



The Monthly Newsletter of the Mecklenburg County Beekeepers Association February 2018

President's Buzz

New Website Password for 2018

By the time you read this, I hope you will have received the 2018 password for the "Members" section of our website. The Bee Blast with that password should go out on February 1. So, if you have renewed your membership for 2018, check your e-mail account for that e-mail. Please save that e-mail to a folder where you can find it later this year when you want to use it.

If you haven't renewed your membership, yet, please take the time to do so you're not waiting for it to be processed later this year when you're anxious to rent the club extractor, or access other features. At just \$5/year, it's a bargain. And we've made it as easy possible for you to renew, with three methods available:

- ~Renew online via the website. (Note: We have to charge an extra \$1 to cover Paypal's fees, but it's probably about the same cost as renewing by mail, and a lot quicker.)
- ~Renew by mail using the form contained in this newsletter.
- ~Renew at the next meeting using the same form.

This year, we've added a new place on the registration form for you to indicate how you might be interested in doing more with MeckBees. Please think about ways that you can help, and share that with us on the registration form.

And speaking of volunteers . . .

Thanks to all of you who have renewed and indicated areas you are willing to help with. If you haven't heard from us, yet, we hope to be in touch with you soon.

We still have a number of jobs open, including:

- AV equipment manager
- Social committee
- Community outreach coordinator

Please don't hesitate to contact me at meckbeespres@gmail.com if you're interested in helping in any of these areas.

February's Meeting

**February 15
7 PM**

**Mouzon United Methodist
Church
3100 Selwyn Avenue
Charlotte, NC**

**Presenter: Kim O'Shea Plant-
ing for Pollinators w/ emphasis
on Bee Nutrition**



Time to sign up for the Swarm List!

Every year, we update the swarm list published on the website. This is a great tool for the greater Charlotte community to use when they spot a swarm of bees, and want to do their part to save them. It's also a great way for you to interact with the public as you collect a swarm, and educate them about honey bees.

Oh . . . and did I mention you get free bees?

To maintain some order in the signup process, we limit signup to the month of February each year. You should have gotten an e-mail around February 1 with instructions on how to sign up. You will need the new password to access the signup page. Please don't delay in signing up.

Have something you want to share with other beekeepers?

Read something interesting about bees? Learned something new from a speaker you've heard, or a conference you've attended? Or maybe you have an experience with your bees you'd like to share with the rest of us? Please consider sharing with us through the newsletter by contacting our intrepid newsletter editor, Rachel Woodhouse, at rachel.e.g.woodhouse@gmail.com.

Tough January

By now, I hope everyone has had a chance to assess their hives. The first week of January was especially tough, and we lost two weak hives. It's so sad when you pull a frame to find a small cluster of bees still, some huddled in cells in a last effort to remain warm. And then you look down, and find the bottom of the hive litter with dead bees. In both cases, we knew these hives were weak going into the winter, and would survive only with a relatively warm winter. While we have had a few warm days here and there during January, the weather since the first of the year has been unseasonably cold. As I write this, it appears that we will another couple of weeks of below average temperatures, although nowhere near as harsh as the first week in January.

For us, the good news is that the remaining six hives appear to be healthy and we expect all of them to make it to spring. Our job at this time is to lay a foundation to help them come into the spring, not as survivors, but as "thrivers."

Cross-pollination

This past weekend (January 27), Maravianne and I were able to attend the Urban Roots Symposium hosted by UNCC. Attended by over 100 people from the community, its focus was on what is happening today to transform the urban landscape. A recurring theme was using available land in cities to produce food closer to urban residents. There's a lot of exciting work being done to convert urban food deserts into prolific vegetative oases, including right here in Charlotte. There is also a lot of good work being done to provide children with opportunities to not only cultivate fruits and vegetables, but also to prepare them for meals.

Happily, honeybees and native bees were mentioned throughout the symposium. Their usefulness, along with the problems they face, were touched on in several of the talks.

Because I don't care for mushrooms in my diet ("No fungus among us!" is my response when asked if I want mushrooms), the one session I thought I would be napping through was "Landscaping with Fungi"



(President's Buzz cont'd)

by Tradd Cotter. Well, I found it rivaled the other sessions when it came to keeping my attention, as the speaker, who owns Mushroom Mountain—a research lab in South Carolina that investigates practical applications for fungi—recounted one application after another, either in development or commercial use. Some examples:

- Accelerating the compost process
- Attracting worms
- Cleaning up contaminated soil
- Killing fire ants

One application that especially intrigued me was the use of a fungus strain known as MET-52 to control varroa mites. A quick search on Google after I got home led me to an article on the subject at the Bee Culture website that you may find interesting: <http://www.beeeculture.com/honey-bees-fungi/>

I hope that all of you find your colonies healthy, and ready to start the spring, not as survivors, but as “thrivers”!
Ed

A note on February's Meeting:

There will be additional Mecklenburg Extension Master Gardener Volunteers milling around to answer people's garden questions etc. So please bring photos, cuttings, and questions etc. Arrive a few minutes early- EMGVs will be there from 6.30pm...



