



SWEET STUFF

NIBA NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2026

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tom Allen

Happy New Year to all of you! I hope your holidays were filled with family memories. This could be our lucky year as beekeepers, the Bears are in the playoffs, the Bears beat the Packers so maybe as beekeepers this will be our lucky year too! This winter has been another weird season, we got more than 17 inches of snow in early December and I thought for sure we'd have a white Christmas but then Mother Nature said hold my beer and warmed up enough to melt all of the snow with rain. I'm not sure how this will affect your bees but hopefully you have them set up to weather the storm and they'll come out strong this spring.

The NIBA Board is in need of a Secretary to take notes at our Board meetings, if you're interested, please reach out to a Board member.

I hope to see you at the January meeting.

Tom will discuss the directors positions and appoint them soon. If you have any interest in a directors position please let one of the Board members know.

I want to wish everyone a Happy Holiday season and a safe and Happy New Year!

Tom





What queen will you request this year?

Greetings Beekeeper –

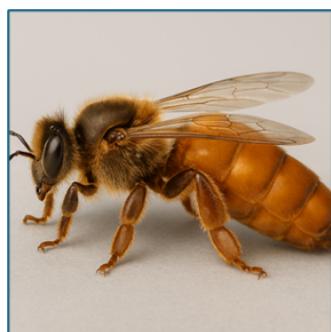
This year many of the NIBA beekeepers will again buy bees through the association. It is a great asset to the members – nearby delivery, lower prices and bought from a reputable source. It is hoped that those who appreciate this will become active in the other activities of the association. There are many.

Each year we get the opportunity to request a particular race of queen. Knowing that queen rearing season is unpredictable, sometimes more of one race are available and another queen source will have weather challenges that make those late or missing. We can request a specific race of queen but we agree to accept what is available.

This year it appears we will have the opportunity to purchase three kinds of queens - Italian (a. m. lugustica), Carniolan (a.m. carnica) or Buckfast. There is **no formal taxonomic designation** for Buckfast bees. Buckfast bees are **not** a species, and they are **not** a subspecies. The Buckfast race is the result of the work of Brother Adam from the Buckfast Abby in Southern England where he combined the genetics he collected from roughly 20 subspecies of honeybees from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. His goal was to develop the best possible bee for the Buckfast Abby's environment. Some of our local keepers have learned to appreciate the Buckfast queens and seek them out.

How does one know if they receive a true Buckfast queen? That is very difficult to tell. More than that, most queens – of whatever claimed lineage – in the US is likely mutts. Generally queens found in the US are open mated. We have no idea who their fathers are.

It only requires one generation to lose the desired characteristics they were bred for. Moving on from that pessimistic note...



How does one know if they have a true Buckfast queen? Looking at the physical appearance of a queen is an inaccurate means of establishing its race (sorry, still a bit pessimistic), but here are typical characteristics of a Buckfast queen. Looking at the queen cage as it arrives, one would hope to note –

Color: yellow/orange to brown

Slightly darker head and thorax



Lighter abdominal striping

Long, tapered abdomen

Calm behavior in cage (not frantic or “runny”)

Once in the hive, these behaviors would be indicative of Brother Adam's bees

Workers are gentle, easy to work

Bees remain calm on the comb during inspection

Less smoke required

Low swarming tendency

Strong spring buildup

Sounds great! Does it seem that these characteristics are subjective? Indeed, they are. Are the Buckfast bees markedly better than other races or species? The ardent supporters in the Buckfast community would say yes. An objective answer is difficult to find, but the goals are very worthy. I suspect that the subjective nature of these characteristics make it likely that there is some cognitive bias making it more likely to ID a queen/colony as expected.... Buckfast. Practically, if Buckfast bees work well in your apiary, stay with them.

Personally, I have enjoyed having Buckfast colonies in my apiaries. They generally behave themselves and produce a respectable honey crop. The major reason I enjoy them is their back story – a pious monk devoting his long life to producing the best of a god-favored creature in the back yard of a monastery. It is a great story.

If you are drawn in by this story, consider reading *Beekeeping at Buckfast Abbey*, Brother Adam's autobiography. It is available from Abe Books (a great used book source) for about \$15.00. This is the most widely recommended, story-driven account of Brother Adam's life, philosophy, and the development of the Buckfast bee.



