



SWEET STUFF

NIBA NEWSLETTER – MAY 2024

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tom Allen

It's early May and our bees are out buzzing! Last month we passed out packages and nucs and the weather was iffy. We had quite a few days with rain, frosty night and snowflakes one day but we get to enjoy some sunny warm days now. WE had the swap meet at MCC and held our first mentor session later that same afternoon. We had a good turnout of both newbies and mentors. Larry took the newbies through the hives looking for the queen and showing them what they should be seeing in their hives. Ryan Harrison and I installed 2 packages that were donated to us by Simo Aiche. We now have 11 colonies in the McHenry County College apiary.

We will be starting something new on May 9th, we will be meeting out at the MCC apiary for some community time. This is for beekeepers of all levels, no specific chores are planned, we just want to meet out there to look at the bees and talk about whatever comes up. It could be about the color of the pollen they're bringing in or what you see in your hives. Nothing scheduled except the time, we'll meet every Thursday at 5 PM. If you're an experienced beekeeper and you'd like to sign up for a day to be out there please send me a note. We have opened this up to students from the agriculture and horticulture programs so they can see the bees that are directly helping their crops and flowers. I'm not sure if they're interested in becoming a beekeeper but they might have questions we can answer for them. Bees sting so dress to your level of comfort.

Spring looks like it's a couple of weeks early so make sure you're giving your bees enough space to work in so they don't swarm. I've already heard from a few of you that you've caught a swarm, hopefully it wasn't one of your colonies! I've received a few inquiries from people who have bees in the wall of their house or business. It seems a bit early for swarms but bees don't follow a schedule, when they feel it's time to go, they go.

The May meeting will be on May 9th, newbies start at 630 PM and the regular meeting starts at 7 PM. This month we will be breaking the meeting up into several areas with each area covering a specific topic or question. **The zoom**

meeting will be in one particular area and will not change during the night. Please try to attend in person to have the ability to hear different topics or questions.

The signup for the McHenry County Fair will be out soon, when you sign up, please include your t-shirt size. Would you like the ability to buy t-shirts and sweatshirts with the NIBA logo on them? This is something that has come up over the past few years, usually after the Fair people reach out asking if we have extra t-shirts they could buy. We don't want to become a clothing store where we're expected to store and sell clothes on demand, but we might be able to make a group purchase a few times a year or go through a company that will print them up on demand and ship them. This is still in the early planning stages so if you have experience doing this and would like to help out, please let me know.

I'm hearing from members who suddenly haven't been receiving the newsletter or who aren't receiving emails being sent out. Sue Pinkawa gets the Sweet Stuff newsletter out at least a few days before the meeting so if you don't receive it, please reach out to Sue or to me. Group emails sent through our google group account are sent out by a few of us when we must send out information about an event, if you don't receive these emails check your spam folder. I look at my text messages more regularly than my emails so please send me a text message at 815-861-1237 if you have a problem receiving email notices. I will look into the situation and at least forward an email to you for a short-term fix. Some email platforms, Yahoo being one of them (I know because I use it) have a problem with emails going to large groups once in a while. I added a Gmail email address for this reason and I always get the Sweet Stuff newsletters. We want to make sure you get everything we send so please don't hesitate to reach out when you think you have a problem. For newbies `````````` and those people who have recently renewed their membership, please make sure to print your contact information clearly so it's more likely to be added into the database correctly.

Have fun with your bees, things should start happening quickly with the nice weather upon us.

I want to wish all you moms out there a Happy Mother's Day!

Tom



Photos From our April Meeting and Award Presentation:





Volunteers for Gardenfest



Bee Predicament

Larry Krengel

The quality of photographs we get on a cell phone is amazing. Visiting a colony yesterday Ken and I found a drone laying colony. Squinting hard with my back to the sun I could see eggs in the bottom of brood cells, but not well-laid eggs. I could not resist. Ken held the frame. I took a picture.



A quality, well mated queen lays eggs just as an expert archer pins the center of the bullseye with the arrow. When a period of queenlessness creates alarm in the hive, workers – who are unmated females – step up and lay eggs. Being unfertilized eggs, each can only produce a drone.

A worker turned egg layer is not skilled at the trade. A keeper knows the eggs are not laid by a queen because they are placed errantly around the cell and multiple eggs are laid in cells. This was the situation we found during yesterday's visit.

