



The Monthly Newsletter of the Mecklenburg County Beekeepers Association March 2019

President's Buzz . . .

Dialogue is Our Best Benefit

While our organization offers many benefits to its members, I think the single most important benefit is bringing together beekeepers across Mecklenburg County with different levels of experience and different approaches to managing their bees. Like all diversity, this can result in honest, heartfelt disagreements. I'm pleased that our members feel comfortable in sharing their different approaches, and are respectful in listening to, and considering, the approaches of others.

Also, this dialogue doesn't have to occur just at the meetings. Many of you already participate in dialogue through the MCBA Facebook page. Others communicate via e-mail with small groups of folks they have exchanged info with over the years.

During mid-February, there was an interesting dialogue via e-mail about whether urban/suburban beekeepers should open feed their bees, and whether that encourages robbing activity. This is a topic that has also been discussed in recent meetings.

Around that same time, there was an interesting dialogue on the Facebook page about what can be done to discourage your hives from swarming. Some folks advocate temporarily placing an extra brood box on top, while others are placing honey supers.

I was happy to see that in both cases, although it was clear that folks were entrenched in their viewpoints, they were respectful in their discourse. This is the kind of healthy sharing of information and opinions that will ultimately make all of us better beekeepers.

Time to Ramp Up for Spring

I know that our job schedules don't always give us time off to get into our hives this time of year when those sporadic warm days pop up. But hopefully most of you have had a chance to at least peek into your hives. We've been able to look into each of ours at least once. Most are strong. We were surprised to lose one large hive early in the season (December). The cause of its demise is uncertain, but there was large number of dead bees in the

March Meeting

March 21, 2019
7pm

Selwyn Methodist Church
3100 Selwyn Ave.



bottom of the hive, and a small number tucked into the brood cells that either froze or died of starvation (but not because there wasn't enough food in the hive).

We had a few weak hives. We chose to combine two of those, because one appeared to be queenless. The combined hive, after just a week, is thriving.

In the strongest hive, we were seeing a number of adult drones in early February. Most of the other hives already have drone brood. By mid-February, a couple of hives were already building queen cups along the bottom of some of their frames.

In early February, we added a second box to our strong colonies that over-wintered in only a single deep box. In all cases, we included a mix of food frames, empty frames and new frames with fresh foundation. In every case, by mid-February, these colonies were already expanding their brood nest into the top boxes. Also, in every strong hive, even if they haven't started producing drone brood, we've placed drone frames for varroa mite capture. (We use older honey super shallow frames for this purpose. The bees will hang drone comb from the bottom of these frames, which can be easily cut off when the cells are capped. We give these to our friends with chickens, who love them.) We expect to remove the first capped drone comb by the end of February. We hope that this early approach to IPM varroa mite control, combined with our winter application of oxalic acid will minimize the need to treat for varroa mites going into the honey flow.

Get ready! If the behavior we saw last year is any indication, we may find that these stronger hives are preparing to swarm, even on these cold days, and we may be seeing swarms on the first warm days in March.

Hope to see all of you at the March meeting!

Ed

Honeybee Health Coalition New Booklet

Hi all, I wanted to draw your attention to a new publication from Honeybee Health Coalition. This is a well regarded organization backed by university researchers and a source of reliable information.

The new booklet (82 pages!) of Best Practices is a trove of great up-to-the-minute info. It might be a bit much for true beginners but everyone else should find something of use in it. It even includes pointers to other resources. And it's free!

Let's give this a wide distribution and ensure good info gets to as many beekeepers as possible.

https://honeybeehealthcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HBHC_Hive_BMPs_v1.0_reduced.pdf

Thanks
Libby



Open Feeding Experience

by Andrew Thiessen

I saw so many articles & videos in 2018 from reputable sources, including universities, that use open feeding in fall as standard practice. I knew I wanted to heavily feed all my hives to see if it helped winter survival. But since I'm cheap, I didn't want to buy Mann Lake hive-top feeders at \$20ea for all my hives--that'd be like \$900 or more!

The Honey Bee Health Coalition's (HBHC) new booklet, "Best Management Practices for Bee Health" states on page 73:

"Open feeding. While it is easy for beekeepers with many colonies to feed bees from barrels of sugar syrup, this encourages robbing behavior, can spread disease, and generally favors strong colonies taking most of the syrup. It will also feed any colonies in the general area, not just those of the beekeeper, and is highly attractive to scavenging yellow jackets."

I always hear several of our club's "Old Guard" rant about how we should NEVER open feed within the city--for exactly the reasons HBHC stated above. Holy cow, I nearly got burned at the stake when I asked some about it! But I also found out--despite being such opinionated experts on it--these same folks had never tried it.