Photo from the beautiful January 17th snow day in Charlotte in the bee garden of Rachel Woodhouse



Odds & Ends

by Andrew Thiessen

Flip Flopping on Feeding

Funny how things change with time...opinions in particular. For the past few years, I have tried my best to manage my bees in a way that reduced or eliminated the need to feed them. And I may have been a tad soap boxy about it (sorry!). But I've thought a lot about it this winter & I'd like to present a different point of view.

Feeding is cheap insurance.

Full transparency, I've lost a few—not many, but a few—hives to starvation this winter. It's tough to say if they went into winter light or if they just burned through their honey stores in short order. (My fault, as I did not take exact weights like I should have in September.) It should be noted that some colonies are thrifty and hardly eat any honey over winter, and some bees burn through 70+ lbs. of honey & starve before the end of January. I want the former bees to make up the majority of my bee yard.

Here's my newly enlightened mindset around feeding, and something for us all to think about. If I lose one hive because I didn't feed it adequately, it's 100% my fault. At \$7/bucket of 1:1 syrup from the local Domino Sugar plant, it costs less than \$20 to get a hive topped up for winter. That hive in spring is worth far more than \$20. In fact, you could split it into four or more nucs & sell them for \$150ea. Or let it ride for honey production and potentially make \$1,000 or more from it in honey sales—double that in a good year with top-notch management!

This coming fall, I will feed all my bees...just to be safe. Feeding is cheap insurance.

Profitable Hobby

Beekeeping is one of a very few hobbies that can turn a profit. Or you can turn it into a nice sideline business with a little more effort and organization. I talked with a beekeeper yesterday who had a great business model. In my experience, successful businesses find little ways to eke out extra income, solve problems and increase efficiency where others do not.

Here's the slick idea I heard from this man yesterday. He pulls two or three frames of brood and nurse bees from each of his hives in early April—right when they're usually threatening to swarm—and makes up one nuc from each of his honey-producing hives. He replaces the removed frames with frames of new foundation. This reduces crowding and gives his big hives new space in the brood box to help prevent swarming, and it creates nucs that he either sells for \$150 each or uses to make up winter loss. Win/win!

The details are that he buys mated queens for these nucs from a top-quality large-scale queen producer. He only keeps the nucs for ~2 weeks after installing these new queens. So, he has minimal hours (labor burden) tied up in these nucs. He transfers the bees into his customers' single-deep hives at the time of sale, so he keeps his own nuc boxes. This significantly reduces materials costs to include only the new queen and five frames for each nuc produced.



Bottom line:

Figure \$25/queen (with volume discount since he's producing over 100 nucs) plus \$7.50 (\$1.50 x 5 frames) = \$32.50 fixed cost. Net profit (not including minimal labor) = \$117.50. This is a significant return on investment! Now when you consider that it also likely prevented his honey production hive from swarming and/or made up for winter loss, it's a HUGE "big picture" win!

Techniques like this separate the Pros from the strugglers.

Sustainability Tip

Try running one nuc for every one or two full-size hives in your bee yard. This is another "cheap insurance" technique that can save your backside. Here's how...

- 1) If your full-size hive swarms, drop the entire nuc (queen and all) right in there and get it back up to strength for honey production. Maybe pull one or two frames with the swarm cell(s) out to set up a new nuc. Win/win.
- 2) Main hive goes queenless? Pull the queen from a nuc to re-queen the big hive. Let the nuc take the hit to produce its own new queen.
- 3) Pull a frame of nurse bees and capped brood each week of Spring & use them to boost up honey-production beehives, so they'll make HUGE honey crops.

Closing Thought

Beekeeping should become more enjoyable year after year. Incorporating one or two advanced management techniques can make the difference between merely stumbling through or loving it. I hope we all crush it in 2018!

In the Beeyard *David Segrest, NC Master Beekeeper*

The excitement of spring is coming. When planning spring planting think about the bees. Kimberly O'Shea will be telling us how at the February meeting. Many beekeepers get started because of the need for pollination. How many gardeners get started to feed their bees?

Everyone has heard the old truism, "You are what you eat." For humans and other omnivores perhaps, you are what you eat eats, would be more appropriate. Planting to feed bees and other pollinators is great, but why not plant something that makes good tasting honey.

The bees are bringing in some pollen on the nice afternoons. I wish I knew where it was coming from. Do you? My belated Christmas present is to be a microscope. The intention is to gather pollen from the flowers and gather pollen from a pollen trap and see how the grains match up. A lot of this can be determined just by looking. There are many features of the pollen grains that can only be examined with a microscope. Kids love microscopes. Get one for your kids. It's too early to put pollen traps on the hives.

The bees need all the pollen they can get to raise brood right now. It may be a good time to feed a little pollen sub. Some light syrup may also be appropriate. When feeding the bees make sure the entrance reducer is at a small setting. Use small pieces of pollen sub patties and check them often. If the bees don't take them get them out of the hive before



(In the Beeyard cont'd)

they draw SHBs. Watch the syrup too. If it is cold the bees won't take it and it will spoil. A touch of vinegar helps prevent mold and changes the ph. A little Honey Bee Healthy makes it more attractive to the bees.