A laying worker is a vexing situation for a beekeeper, especially a keeper with one or two colonies in the

backyard. The options for righting the colony are limited and generally unreliable. If the colony is left to the logical end, it dies.

How about just buying a new queen? No. The bees mistakenly sense that they have a queen in residence because there are eggs (that put off an satisfying pheromone). A new queen is considered an invader and will be dispatched. Being a successful beekeeper requires education, insight, and luck. We mixed them all together yesterday and (hopefully) solved the problem. At our disposal was a strong queenright nuc – luck. Borrowing an old trick – education - we took the existing frames ten feet into the weeds and shook off the attached bees, an old trick sometimes called a “shook swarm”. The five frames from the nuc were positioned in the center of the existing hive box. The remnants of the former colony were placed to the right and left. Now we wait.

The hope is that the bees from the nuc will rule the nest and the bees shaken at a distance will return to a colony holding the new pheromones of success and throw in lots. It is said (OK, who really knows??) that the workers who have begun laying will not be able to successfully fly to join in the now combined colonies. All will be well. The future is good. There will be a honey crop soon.

Excerpted from a recent issue of The Beeline

P. S. Thursday, May 9 at 5:00 pm we will have the first – that we hope will become weekly – gathering in the NIBA beeyard. All are welcome to join in. Installing a nuc and adding a comb honey super are possible activities this week... Don your bee gear and come visit the bees before the association meeting that evening. LK

Chores of the Month – May – and so it begins.....

Like the bees we study, we accomplish more together.

John Leibinger

What's happening in the hive?

You should be observing a lot of pollen collection daily. There was a lot of pale yellow maple pollen (or light gray from red maples) coming in during April. I observed some blue pollen being brought in from scilla (Siberian Squill specifically) a couple weeks ago. Most recently you may be seeing much more orange pollen which is from dandelions. Dandelions are plentiful, the fruit trees are in bloom, life is good in the beehive! You may also notice that they are consuming sugar syrup at an increasing rate in early May. It will slow down as more and more natural nectar becomes available. Keep them well fed to promote colony growth, but remove if you have the opportunity to collect early honey.

Packages hived in April have been steadily declining in numbers since installation as older bees die off. That will be changing now. The new package colonies will be producing their first new adult bees for 2024 around the time you are reading this and should have a mix of brood at all stages. In the next few weeks their populations will increase very rapidly. Within a couple weeks, depending on how early you installed your bees and your mix of new foundation or drawn comb, the colony should be about ready for the addition of a second box (if you are managing via a two deep hive body process, or supers if managing via a single brood box approach), so be prepared. Alternately, if you are utilizing an all medium box management process, you will soon be adding a third box (that box may be an additional brood box or honey super depending on your management philosophy). Nucs hived in early to mid-April will have built out new foundation they were provided in their brood box and may well be requiring the addition of a second box or honey supers, again, depending on your personal management practice and goals. The weather will have a significant influence on the rate at which the bees build out their comb, and so far this year all systems are GO. This year's weather has been more favorable than many earlier years. If you started with moderately strong overwintered colonies or with nucs, getting supers on in early May could be the winning ticket for early honey. Watch the weather and your colony development. Try not to miss the early opportunity.

Overwintered colonies, depending on their strength, will be building population fairly quickly (again, weather dependent) and are likely candidates for swarming from now until the end of June. On April 14th I was caught off guard just hours before I was going to make a split. I had an overwintered colony swarm and it was a big one. (They settled in a pine about 8 feet up so I was easily able to recover it 😊). You will notice some drones already hatched and will likely see additional drone brood at various stages. If you see a fair amount, consider this a precursor to potential swarming if you have overwintered colonies (or strong nuc starts for that matter).

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

Feed. Sugar syrup at 1:1 ratio (2 lbs sugar/1 qt water). (If Needed) This is a conventional mix this time of year to stimulate the colony to increase brood rearing. Some will opt to dilute the syrup even a bit more, maybe 1 part sugar to 1.5 parts water to more closely simulate the sugar concentration in nectar. A small amount of heat will dissolve the sugar quickly. Allow to cool before feeding to bees. Beware that you can over feed. If you notice that the bees are plugging up the queen's brood box laying space, back off the feeding. You want to stimulate brood rearing, not swarming!

Pollen, pollen substitute, pollen patties. Though my personal observation is that there is a lot of natural pollen coming into the hive right now, these early supplemental protein sources are good insurance to help the colony raise brood if the weather creates difficulties for foraging. The weather can raise havoc on the pollen supplies. A typical colony will consume upwards of 60 pounds of pollen over the course of the year, so a little early help is a good thing.

