



SWEET STUFF

NIBA NEWSLETTER – JUNE 2020

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tom Allen

Well it's hard to believe June is here already! As the Covid-19 restrictions get lifted a bit, we can start to safely look at the hives of new beekeepers, to offer them some suggestions on what's going on in the hive, or just help them do their first real hive inspection. The State of Illinois restrictions that are relaxed will not allow us to meet in person in June. MCC is working within the Restore Illinois rules and will be able to have small groups of employees in to properly sanitize the college. Summer classes are all online but no decision has been made yet on how Fall classes will be taught, which will have a direct impact on our in-person meetings.

I've been asked by a few new beekeepers to take a look in their hives, and I've seen some interesting trends. It seems the bees are packing syrup and nectar into cells the queen could be laying eggs in but not drawing out too much new comb. One beekeeper's hive had 10 queen cells hanging off of frames; and earlier in the week she had taken a photo of what was probably the hive swarming. It was early in May so I thought it could have been an orientation flight, because it looked like they came back to the hive. Another new beekeeper had a strong aggressive hive. Sometime after his inspection he went back in and the queen was gone but the frames

were either built out and filled with syrup and nectar or not very well built out.

John Leibinger took a potential new beekeeper to MCC to look at the mentor hives. John

went through the purple hive and contacted me to say we need to add a deep box or 2 supers because they need room. I loaded up my car with boxes and frames to work on all 3 hives because, during my inspection about 6 days prior, this was the weakest hive. We added 2 supers to the purple hive and moved on to inspect the green hive. We found 10 capped queen cells, lots of bees, and no queen. We went through each frame at least twice looking for her but she was gone. This hive had lots of capped brood and larvae suggesting the eggs were laid about 5 days ago. John, who has way more experience than I do, suggested we take a frame with queen cells and put it in a nuc box along with a frame of nurse bees from the blue hive, which was also full of bees and capped brood, a frame

MEETING AGENDA

6:30 Q&A session for newbees, but any is invited to join for answers to your questions.

7:00 Pledge of Allegiance

7:05 Old Business

7:10 New Business

7:20 Video presentation on mite counts & inspection.

Q&A session immediately following presentation

Anything for the good of the group

Adjournment

of honey and pollen and a frame for them to work. Hopefully this gives us a 4th colony to work. As we got into the blue hive, we found a few queen cups and there were eggs in them. We looked for the queen, going over each frame at least 2 or 3 times but she wasn't found.

These hives are for mentoring new beekeepers, as well as to show anyone that is interested how to do an inspection or compare hives in different locations. Beekeeping isn't for the faint of heart. Every year is different. This year I've seen quite a few NIBA members that have caught swarms, sometimes their own, in early to mid-May. This seems early to me, but we've had what seems like a warmer May than usual, which helps the bees get ahead of where they were in recent years. Most of the hives I've looked at are exploding with bees which could lead to more colonies overwintering because of the number of bees in the colony.

Next up is doing mite checks and treating the colonies if the mite numbers require it. There are many ways to treat as you know, but it's been shown we should mix up the ways we treat the colonies so they don't become resistant to any one type of treatment. Some who want to go chemical free are using the Mighty Mite Killer Thermal units. I'll be interested to see how well they work. Most switch up using oxalic acid and a few other treatments to control the mites. Regardless of how you treat, you should be checking for mites soon so they don't get out of control.

I hope you're all healthy and doing well. Nothing would be better for my mind than to see everyone at a face-to-face meeting. Until then I hope to see you at the June Zoom meeting. You will have the opportunity to ask questions, and very experienced beekeepers will answer them. We tried something new at the May meeting—Marcin had a Q&A at 6:30, and I felt it went well. New beekeepers had the opportunity to ask questions and Marcin explained what should be happening in a hive for the next 6 weeks. I hope to continue this at the June meeting and I hope you'll all join us at 6:30. We just continue right into the regular meeting at 7, so you don't have to sign out and join a new meeting.

We are still in need of a Board Secretary. If you'd like more information on the position or would like to join the Board, please contact any of the Board members.