Are you tired of hearing about mites yet? The bees are. If they need it treat them!

What's Blooming in January: Hellebore

by Matt Burgoon

Common Name: Stinking hellebore, dungwort

Botanical Name: *Helleborus foetidus*

Plant Type: Evergreen Herbaceous perennial

Typical Bloom Period: January - April

Nectar Usefulness: medium

Pollen Usefulness: medium

One advantage to keeping honey bees in a largely urbanized county like Mecklenburg is that a diverse group of gardeners cultivate a diverse mix of plants. So while our local natives might be mostly dormant, a European introduction might be in full bloom. Stinking hellebore — *Helleborus foetidus* (think “fetid”) — is one such introduction, and our neighbors' gardens might be providing our bees with some late winter encouragement.

Helleborus foetidus is in the buttercup family, Ranunculaceae. The leaves of hellebore are deeply lobed and divided into 7-10 segments which are narrow and lance-shaped. They are a rich green; their stalks and veins are tinged purple. Hellebore remains green all year in the mild winters of Mecklenburg County and thrives in the summer shade of our deciduous trees.



photo courtesy of Rachel Woodhouse

Hellebore blooms as early as January, sending up shoots of several flowers which droop toward the ground. They begin with a pinkish hue. The flowers are perfect — having both male and female parts in each flower — and they are self-fertile, but the stigmas become receptive earlier than pollen is released — they are *protogynous* — so cross-pollination is more likely. The showy, petal-shaped parts are the sepals, while the petals are shaped as tiny tubes and contain the nectaries. The sepals will remain showy after fertilization but will turn a light green color.

The nectar of *Helleborus foetidus* has a high sucrose content, making it especially valuable to bees. A study published in 2008 observed that the sucrose:fructose ratio of hellebore nectar changed after a visit from a bumblebee. Was the nectary of the flower responding to stimulus probe? Or perhaps the bumblebee was spitting enzymes into the nectary while foraging? Further studies found that the tip of the bumblebee proboscis is a vehicle for yeasts which colonize in the nectary and catalyze the sucrose. The catalysis generates heat, warming the flower from within, causing it to grow better in a cold environment!

Hellebore is also particularly valuable as a pollen source because the flower heads droop over to face the ground, protecting the anthers from wet weather. Peter Lindtner documents that *H. foetidus* pollen grains are small and round; they form yellow pollen pellets.



(What's Blooming cont'd)

Helleborus foetidus is not listed in any of my native plant resource books. Most of the information in the article was gathered from the following sources:

General information:

<http://herbaria.plants.ox.ac.uk/bol/plants400/Profiles/GH/Helleborus>

Studies on nectar and yeasts:

Canto, Azucena, Carlos M. Herrera, Mónica Medrano, Ricardo Pérez, and Isabel M. García. 2008. "Pollinator Foraging Modifies Nectar Sugar Composition in *Helleborus Foetidus* (Ranunculaceae): An Experimental Test." *American Journal of Botany* 95 (3): 315–20. <https://doi.org/10.3732/ajb.95.3.315>.

Herrera, Carlos M., and María I. Pozo. 2010. "Nectar Yeasts Warm the Flowers of a Winter-Blooming Plant." *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences*, February, rspb20092252. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2009.2252>.

A close-up look:

<http://www.microscopy-uk.org.uk/mag/artmay10/bj-hellebore.html>

2018 MCBA OFFICERS

President: Ed Moyers (meckbeespres@gmail.com)

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Email us with questions at
meckbeespres@gmail.com

Picture and Article Submissions
are always needed and are
greatly appreciated.

Email submissions to:
Rachel.E.G.Woodhouse@gmail.com



Mecklenburg County Beekeepers Association

2018 Dues Form (January 1 thru December 31)

Note: State registration is now handled separately through the state website
Please see link below

(Please print clearly)

Today's Date _____

MCBA Annual Dues: \$5

I am:

New

Renewing

N/A

*First Name: _____ *Last name: _____

*Address: _____

*City: _____ *State: _____ *Zip code: _____

Phone: _____ *Email: _____

County of residence: _____

How long have you kept bees? _____(yrs) Number of hives _____

How would you like to be involved with the Club? _____

*This information (name, mailing address, email address) will be provided to all members of the Mecklenburg Beekeepers (and to members ONLY - no one else will receive this information from us). If you DO NOT want this information shared, please opt out by initialing here. _____

Please make check payable to MCBA and mail completed form to:

Dietlinde Zipkin
MCBA Secretary
201 Foxlair Ct.
Matthews, NC 28105

For state membership registration or renewal, you'll find a link on the NCSBA home page:

<https://www.ncbeekeepers.org/>

Benefits of state membership include :

Subscription to the quarterly Bee Buzz newsletter

Notices of bee-related education opportunities

Member discounts to the state conferences and other education opportunities

Discounts on magazines such as the American Bee Journal

Copy of the Yellow Book statewide membership directory

Annual beekeeping calendar



the honeycomb