



*The Monthly Newsletter of the Mecklenburg County Beekeepers Association February 2019*

## **President's Buzz . . .**

A great start to the new year!

We had excellent attendance at the January meeting, with a nice turnout by a number of this year's Bee School students, along with some other visitors. Johnny Preston, Tommy Helms and George McAllister did a great job to discussing their approaches to catching swarms and managing their apiaries to minimize swarming by their bees.

Our February meeting will feature George McAllister, who will tell how us he is effectively using queen castles not just for swarm management, but for all aspects of managing his apiary and maximizing his per hive honey production.

A special treat early in the meeting was a little slide show put together by Dietlinde Zipkin concerning what plants she's seen in bloom during the month of January that are being attended to by the bees. Diet hopes to continue these slide shows at other meetings this year.

### **2019 Renewal Reminder**

If you haven't already, please don't forget to renew your membership for 2019. We continue to offer MCBA membership for an incredibly low cost of \$5/year (\$6 if you renew on the website, to cover the extra we have to pay PayPal for that transaction). You can renew the following ways:  
Through our website (<http://www.meckbees.org/become-a-member.html>)  
By printing a paper form (see later in this newsletter or on the website), filling it out, and attaching a check. You can either turn it in at the next meeting, or mail it to the address on the form.  
Pick up a form at the next meeting, fill it out there, and turn in along with your payment.

PLEASE NOTE: You will need to renew your state membership separately. You can do that through their website at <https://www.ncbeekeepers.org/membership/join-or-renew-now/membership-application>. If you plan to attend the March NCSBA meeting in Monroe, you should register right away to assure that you qualify for the member's discount for that meeting.

## **February Meeting**

**February 21, 2019**

**7pm**

**Selwyn Methodist  
Church**

**3100 Selwyn Ave.**

Guest speaker:

George McAllister

Increasing honey productions  
using queen castles



## **Upcoming Bee Conferences**

I want to remind folks that in addition to the excellent speakers and topics we feature at our meetings, you can benefit from additional speakers and topics at state, regional and national conferences. A little later in this newsletter, Libby Mack has graciously contributed information on the two state conferences, and this year's EAS conference, which is conveniently located in South Carolina. I know that schedules and family situations may prohibit folks from going to one or all of these, but I strongly encourage everyone to make an effort to attend at least one

Depending on where you reside in Mecklenburg County, both of this year's state conferences are within commuting range, with March's in Monroe, and August's in Hickory.

The EAS conference, which is being held in Greenville, SC, is probably too far for a daily commute, but is certainly a low cost trip since you can easily drive to it.

## **Swarm List Registration**

It's that time of the year again: To sign up for the MCBA Swarm List. As you likely know, Meck Bees maintains a list of members who are interested in/willing to take calls from members of the larger Mecklenburg County community who have spotted swarms, and would like to find them a nice home with a local beekeeper. The Swarm List provides benefits to:

Property owners as an easy way for them to locate individuals who can help them remove a swarm from their property.

Beekeepers as a means to obtain free—and hopefully healthy—bees to add to their beeyard.

Honey bees, as the ability to contact someone to remove a swarm means fewer swarms being sprayed with insecticides by (sometimes) terrified homeowners.

The swarm list includes the name and contact information for the beekeepers. It also provides information that helps a property owner make a better decision about whom to call, including areas of the county the beekeeper is willing to travel to, height restrictions (i.e., only willing to retrieve swarms located below a certain height off the ground), and whether they are willing to retrieve bees from structures.

Because retrieving even swarms near the ground requires some elementary beekeeping skills, we do not recommend new beekeepers sign up for the swarm list. Instead, we encourage new beekeepers to get a year under their belt and, if possible, work with their mentor—or other beekeepers—to retrieve swarms.

Signup to be placed on the Swarm List will begin around February 1, and will end around February 28.

An e-mail announcing the beginning of registration will be sent out when around February 1. Please keep in mind, to get on the Swarm List, your MCBA membership must be current, so please make sure you have renewed by then.

## **New Website Feature**

It's been a couple of years ago that our webmaster, Kevin Freeman, and I started talking about adding a new feature to the website. The idea was to provide a way for beekeepers wanting to sell miscellaneous equipment to other beekeepers who would be interested in that equipment. The best comparison I can think of would be to a classified ads section in the newspaper. (Remember those??)

This feature, which will be open to anyone visiting the website, will have one page that allows a seller to submit their listing. The second page will include all of the current listings. A listing will be allowed to stay on the list for 30 days.



When a person submits a listing, the information will be e-mailed to a MeckBees volunteer responsible for maintaining this list. They will review the information for completeness and appropriateness. If all is well, they add the listing to the website.