The McHenry County Fair is still on for now, but as we've seen with so many other events, it could be cancelled. We should move forward as if we'll be there talking bees with excited fairgoers. Soon we'll have a SignUp Genius with dates and times we need to fill with NIBA members. Please consider volunteering for a shift, this could be our only fundraising opportunity this year. When you sign up for a shift include your t-shirt size in the comments.

Tom

CHORES OF THE MONTH – JUNE

John Leibinger

Like the bees we study, we accomplish more together.

What's happening in the hive?

The colony population should be expanding fairly rapidly and reaching its peak this month...if it ever stops raining. Like May, in June the nectar flows and pollen availability are quite diverse and abundant in our area so there is great wealth of resources for colony growth. Resources/nutrition lead to growing healthy hives. You should notice that the bees are probably no longer taking sugar syrup, but rather are collecting nectar from natural sources. Remove the feeders at this transition. Large healthy colonies are susceptible to an increased swarming urge. Make sure that there is plenty of space for colony expansion. The queen needs room to lay eggs. The workers need room for nectar and pollen storage. As you inspect frames in the brood nest, be mindful of excessive nectar/sugar syrup storage in the brood nest. Excessive storage in this area can restrict the queen's ability to find space to lay and can lead to swarming or reduced colony growth due to lack of egg laying space. Remove and replace excessive storage frames with frames of open drawn comb or new foundation. Better yet **ADD HONEY SUPERS!** Keep in mind that the bee population is not the only expanding population. Varroa mites will be on the increase also. Monitor their growth by doing regular mite checks (monthly sugar roll or preferably, the more accurate alcohol wash). Know what you have and keep records. Keep their growth in check by utilizing a miticide, organic acids, drone comb culling, a mix of IPM methods, a brood break or combinations of any of these. 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.

For New Beekeepers just getting started this year:

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)

Finish assembling and painting *additional* equipment, if you have not already done it. You should be on a second deep brood box (or third or fourth if using medium brood boxes) now or very soon (brood box addition may vary depending on your management philosophy and specific goals). Let's hope for the best and have honey supers and frames built and ready to install this month.

Feed your Bees.. Feed them until they stop taking the supplemental feed. At some point in the month, if they haven't already, they will switch over to entirely natural nectar sources at which point you can remove the feeders.

Spend time observing your bees. This is one of the reasons you took up this hobby. Observe their comings and goings. If you have multiple hives (and you should) observe and compare the behaviors of the different colonies. Talk to other beekeepers. This is 'mission critical' to learning what 'normal' is, and a key to becoming a better beekeeper. Are the bees bringing in pollen? What color? What is the source? (See Pollen Identification Chart link in General Info section below).

Get a Mentor from the Bee Club. Ask for help and guidance. It may not be hands on help this year, but a good mentor with practical experience will be able to ask the right questions and provide valuable guidance.

For All Beekeepers, it is time to:

Be very observant of signs of swarming and take appropriate action. This is most relevant to overwintered hives and recently installed nucleus colonies. Probably not a big problem for new beekeepers that started with packages on new foundation or foundationless, but for the rest, keep your eyes peeled for telltale queen cups/cells at the bottom of the frames. Do they have eggs or larvae in them? If they do, the swarm is coming....if not, keep watching and provide additional space immediately. Larry Krengel provided lots of information on swarming and how you might want to deal with it in our May Videoconference meeting. Additional information can be obtained by reading Megan Milbrath's article of Swarms (see link below under General Info [Meghan Milbrath on Northern Swarms](#) for an extremely comprehensive dissertation on swarming).

Add Honey Supers

Maintain the space around your hive(s). Your bees work hard at thermo-regulation 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 increases their foraging efficiency.

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 thermo-regulation efforts.

Monitor for Varroa Mites monthly. (See General Info section below for references to mite checking procedures)

Treat for Varroa Mites as needed.

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 counts, 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. (See **Hive Inspection Form** link in General Info section below of one of many checklists that can be found in a quick Google search. Not necessarily the best...just an example.)

The following is a repeat of last month, but it bears repeating. May and June are the months for swarms and like May 2019, May 2020 was a bit cool and rainy, there may be increased swarm activity in June.

