create and use nucleus colonies to over-winter more colonies and increase the colonies in my apiary.
- Learn to raise my own queens.
- Learn to produce comb honey, e.g., Ross Rounds, cut comb honey, chunk honey, or section boxes.
- Learn to produce Creamed Honey.
- Learn to make Mead.
- Learn how to process and use beeswax. Make candles, lip balms, hand creams, soaps.
- Learn how to collect/process/use propolis.
- Are you interested in encaustic painting? Are you interested in creating wax art?

If you have some of these interests, raise the issue at a club meeting and propose having a sub-group session to explore the subject.

Do you need to re-evaluate your equipment to be sure you have what you need to achieve your goals (see A. above)?

C. Bee Inventory

-How many colonies do you want to start this year with? How many do you have that will overwinter? Are you sure?? A live hive in early February is a 🍯 live hive in April....we still have a couple tough months to go....don't be caught bee-less in April.

-Order as early as possible to reserve your bees. Packages or Nucs? Decisions, decisions.....

I'll leave you with this:

It is February. Get ahead of your season. Read, Study, Learn. Your pre-season preparation will set the tone for your success for the year. Now is the time!

Can't wait to go from this.....**To this!**



....and I don't mean having a colony die and go from 4 to 3!



Warren Spencer – master of the wooden hive

The year was 2010 and Warren Spencer showed up for the first night of Beekeeping 101. Warren had decided to take up keeping bees. Long retired, he – as with many retirees – decided to take up something new. That is where the story of Warren and the beekeepers of Northern Illinois begins.

Warren found after a few years that beekeeping was not going to be his cup of tea, but he sure did enjoy making the hive parts from scratch in his garage workshop. Now 14 years later he has provided many of us with beeyard woodware made to our desires.

The reason for this writing is that Warren has decided to retire again. This will be his last year of constructing and concocting hive parts for our local beekeepers. If you want a Spencer original, here is your last chance. Just like there are no new Picaso paintings, soon there will no longer be new Spencer beehives.

Many of us will miss the camaraderie of an afternoon picking up hive bodies from Warren's place. The stops were never short. He is a true and honest friend to us beekeepers and always ready to go the extra mile to help. Happy retirement, Warren.



2024 NIBA OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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Webmaster – Terri Reeves

Newsletter Editor – Sue Pinkawa

Club Extractor Coordinator – Al Fullerton

Club Raffle Coordinator – John Leibinger

Snack Coordinator – Robin Tibbets

Honey Extractor

Did you know that your membership in NIBA includes the opportunity to rent one of the clubs 3 honey extractors?

Two of the extractors are manual, a 4 frame a 3 frame. The third is motorized and is capable of extracting both sides of 9 frames at a time.

Rental fee for either of the manual extractor is \$10.00 for 3 days with a \$10.00 security deposit. The electric (motorized) 9 frame extractor costs \$25.00 to rent for 2 days with a \$75.00 security deposit. Deposits will be returned if equipment is returned on time, clean, and undamaged.

The extractors come with most equipment needed to make the uncapping and extraction experiences go smoothly, except of course, the honey frames and buckets.

To reserve a date contact Al Fullerton by phone or text at 815-382-7139 or email adfhone@gmail.com, if you don't get a timely response, just phone. Pick it up in Cary Illinois.

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!
reevesthere@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. spinkawa@gmail.com



**The queen marking color for
2024 is Green.**