Some key things to keep in mind about this little service we're adding:

This is meant to be used for the occasional sale of miscellaneous items. That would include beekeepers who have decided to quit keeping bees, or want to reduce the number of bees they're keeping, and want to sell all or most of their equipment.

This is NOT intended to be used as advertising for businesses selling bees or equipment.

MCBA makes no warranty concerning the equipment being sold through this feature. However, if it appears that someone is trying to cheat folks through this feature, we want to hear about it so we can remove their listing.

We'll monitor this closely for the next few months to see how well it works. If we find there are issues, we will either modify or remove the feature.

### **Bees in the Movies . . .**

I'm a bit of a movie buff, but not necessarily in the sense that I watch blockbusters or Oscar nominees. I have an eclectic taste that results in my watching a wide variety of movies, although I do tend to prefer science fiction.

Since Marianne and I started keeping bees, one of the things I am intrigued with is the use of bees in movies. An obvious example is the *Secret Life of Bees*, which is set in South Carolina in the mid-1960's, where some of the key characters are beekeepers. I enjoyed this movie quite a bit, but the beeyard smoking scene, which is quite dramatic, is certainly over the top.

More recently, the movie *Mr. Holmes* uses his honeybees as a key part of the storyline. The makers of *Mr. Holmes* wanted the beekeeping scenes to be as realistic as possible, and hired "bee-master" Steve Benbow, a famous London beekeeper best known for his work with Fortnum & Mason's beehives, to work with Ian McKellen (who played Holmes). The fact that McKellen's initial reaction to having to work with bees in the movie was, "No!", is a testament to Benbow's success in working with him to produce such realistic looking scenes working with the bees and his young mentee, Roger.

In the last few weeks, Marianne and I have watched a couple of interesting movies that feature honey bees in minor roles that are nonetheless significant to the story. The first of these is Netflix movie, *Io*, which is another of the many dystopian future movies that have come out over the past decade. The young scientist whom the story centers around, is one of the few remaining humans on an Earth that has been poisoned by man, and lives in one of the last pockets of the Earth with adequate oxygen for life. Part of her work is with honeybees, whom she experiments with in the hope that they will be able to adapt to the new, poisoned environment.

The other movie, *Leave No Trace*, is about an Iraq war veteran who copes with his PTSD by moving from one area to another with his teenage daughter, camping in remote woods and parks as he tries to avoid meaningful interaction with other people. In one of the locations, there is a community of like-minded veterans who have come together to help one another out. While in that community, one woman, who is a beekeeper, invites the



daughter, who later invites her father, to join her in the apiary, and experience opening the hives and inspecting the bees. The time spent in this community serves as the turning point in the father's and daughter's relationship. Even though I'm a sci-fi fan, I have to admit that *Leave No Trace* was by far the better movie. Also, I felt the beekeeping scenes were more realistic in this movie.

### **Correction to last month's President's Buzz**

In my write up last month about the demise of Brushy Mountain, I mentioned an article by the Wilkes Journal-Patriot and provided a link to it. Well . . . apparently it wasn't the correct link. Jason Hunt was gracious enough to point this out to me, and provide the correct link. If you haven't already found it on your own, here it is:

[https://www.journalpatrot.com/news/brushy-mtn-bee-farm-closed-in-receivership/article\\_c0c88f0c-f7cb-11e8-adac-4bfc157f9d5f.html](https://www.journalpatrot.com/news/brushy-mtn-bee-farm-closed-in-receivership/article_c0c88f0c-f7cb-11e8-adac-4bfc157f9d5f.html)

Hope to see all of you at the February meeting!

Ed

## ***Mark Your Calendar, Plan To Attend***

There are several upcoming events that promise to be both entertaining and educational.

- 1) North Carolina State Beekeepers – Spring Meeting. March 1-2 in Monroe NC. Take advantage of this close-by location, hear expert presenters, visit lots of vendors and meet lots of beekeepers. Registration now open [www.ncbeekeepers.org](http://www.ncbeekeepers.org). Those of you in Bee School, you are already members of NCSBA.
- 2) Eastern Apicultural Society – Summer Meeting. July 15-19, Greenville SC. EAS is the preeminent beekeeping organization on the east coast, reaching up through the US and Canada. We are so fortunate to have this meeting happening right down the road. The first couple days are a “beginner” class but it covers so much information and is taught by expert Master Beekeepers, so you can't really call it Beginner level. The rest of the days are a fire-hose of new and important information as well as vendor exhibits and social events. Registration isn't open yet but watch for it at <http://www.easternapiculture.org>.
- 3) NCSBA – Summer Meeting. This meeting has been moved to August because of the July meeting of EAS, the new dates are August 8-10 in Hickory NC. Always a great learning experience and not that far away. Watch for details at [www.ncbeekeepers.org](http://www.ncbeekeepers.org)

Let's have a great Meck Bee turnout!