Get your swarm traps out! Anybody interested in getting **FREE BEES?** This is the time of year to take advantage of the natural biological rhythms of the hive. Overwintered colonies are highly likely to swarm. Why not be an opportunist and capture a colony that otherwise will find a hole in a tree? It is fun, challenging, and **IMMENSELY EXCITING** when you find bees in your trap. Additionally, these are often colonies that have overwintered....Northern Illinois proven stock capable of handling our winter....wouldn't you want to add some of that quality to your apiary? Here is a swarm trapping website...Jason is 'the man' when it comes to swarm trapping. He has lots of advice and encouragement on swarm trapping along with free plans for building swarm traps. Check it out.

[Swarm Trapping & Bait Hives by Jason Bruns](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

[Swarm Trapping video with Solomon Parker and Jason Bruns](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

Assemble some gear to be prepared to catch a swarm hanging in a tree, on a fence, or somewhere else they aren't wanted! Be ready in case a friend calls and says "Get here quick, my neighbor is freaking out! There is a bunch of bees hanging on my neighbor's swing set and we don't know what to do!"

Note: Swarm trapping and swarm 'catching' are two different things. Swarm trapping involves putting out 'bait hives' for bees to find and inhabit (and then join your apiary). Swarm catching involves capturing a swarm from a tree, bush, fence, or any of a hundred other areas that an initial swarm may land at shortly after exiting the hive and while waiting for the scout bees to find a new home. Usually this is the result of a panic phone call you receive from someone who knows you are a beekeeper. This can be an **INTENSELY EXCITING** activity.

Get your blood flowing! Capture or Trap a Swarm!

Fascinating video to watch the action going on in a clustered swarm. You can observe a lot of scouts doing waggle dances. It gets real interesting at around 24:15 minute mark.

[Check out this swarm video](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

[Catching a swarm](#) (Ctrl+Click link)



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)

Pollen identification chart:

[Pollen Color Chart](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

Inspection sheets:

[Inspection Checksheet \(basic\)](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

[Inspection Checksheet \(detailed\)](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

Sugar Roll Method: [Sugar Roll Mite Inspection - YouTube](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

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

[Meghan Milbrath on Northern Swarms](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

Stay Safe!



PHOTO OP!

We know many of you enjoy taking photos in your apiaries. Starting in June, we'd like to invite you to submit your favorite beekeeping-related photos. We'll conduct an informal poll during the monthly meetings and the top pick will be featured in the following month's newsletter and as the group's Facebook page cover photo. Here are the details:

- 1. Submit one photo per month by 9:00 pm the Thursday immediately preceding the scheduled monthly meeting*
- 2. Email your photo as an attachment to stephanie.d.slater@gmail.com with "NIBA Photo" typed in the subject line*
- 3. Please include your name and a short caption in the body of the email*
- 4. Each month's top pick may be used for future club activities*
- 5. Participate in as many months as you'd like!*

ASSESSING HIVE TEMPERAMENT

By Nicole Gennetta on November 11, 2019

Have you ever wondered why one hive may act differently than others? Or maybe why your once gentle hive is suddenly out to sting anything that moves?

Hive temperament can be somewhat subjective (as some people are more tolerant of froggy bees than others), however, there is generally variation from one hive to the other. Each hive has its own unique attributes that will result in each colony's behavior being unique. However, there are several conditions that can affect behavior.

What is normal hive temperament?

Before we begin, it's important to recognize normal hive temperament. Again, each colony will differ to some degree. In general, your colony should be gentle during the mid-summer when the weather is warm, sunny, and there are plenty of nectar-producing flowers.

During inspections, when conditions are optimal, the bees should essentially ignore you as you walk in front of the hive, perform inspections, etc. This is when they should be their best behaved.

Naturally, we enjoy keeping bees that are docile and tolerate hive inspections. Keeping aggressive bees is simply not fun!

So, what causes mean bees or sudden behavior changes? Let's take a look at some of the roots of change:

- Weather
- Heat
- Clouds
- Night
- Dearth
- Predation and robbing
- Genetics
- Frequent hive inspections
- Time of day
- Vibration/mowing
- Rough handling
- No smoker

Weather

Bees like bright, warm, wind-free days. Hives should not be opened in the rain, or when temperatures below 55 degrees F. When it is overly windy or storms are moving in, bees will not be as welcoming.

