



SWEET STUFF

NIBA NEWSLETTER – AUGUST 2025

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tom Allen

I'm writing this just 2 days after the close of the fair. July flew by for me and August will be the same. We have lots of birthdays and an anniversary during the end of the summer so weekends are packed. Add in that I also volunteer with the Salvation Army's Emergency Disaster Services so I respond with a canteen kept in Crystal Lake to fires of all types and other emergencies that will have firefighters out on long calls. I feel bad because I don't keep bees anymore and have only been out to the MCC bee yard once this year. My contribution has centered around bottling the honey we sell and I've bottled all we had. This year we expanded the sizes we bottle to include 2 pound bottles, quarts and we bought several cases of glass 1 pound bottles. Just as we run out of the honey we have in 5 gallon buckets in the storage unit we're talking about when to extract the supers from the MCC hives. More to come on that soon.

The Fair, what can I say about the Fair... we sold a lot of honey, sold out on the 2,000 honey sticks we bought and talked to a lot of people over the six days it was open. Donna designed a beautiful booth and for the most part it stayed just as it was originally set up, Al Fullerton made a new table the observation hive was mounted to which gave people the opportunity to see both sides of the frames easier than when it was clamped to the edge of the table in the old booth. Somewhere around 8-10 people helped move in everything for the booth including the bees in the observation hive. Over the 6 days the Fair was open around 45 people volunteered to work in the booth and everyone met their commitment. Several people worked multiple shifts during the week with a couple of them working at least one shift each day! These people are the ones who make it possible to rent our meeting room at MCC, pay for speakers at meetings, pay for the fees at different events we go to, bottles we sell honey in and so much more. Half of the membership fees we collect from memberships go to the Illinois State Beekeepers Association which probably means less than \$2,000.00 goes to NIBA. I want to thank all of the volunteers no matter what role you played in helping out for the Fair!!

The honey show had so many entries from both kids and adults that it took our own Stephanie Slater almost 7 hours to complete the judging. Honey show superintendent

Cristy Binz and Sue Pinkawa helped set the show up and assisted Stephanie throughout the show. Many NIBA members entered the show and did very well. I hope the speakers we've had at meetings who spoke about their experiences on getting honey and wax products ready for the honey show helped NIBA members do well with their entries!

Thank you!

Tom



Pictures of the McHenry County Fair honey show, including the famous picture of Ron Fischer the honey judge of 35 years. Ron was not there this year, but Stephanie Slater stepped in to do the judging. Sue Pinkawa and Cristy Binz were there to help with the judging procedure. Great showing in the Jr. Class that is growing every year !



The Production of Wax to Build the Castle

Larry Krengel

Honeybees are the original do-it-yourselfers. Consider a swarm emanating from a parent hive, taking flight to a new nest in a cavity in a distant tree. All they bring along is a honey stomach full of honey. Anything they are going to have they will need to produce themselves. All work to build their new wax castle.

I ponder how I would do if I were sent out into the woods with a few thousand other human beings equipped only with what we could carry. Our bees have been doing this for millions of years. They have gotten good at it.

A swarm – perhaps 15,000 bees – sets out with a prime mission... survival. A swarm is made of bees of all ages. In an existing colony, behaviors are age linked. Young bees clean the house and tend the young while older bees guard the door and forage for nectar and pollen. Not so in a swarm. Bees adapt to atypical jobs. In particular, bees of all ages produce wax, the critical element for constructing the new bee castle.

Honey stomachs full of honey and no place to deposit it, beekeepers have long thought the bee processes it into wax. It is not quite that simple.

Dr. Stephen Pratt of the University of Arizona is a neurobiologist who studies the collect behavior of social insects... like the honeybee. He was particularly interested in why honeybee colonies choose to produce wax.

Traditional thinking taught that nectar receivers would naturally produce wax if honey was held in their stomachs when no storage cells were available. This, he discovered, is not true in existing colonies. Instead, most builders came from another, “unidentified subpopulation” of workers. I am intrigued. Who are these castle builders?

Honeybees in existing colonies initiate new comb construction only when two conditions are met: they are currently collecting nectar, and they have filled their available comb beyond a threshold level with brood and food. This ensures that the energy-intensive process of castle building is only undertaken when it is most beneficial for the colony.

Again, I am intrigued. How does a mass of thousands of individuals collectively agree that threshold has been exceeded?

Back to thinking about the swarm... the colony does not depend on that unidentified subgroup to produce wax. All in the swarm contribute wax to castle construction. Those traditionally too young and those too old step up to support the challenging mission.

The more we learn about the secret world of bees, the more we realize we know little.

Chores of the Month – August – the dog days of summer

Like the bees we study, we accomplish more together.

John Leibinger

What's happening in the hive?

The colony population has peaked and will likely start to decline slightly later in the month. Nonetheless, you should be observing lots of bees and still see brood in all stages (BIAS) being raised to replace the older bees in the colony. The laying rate 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).

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. **With all this in mind, beware of potential robbing.**

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 use the feeders to mitigate the bees encroaching on neighbors and it seems to be work well).

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 2026. 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, Formic Pro, Varroasan (extended release Oxalic Acid), and Api Bioxal (approved brand of Oxalic Acid...multiple application methods available). 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 remarkably 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 paradichlorobenzine (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 2025 and plan better in 2026.

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)

Varroa Management Decision Tool (Ctrl+Click link)

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



PICTURES FROM THE McHENRY COUNTY FAIR 2025









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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 adfhoney@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 2025 is Blue