[Beekeeping at Buckfast Abbey by Adam, Brother: good \(2013\) | Blue Vase Books](#)



More Bee Stuff

Many of those reading this Sweet Stuff also receive the once-in-a-while blog that I write – “the Beeline”. The subject is bees. The focus is Northern Illinois. If you do not receive the Beeline but would like to, use the QR code here to subscribe. Easy in, easy out. Nothing for sale! It is a Google Group and you are welcome to join us.

See you in the beeyard.

Larry



What kind of queen will you put in your apiary

Appearance (Workers & Queens)

Trait	Buckfast	Italian (<i>A.m. ligustica</i>)	Carniolan (<i>A.m. carnica</i>)
Color	Yellow-orange to brown; lighter abdominal bands; darker head/thorax	Bright yellow/golden; uniform color; light bands	Dark brown to black; grayish bands; dusky overall
Hair	Moderate; clean thorax	Sparse; shiny thorax	Dense; fuzzy thorax and abdomen
Queen size	Long, tapered abdomen; variable color	Long, golden abdomen; uniform	Shorter, darker abdomen; robust build
Wing tone	Clear, slightly iridescent	Clear	Slightly smoky or dusky



The Sweet Life

McHenry County College along with other area colleges are combining to offer a short online introduction to the world of honey bees and beekeeping, *The Sweet Life: A Buzz-Worthy Look into the World of the Honey Bees*. This one and a half hour non-technical gathering is intended for an audience that is available during daytime. Do you know someone who would like to know more about bees, but is not interested in keeping bees? Pass this info on to them.

The Sweet Life: A Buzz-Worthy Look into the World of the Honey Bees

Friday, January 16, 2026 @ 10:00 am

https://mchenry.augusoft.net/index.cfm?method=ClassInfo.ClassInformation&int_class_id=13501&int_category_id=0&int_sub_category_id=0&int_catalog_id=0

“Join us for a delightful journey into the fascinating world of honey bees! We'll explore the secret lives of these industrious little creatures, uncovering how they create the delicious honey we all love. From the Queen Bee's royal duties to the amazing teamwork of the worker bees, we'll learn about their incredible communication, their vital role in our ecosystem, and simple ways we can help them thrive. This presentation is full of fun facts and amazing stories about bees.”

Beekeeping 101 Returns to MCC

“It can't be that hard. Just put the bees in the box in the spring and extract the honey in the fall. Right?”

It is a fact of beekeeping, understanding the basics of the bees and the yards we keep them in is a key to success. If you know someone who intends to begin with bees, suggest that they **not** put the cart before the horse. Take a course to learn the basics before the bees arrive. How about in February?? MCC's Beekeeping 101 runs four Wednesday nights beginning on February 4, 2026. The class can be in person or online. Here is more info –

https://mchenry.augusoft.net/index.cfm?method=ClassInfo.ClassInformation&int_class_id=12873

Larry



COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT CENTER SPRING 2026



BEEKEEPING

Beekeeping 101

Keeping honeybees is fascinating. Bees will pollinate your garden and provide a sweet crop of honey. In this class, you will learn where to start as a keeper of bees. We'll cover bee biology, modern beekeeping techniques, construction of hives, and how to acquire bees. Keep bees for the fun of it, as a sideline job, or to help your garden and orchard.

Fee: \$75

In person

12873 W 2/4-2/25 6:30-9 p.m. Catalyst Campus
Remote

12874 W 2/4-2/25 6:30-9 p.m. Remote

Larry Krenzel

7 Ways To Raise A Queen

The number of small-scale beekeepers is increasing, and the demand for locally raised queen bees is growing. Purchased queens are often raised in areas of Africanized honeybees or come from migratory bee operations where dangerous viruses are exchanged. Gain information and learn seven simple methods of raising healthy honeybee queens. With a few insights and a small amount of equipment, the backyard beekeeper can raise locally adapted queens from bee stock with a great record of winter survival, good temperament, and excellent honey production.

Fee: \$25

Larry Krenzel

In person

12889 W 3/4 6:30-9 p.m. Catalyst Campus
Remote

12890 W 3/4 6:30-9 p.m. Remote

Comb Honey

Comb honey is old fashioned honey harvested in the bees own wax case. A hundred years ago honey was removed from the hive and eaten in the comb. Today, extracted honey (honey in the jar) is the norm. This course is an opportunity to return to the old (and some contend the healthiest) way of harvesting honey. Producing honey in the comb is a beekeeping challenge, an old fashioned challenge explored in this class.