Heat

Bees may be more easily agitated during periods of extreme heat.

Clouds

Bees navigate by [UV rays](#) and their orientation to the sun. On cloudy days, bees are not able to navigate, which can make them a little cantankerous. On cloudy days, it's best to leave the bees alone.

Night

Similar to cloudy days, bees are not able to see at night. Therefore, they will attack light sources and movement. While it is safe to walk by the hive at night, never open the hive! You'll be greeted en masse by unhappy bees.

Dearth

This is probably the main cause of sudden temperament changes. Two weeks ago your bees were sweet as can be, and today they are bouncing off your veil.

During the nectar flow, there are plenty of resources. In the bees mind, if you were to take some honey, it would not be a huge deal. They can just go get more nectar. However, during the dearth, the bees cannot replace losses and suddenly become very protective of their honey.

Predation & Robbing

Bees will become defensive when they are pressured by predators like skunks. They are also edgier when they are being robbed. If your colony behavior changes suddenly and you've ruled out these other possible causes, consider the possibility of predators or robbing.

During the dearth, it's important to use your veil and gloves, and at a minimum, and use your smoker.

Genetics

Genetics may be the source of the bees aggression. In areas with Africanized bees, you may have a ["hot" colony](#). You may also just have a queen that makes crabby daughters.

I had a colony with a queen that was just M-E-A-N! I dreaded working that hive because I knew the chances of being stung was high. Fortunately, the fix is simple — just [requeen](#).

Frequent Hive Inspections

It can be challenging to contain your enthusiasm and curiosity when it comes to your bees. However, they should not be inspected more than every 10 to 14 days. Each time you open the hive, you break propolis seals and interrupt internal operation which takes the bees some time to recover. Over-inspection will result in grumpy bees.

Time of Day

Early in the morning and in the afternoon, there are more bees in the hive. Waiting until midday when the foragers are out of the hive reduces the in-hive population by about 30%, and will decrease the likelihood of bees becoming upset.

Vibration/Mowing

Bees don't like vibrations, so things that cause vibrations are sure to disturb them. Things like mowing are the common culprit. Your best bet is to hand-pull weeds around the hive, try mowing at night, or wear your suit when mowing in front of the hives.

Rough Handling

Have you ever dropped a frame? In addition to the embarrassment, you'll probably find that the bees don't appreciate the jostle and may show some aggression. Moving hive bodies or frames aggressively, dropping your hive tool on the top of the frames, or setting boxes on the ground abruptly can all annoy the bees. When working your hive, move slowly and methodically to reduce vibrations.

No Smoker

Do you know [how a smoker works](#), and the proper way to use one? A smoker interrupts the bees pheromone communication. When a bee becomes aware of a threat, she releases a pheromone to notify her sisters. This group of bees then seeks to neutralize the threat.

A smoker masks the pheromone released by an aggravated bee, so her sisters cannot smell them and also become alerted.

It is important to always have your lit smoker available. If you chose not to use it, that is up to the individual. However, if the bees become agitated, the smoker will help keep the situation from getting worse.

Be sure not to over-smoke your colony either.

What to do when your bees become aggressive?

When your bees become aggravated, it is best to try and determine the cause. If you are able to figure out why they are upset, you can possibly fix the problem, or at least understand the reason.

Sometimes, the bees are just too crabby to work with. When this happens, you just need to close the hive, [walk away](#) and try again later.

Nicole Gennetta is a beekeeper in southern Colorado and owner of [HeritageAcresMarket.com](#) and the [Backyard Bounty Podcast](#)—resources for beekeeping, raising chickens, and sustainable living. Used with permission.

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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. newsletter@nibainfo.org

Membership Has Its Benefits!

- By Randy Mead

Did you know that your membership in NIBA includes the opportunity to rent a club 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.

To reserve a date, contact Randy at rmeadtoys@gmail.com.

Are you on Facebook? So are we!

Search for Northern Illinois Beekeepers Association. It's a closed group, so you need to request to join—but we're happy to approve your request.

We're an active and knowledgeable group. Lots of questions and answers about the Fall season and preparing for winter, robbing, etc. And LOTS of pictures!

Join the fun today!

The queen marking color for
2020 is BLUE.