Check for swarm cells. A quick check can be made by tilting a complete hive body up and looking at the bottom of the frames for swarm cells (the top box is the most likely box that you will see the swarm cells in unless you have already done a hive body rotation). Be careful not to let the top box slide off when doing this. Get assistance if needed.

SUPER UP! If you have a strong colony of foragers, consider removing feed and adding supers to take advantage of early nectar flows. Early honey crops are possible.

Rotate Hive Bodies. If your bees have moved into the top box consider rotating the top box to the bottom. The upside to this is that it provides space for the colony to expand upwards and may reduce or delay the swarming urge. The downside is that you may be dividing the brood nest if it spans both boxes. If this situation exists, addition of a third box above or adding supers may be a better alternative.

Frame Rotation. As temps warm up, consider removing some old frames (w/o brood) and replace with new foundation as part of an annual comb renewal program. Place new foundation frames at the outer positions in the hive. Introducing new foundation may also help delay the onset of swarming if you are removing frames from brood box that are bound up with nectar or pollen.

Remove Winter Wrappings by mid month.

Remove mouse guards.

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 will need a second deep brood box (or third or fourth if using medium brood boxes) now or very soon. You may need an additional 'cover box' for feed jars or buckets. Let's hope for the best and have honey supers built and ready to install in early to mid May. Like having a lit smoker, it's better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it. .

Feed your Bees. Feed your Bees. Feed your Bees. This cannot be over-emphasized, especially for packages being started on new foundation. Well fed colonies are larger and more productive. Feed them until they stop taking the supplemental feed. You should be able to monitor their syrup consumption every couple of days without going deep into the hive and causing undue disturbance. At some point in the month, they will likely 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. Are they bringing in pollen? What color? What is the source? Take notes.

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

Get a Mentor from the Bee Club. Ask for help and guidance. Help may be in person, via phone, e-mail, or text but no matter how the communication takes place, it still will be very helpful, if for no other reason than the confidence and peace of mind a good mentor can provide. **Take advantage of the club provided/sponsored mentoring activities.**

For All Beekeepers, it is time to:

Review your Beekeeping Goals for 2024 and act accordingly. See February month's chores list.

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. Consider learning a bit about Growing Degree Days(GDD). This will give you great insight into when your local plants will be blooming. As you see the blooms emerge, or pollen coming in, note the GDD year to date for future reference.

[Explanation of Growing Degree Days](#) (Ctrl + Click link)

[Great Growing Degree Day Chart/Tool](#) (Ctrl + Click link) [Nice Seasonal Pollen Color Chart](#) (Ctrl + Click link)

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 (for new beekeepers, this is a prime reason for having a mentor and for having multiple hives). 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. Here is an example of one of many checklists that can be found in a quick Google search. Not necessarily the best...just an example. [Hive Inspection Report](#)(Ctrl+Click link)

Remove entrance reducers. (Or at least increase the opening size) Probably in the mid-late May timeframe. As forager numbers increase and forage availability peaks, you want to make sure that the bees have easy access in and out of their hive. This is a very busy and very important time of the year for them to collect and store pollen and nectar. The ready availability of pollen and nectar resources virtually eliminates the issue of robbing this time of year.

Monitor the hives for swarming signs. Probably not a big problem for new beekeepers that started on new foundation or foundationless, but for the rest, keep your eyes peeled for telltale queen cups 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 ([in the brood box by swapping out honey/pollen bound frames](#) and by adding supers)(simply adding supers is often not enough).

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 are several websites to get you started...

[Jason Bruns on Swarm Trapping](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

[Swarm Traps and Bait Hives](#) (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 **INTENSLY EXCITING** activity.

Get your blood flowing! Capture or Trap a Swarm!



"SO, HOW CAN YOU TELL THE SWARM IS GOING TO LEAVE?"

Welcome to the 2024 Beekeeping Season!



Fun Facts About Bees and Beekeeping



- Bee venom is used as a treatment for several ailments, including arthritis and high blood pressure.
- Worker bees have barbed stingers, while a queen has a smooth stinger, which she mostly uses to kill other queens.
- There are people in Africa that keep elephants out of their fields by keeping honey bee hives around the fields in what is called a "bee fence."
- The ancient Greeks minted coins with bees on them.

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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 adfhoneymail@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!

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. spinkawa@gmail.com

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