Fee: \$25

Larry Krenzel

In person

12891 W 3/11 6:30-9 p.m. Catalyst Campus
Remote

12892 W 3/11 6:30-9 p.m. Remote

Beekeeping Field Study

This short course will provide practical, hands-on instruction for installing, manipulating, and inspecting colonies of bees. The class will meet in a bee yard, so appropriate clothing and bee equipment will be necessary. Spring is the time to start with bees, and this course will walk you through it step by step. Learn what you need to know to start out right with your bees.

Fee: \$59

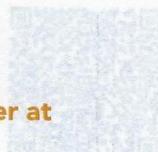
Larry Krenzel

12906 Sa 4/11, 4/18 10 a.m.-Noon MCC
12907 Sa 4/11, 4/18 1-3 p.m. MCC



To register for a class, scan the QR code, visit www.mchenry.edu/personaldevelopment, or call (815) 455-8588.

For more information, please contact the Community Enrichment Center at personaldevelopment@mchenry.edu or (815) 455-8758





COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT CENTER

SPRING 2026



Varroa Mite: Know Your Enemy

Enemy #1 in the honeybee world is Varroa Destructor – the varroa mite. Understanding how the biology of the honeybee and that of the varroa mite intersect is important to successful beekeeping in today's world. This mite attaches to honeybees and their larva weakening them and passing on deadly viruses. A successful strategy for control of these mites is critical to the survival of a honeybee colony. This class will discuss the history, the biology and the control of Varroa Destructor.

The Sweet Life: A Buzz-Worthy Look into the World of the Honey Bees

Join us for a delightful journey into the fascinating world of honey bees! We'll explore the secret lives of these industrious little creatures, uncovering how they create the delicious honey we all love. From the Queen Bee's royal duties to the amazing teamwork of the worker bees, we'll learn about their incredible communication, their vital role in our ecosystem, and simple ways we can help them thrive. This presentation is full of fun facts and amazing stories about bees.

Buzzing Beauty: DIY Beeswax Lip Balm Workshop

Join us for a hands-on workshop where you'll learn to create your own natural lip balms using beeswax. Discover the benefits of beeswax and explore a variety of essential oils and natural ingredients to customize your balms. This workshop will cover the entire process, from melting and mixing to pouring and packaging, ensuring you leave with your own personalized lip balm to take home. Perfect for beginners and anyone interested in natural skincare, this fun and informative session will have you crafting your own lip care products in no time. All materials will be provided.