# *What's Blooming in February: Mahonia*

by Matt Burgoon

Common Name: Oregon Grape, Mahonia

Botanical Name: *Mahonia bealei*

Plant Type: Evergreen shrub

Typical Bloom Period: Jan-April

Nectar Usefulness: excellent

Pollen Usefulness: low

Lately I've become mildly fascinated with living designs that employ smart strategies but don't have big brains. And with organisms which have an appeal to humans that improves their success as a species. Honey bees are a little of both. So are *Mahonia bealei*, or Oregon grape.

Here is a plant which offers berries in a bunch, like grapes. They look appealing but if approached from the ground, the long sharp spines of the leaves repel the would-be eater. Approached from the air — or very gingerly — they are accessible. They more seed than flesh, but edible — to humans too. So they would have their seeds taken by birds over mammals, carried farther not nearer, and dropped in the shade beneath a tree branch not in the middle of a sunny meadow.



*Honey bees on Mahonia, courtesy of Jodie Rierson*

The Berberidaceae family (think “barberry”), with only around 600 genera, has been of interest to researchers especially for studies of morphological evolution. Joan W. Nowicke and John J. Skvarla authored a book for Smithsonian which discusses the effectiveness of pollen grains related to the size and shape of apertures in the grain — fantastic microscopic images here! Within the barberries, the Genus Mahonia has native populations in eastern Asia and the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. Similar plants in two locations separated by the Pacific present an opportunity to study evolutionary parallelism and divergence.

Closer to home, Mahonia species are considered invasive in the southeastern U.S.: they outcompete native species for resources and disrupt the delicate relationships between flora and fauna where they are established. A 2006 study in Clemson, SC found *M. bealei* had invaded 87% of the woodlots of the city and called for recognition of its serious threat to fragile ecosystems. A driving tour of Charlotte will find specimens in our woodlots too, usually in shady spots under trees. So we wisely choose to propagate alternative native species instead.

However, we do take some pleasure from existing specimens. Watch out, as the spines on those waxy leaves are stiff and sharp! A close examination of the inflorescence reveals a raceme, or stalk, of flowers on short pedicels; the flowers closest to the plant bloom first. While the stalk is upright, each flower is closed and faces downward; cold winter rains are kept out. The light fragrance reminds me of lemon Pledge. Forcibly opening the flower reveals that it is perfect — it has both male and female parts. Droplets of nectar are large enough to be visible and the taste is lemony sweet. The rest of the flower has a citrus tartness, for a late winter salad topper. Oregon grape has medicinal value: the root and root bark contain berberine. Stem bark, leaves, and berries may be processed as dyes.



*(What's Blooming in February: Mahonia cont'd)*

Our bees do not eat the whole plant; they come to Mahonia for the nectar, which is plentiful. They may take away just a little pollen; it is almost white in color.

Here is an evergreen shrub considered native in locations an ocean apart, "naturalized" through much of Europe, and so successful as to be invasive in Mecklenburg County. It is not picky about soil, and produces flowers and edible fruit in dense shade. That's pretty smart!

A thoughtful write-up about a close cousin:

<http://nativeplantspnw.com/tall-oregon-grape-mahonia-aquifolium/>

A delight to read the observations about pollen and look at the pictures:

JW Nowicke, JJ Skvarla. Pollen morphology and phylogenetic relationships of the Berberidaceae. Smithsonian Contrib 50: - Bot., 83p.(1981)

Finding alternatives to this and other invasives:

<https://projects.ncsu.edu/goingnative/howto/mapping/invxse/oregongr.html>

## 2019 MCBA OFFICERS

**President:** Ed Moyers ([meckbeespres@gmail.com](mailto:meckbeespres@gmail.com))

**Vice President:** David Segrest ([meckbeevp@gmail.com](mailto:meckbeevp@gmail.com))

**Treasurer:** Diana Helms ([meckbeetreas@gmail.com](mailto:meckbeetreas@gmail.com))

**Membership Secretary:** Dietlinde Zipkin  
([meckbeesec@gmail.com](mailto:meckbeesec@gmail.com))

**Chaplain:** Tommy Helms

**Webmaster:** Kevin Freeman ([meckbees@gmail.com](mailto:meckbees@gmail.com))

## Contact Us

Email us with questions at  
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Picture and Article Submissions  
are always needed and are  
greatly appreciated.

**Email submissions to:**  
[Rachel.E.G.Woodhouse@gmail.com](mailto:Rachel.E.G.Woodhouse@gmail.com)



# Mecklenburg County Beekeepers Association

2019 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? \_\_\_\_\_

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