With my typical "first in line to poke the tiger" mindset, I decided I should definitely give it a go to know for sure. I started open feeding in secret for a week before I asked George McAllister (whose electronically monitored beehives are located nine houses away from mine in Charlotte) what his hive weight readings were for that week, and informed him what I was up to. He was surprised his hives hadn't gained any weight that week. I decided to continue for another week, so we could be sure it hadn't just taken his bees, and the hives at the far ends of my bee yard a while to catch on to the new food source.

In my informal, albeit eye-opening, experiment on open feeding this past fall. We found the following:

1) Open feeding does not, in any way, encourage robbing. Using live monitoring with electronic scales in both George's apiary and my own (which are only nine houses apart in Charlotte), I began open feeding for a two week period. I placed two feed tubs--refilled every 3-4 days as needed--with 15 gallons 2:1 sugar syrup in each tub, in the center of my apiary (roughly a 100ft x 50ft area). During this period George's eight hives showed no appreciable* weight change. Within my own bee yard of (then) 24 hives, only beehives within ~20ft of the feed tubs gained weight. Hives greater than ~20ft from feed tubs within my apiary showed no appreciable weight change during the open feeding period.

2) However, inverted pail feeders atop all hives--this pamphlet's recommended (and my favorite) method--did briefly encourage intense robbing within my apiary. This robbing was easily halted by turning the six hives being robbed 180 degrees on their hive stands. To clarify, while robbing was in progress, I picked up and turned around affected hives that originally faced south, so that their entrances then faced north. This is the simplest effective method I've found to halt robbing, while still allowing house bees to come and go as they please. Robber bee traffic/interest at the original entrance location typically stops within 15-20 minutes, and forager traffic--indicated by incoming pollen--is seemingly uninterrupted at the new entrance location.

3) I routinely move brood frames covered in nurse bees from hive to hive. So, "spreading disease" between my own beehives is not a concern to me, personally. Some folks freak out about that, but it's a standard part of my management practice. As I've written a zillion times, I only want robust bees that can handle whatever comes their way. Good riddance to weak/sucky bees, I say.



NOTE:

I repeated the two week open feeding experiment at my Lake Lure, NC apiary and found a similar weight gain distribution pattern using live monitoring with electronic hive scales. All hives (then ~30) at that bee yard are arranged on three rows of hive stands (running east to west) contained within a 40ft square electric bear fence. I placed two feed tubs at the back fence (north side, behind all hives). Only hives on the back row showed appreciable weight change. The middle and front row hives showed no appreciable weight change, which confirmed no robbing occurred within the apiary.

*By "appreciable" I mean out of the ordinary for the season.

My summary:

Tons of reputable large & mid-size beekeeping operations, universities and even backyarders in dense city environments use open feeding with great success without a hint of the "Mythical" robbing, disease spreading nor feeding other area beehives. I found even hives on the edges of my own bee yard didn't access the feed tubs! The "standard" recommended application is one open feeder (Rubbermaid tub, 55 gallon barrel, etc.) per ten beehives. That said, rather than open feeding I much prefer an inverted 2 gallon pail atop each hive's inner cover. Because it puts the feed directly onto each hive, it's far more fine tuneable to the needs of each specific beehive.

I generally hesitate to make suggestions anymore. But strictly based on my own experience, I'd recommend: 1) Place open feeders within 15-20 feet of hives; 2) Monitor hive weights daily & adjust as needed; 3) Maybe let super strong opinions of others roll off your back and do what works for you & your bees. After all, nobody knows your bees, your family situation and your work/life balance requirements better than you!

Bee School 2019 *by Gerry Mack*

Our annual Introductory Beekeeping School is in full swing. We are more than halfway through the curriculum and Students are very excited to get into their Mentor's bee-yards for some hands-on experience when the weather cooperates.

- Introduction to Beekeeping
- Honey Bee Biology and Behavior
- Beekeeping Equipment Choices
- Establishing New Bee Hives
- Equipment Demonstration Day
- Controlling Varroa Mites
- Hands-On Beekeeping Practices
- Honey Bee Pests and Disease
- Beekeeper's Annual Calendar
- Class Review and NCSBA Certified Exam

We have over 50 Mentors this year to help 140 Students get started as beekeepers. Thanks to all the mentors, instructors and other volunteers who have again made our BeeSchool a success.

Photo credit Shelly Sporre: The annual Mentor Fashion Parade during Equipment Class



In The Beeyard

David S. Segrest NC Master Beekeeper

Who's to know what to do with this weird weather. The ground hog says we are having an early spring. Some days I believe it. Some days I don't. Most beekeepers seem to be experiencing brood buildup already. That probably means we will have an early swarm season. Everyone should have a bait hive installed as soon as possible to trap any swarms. Also a close watch should be kept for swarm cells.