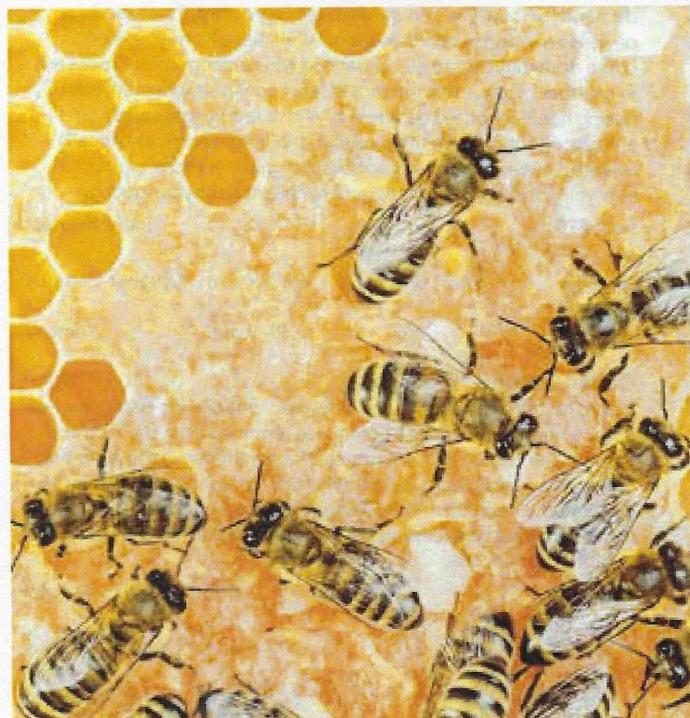
Coming soon: **Stephanie Slater**

Honey Tasting: A Sensory Analysis of Honey

Honey takes a long journey before it lands in your jar. The final product can be affected by many variables, including the local climate, botanical sources and the honeybees who visit them, and the activity of beekeepers. In this class, we will study varietal honeys using our senses of sight, smell, taste, and touch to fully appreciate the selection of these honeys. We will approach honey tasting as a sensory journey as we review at least five varietal honeys and compare their flavors and profile differences. We will also review and discuss: a Honey Sensory Wheel and how that impacts fragrances within the honey; how to more finely tune our senses to appreciate our local varietals of honey; how honeys acquire certain aromas that often differ from what we would expect; methods of tasting the full balance of flavors of these honeys; how to appreciate the different textures of honey and their impact on our taste buds; and sample 20+ varieties of handcrafted local honeys (creamed, infused, raw, and barrel-aged) and other honey-based products (honey sauces, mustards, and honey hot sauces). Students will receive their own Honey Sensory Booklet for future tastings.

Coming soon.

Frank Moriarty



To register for a class, scan the QR code, visit www.mchenry.edu/personaldevelopment, or call (815) 455-8588.

For more information, please contact the Community Enrichment Center at personaldevelopment@mchenry.edu or (815) 455-8758



NORTHERN ILLINOIS BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

2026 APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Affiliated with the Illinois State Beekeepers Association (ISBA)

Check one: Renewal Individual Membership - \$20 Renewal Family Membership - \$30
 Check one: NEW Individual Membership - \$25 NEW Family Membership - \$35

(Includes Single Membership in the Illinois State Beekeepers Association, additional ISBA memberships, \$10 each)

If applying after February 28, 2026, and you are a renewing member, please add \$5.00.

Name(s):		
Address:		
City:	State:	Zip:
Phone:		
Email address (if family membership, include all emails. Newsletter will be sent to all emails):		

Yes, I would like to order a NIBA name tag(s), add \$16.95 per order (which includes postage).

Name tag(s) should read as follows (please print clearly):

Please tell us more about yourself:

I sell honey ____ willing to Coach/Mentor ____ Swarm Catcher ____ willing to remove Bees from buildings ____

Personal skills I would be willing to donate to NIBA (i.e. Beekeeping experience, accounting, webmaster, event planning, community education, carpentry, legal, business management, retail knowledge, other)

Complete this form and mail with check payable to: NORTHERN ILLINOIS BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION (NIBA)
 TO: NIBA Membership, c/o Sue Pinkawa, 5010 Bonner Drive, McHenry, IL 60050



Chores of the Month – January 2026

Like the bees we study, we accomplish more together.

John Leibinger

HAPPY NEW YEAR

What's happening in the hive?

Winter is pretty well set in. As I write this the temperature is in the mid teens, but at least it's not windy and not snowing. We had a couple days barely touching 50 degrees during December. For those who ventured in the bee yard, you were given a pretty good idea of whether or not your colonies were still alive or had already succumbed to the many stresses bees have to cope with.

As normalcy returns, temperature-wise, the bees will be clustering to maintain colony warmth for the next several months. Slowly working their way up the hive, they will be consuming the food that they have stored away specifically for this time. At colder temperatures, bee activity slows and leads to a tighter cluster. On the plus side, they may consume fewer stores during this time, but they also have less ability to move around within the hive to access stored honey. If they are not in direct contact with frames of honey, they are at risk of starvation.

A mild winter generally allows the bees to be a little more active in the hive. The result is they consume more of their stores. This may have been happening during our warmer days in December. **Stay conscious of the weather.** Be aware that they may need additional emergency feeding, particularly as we enter February when low levels of brood rearing commence.

There are heater bees at the inside of the cluster that will be producing heat and the bulk of the rest of the workers will be surrounding them, maintaining layers of insulation to minimize loss of that precious heat. Some of those outer bees will perish and fall to the bottom board. Undertaker bees will periodically push the bodies to the front of the hive (possibly blocking off hive egress at the bottom entrance). The bees will slowly rotate from the colder outside layers of the cluster to inner layers to warm up. This will continue throughout the winter. The cluster itself will also very slowly migrate around the hive in an effort to stay near stored food. They are in survival mode.

For All Beekeepers:

Unless we have a few days of unseasonably warm weather or you perceive your hive weight being unreasonably light, this is not the time to be breaking into the hive bodies and disrupting the seals or the winter cluster.

Periodically walk out to your hives and take an external look at them. Remove snow (it will come eventually) from around the entrance and look to see that there haven't been any pests causing a problem.

Try to get an idea of the remaining stores by 'hefting' the hive. Lift up the rear of the hive and feel the weight. If fairly light, you may need to provide some emergency feed, i.e., winter patties, fondant, sugar cakes, dry sugar, etc. (dry feed, not wet). Another indicator would be if you see the cluster high up underneath the inner cover (if you are looking on a warm day). Emergency feed should be placed directly above the cluster, under the inner cover, in direct contact with the tops of the frames. (Restrict your activity to the top of the hive and avoid breaking into the hive bodies.)

Make sure that if you utilize an upper entrance/exit, it is clear of snow and debris. It helps with ventilation and it is an easy egress point for bees to take cleansing flights in the winter. (assumes you utilize the ventilation hive philosophy)

If you are managing your hives with the condensing hive approach, be sure that your entrance is not plugged with dead bees. Clean out as needed.

If you have been a conscientious beekeeper throughout the 2025 season and have monitored and controlled varroa mites, left the bees with sufficient stores, ended the year with healthy bees and a young queen (less than a year old), you have provided your bees with the chance of thriving in Spring 2026. Still no guarantee, but you have shifted the odds in their favor.

Some odds and ends to keep you active and engaged this winter:

Melt down beeswax. During this time, excess comb, bits, scraps and older wax from frames can be melted down to form blocks of beeswax for future use.

Make beauty products. Lip balms, lotions, creams, salves and scrubs are all fun things you can learn how to make, use, gift or sell.



Make candles. The beeswax that was melted down can be turned into homemade candles.

Research new techniques. Beekeeping is a field that continues to grow. New hives, alternative feeding methods, and integrated pest management techniques are always adapting and improving.

Repair and replace old hives. This is a great time to repair and paint your extra woodware, and replace worn frames and/or foundation. It's also time to assemble new hives.

Prepare for spring splits if you want to increase your hive count. Most hives that come out of winter with strong numbers can be split (or they may split themselves, i.e., swarm). Learn how to make splits and what equipment is necessary. Alternately, learn some swarm mitigation techniques, e.g. spring queen replacement.

Build a swarm box. Be ready to catch a swarm this spring with this fun project. Learn about tanging and give it a go...let me know how it works out.

Train new beekeepers. Volunteer to share your experiences to help train new beekeeper

Start preparing for the 2026 season:

Pay your association dues for 2026.

Renew your annual Apiary Registration with Illinois Department of Agriculture.

Clean up any dead outs that you have experienced this season.

Launder your bee clothing. Over the course of inspecting hives clothing picks up honey, propolis, dirt, and most importantly, bee venom. The venom odor with its accompanying alarm pheromone sets you up for upsetting the bees before you ever open a hive. This should be done routinely during the beekeeping season, but at least let's be sure to get a clean start to 2026. **Note:** Use a scent free detergent.

Continue to increase your knowledge of bees and beekeeping:

- Read and study about bees and beekeeping
- Attend beekeeping meetings
- Increase your knowledge of local plants and trees. Learn about the relevance of Degree Days.
- Form a small group of beekeepers to meet for lunch and talk bees.

Inventory your equipment, tools, and supplies.

Set aside some money - for replacement or expansion bees, new/replacement equipment and supplies.

Order your bees if needed. Nucs? (Highly recommended for new beekeepers without drawn comb.) Packages? New Queens?

Review your 2025 season (and your notes) for successes and opportunities.

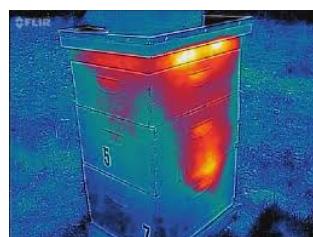
Think about and set new goals for 2026. What do you want to accomplish/learn this year?

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)

***Spring is just ahead.
There is a new beekeeping season on the
way!***





2026 NIBA OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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Program Chair – Larry Krengel
 Webmaster – Terri Reeves
 Newsletter Editor – Sue Pinkawa
 Club Extractor Coordinator – Al Fullerton
 Club Raffle Coordinator – Jim Jellissen
 Snack Coordinator – Julianne Anderson

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

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 adfhoney@gmail.com, if you don't get a timely response, just phone. Pick it up in Cary Illinois.

The queen marking color for 2026 is White