There are several options for swarm cells. Waiting until they are capped is too late. They need to be dealt with while they are wet. (A wet cell is one with a larva inside). Know the difference in queen cells and queen cups. Bees build queen cups on a regular basis, sometimes they just tear them down later. Sometimes they use them to raise a queen. A queen cell like other cells is capped eight days after the egg is laid. This means the hives need to be checked a minimum of every 7 days. This does not require tearing down the whole hive.

Swarm cells are almost always on the bottom of the frame. They will be in a brood box. Lift the box at an angle and observe the bottoms of the frames. If the hive has more than 2 boxes the upper boxes will need to be removed. There may be queen cells in the middle or upper portion of the frame. These will probably be emergency or supercedure cells. They can be an early warning sign for a colony with a developing queen problem. Examine the brood pattern. Look for very young larvae or eggs. Look for the queen. Do not destroy or remove these cells unless you are extremely confident that a viable queen is present.

Finding swarm cells gives the beekeeper several options:

- 1) let the bees swarm and catch the swarm.
- 2) remove the cells with a couple of frames with bees, pollen, honey and brood. Put them in a queen castle or nuc and start a new colony. If these cells come from a good productive healthy colony this is one of the best ways to grow an apiary.
- 3) just destroy the queen cells. This is a wasteful option, but for people who don't want any more colonies or who don't have the resources to house more colonies it may be the logical choice.

The space needed to describe a Snellgrove board and its uses is not available here. It can be researched on the internet. This is the time of year when it can be most useful.



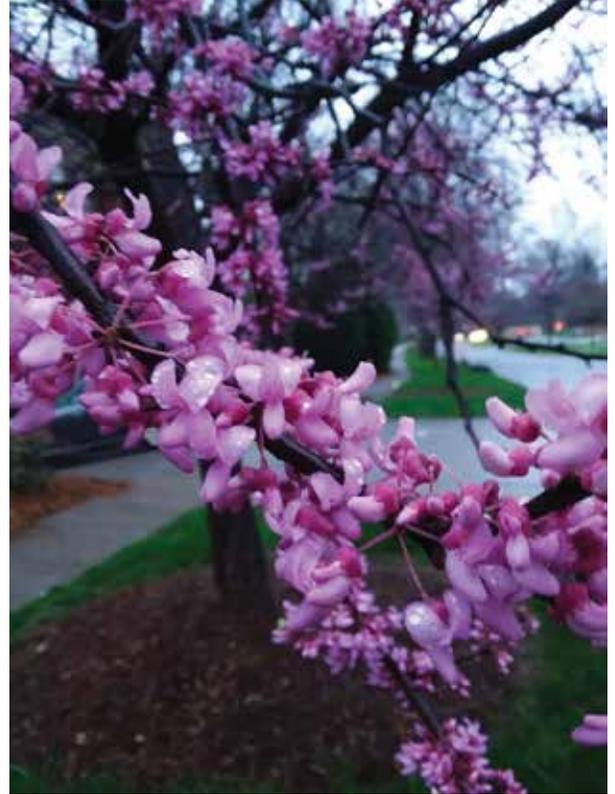
What's Blooming in March: Eastern Redbud

by Matt Burgoon

Common Name: Eastern Redbud
Botanical Name: *Cercis canadensis*
Plant Type: Mid-story tree
Typical Bloom Period: February-March
Nectar Usefulness: medium
Pollen Usefulness: medium

I always think of fireworks – the low rockets that hiss into the sky and pop with a spark and we wait for a long second before our eyes are dazzled all-at-once by a globe of snowflakes. So it is with an Eastern Redbud tree in bloom, be it in a park or along a street or the edge of a wood. The dark colored trunk and branches and twig tips are all covered with pink-almost-purple flowers in small bunches and there are no leaves yet to obscure them.

Cercis canadensis is native in Mecklenburg County, an understory tree growing 20 to 40 feet. It is in family Leguminosae, with beans and peas. It has a deep taproot and an irregular, shrubby form so it is widely planted as a landscape ornamental. It flowers early in the season, just before dogwoods, and in a second movement puts out delicate, heart-shaped leaves.



The individual flowers are in papilionaceous configuration: they have a banner petal, two wing petals, and two keel petals. The banner (top) petal has nectar guides: visual cues to direct a bee to the nectary. A visiting bee lands on the keel petals, and the enclosed stamens spring up to deposit pollen on the insect's abdomen. *Cercis canadensis* is dioecious and self-fertile so the species fidelity of a pollinator is not important. Fertilized ovaries will develop into “pea pods” with several seeds in each; the pods are shaped as a weaver's shuttle, which is called kerkis in Greek. Our honey bees harvest a medium amount of nectar from the flowers and a fair amount of pollen, which appears creamy white in their corbiculae. Bumblebees also like redbuds, and observers have documented blueberry bees (*Habropoda laboriosa*) visiting redbud flowers. Leafcutting bees (*Megachilidae spp.*) will line their nests with bits of redbud leaves — round cut-outs in the leaves are evidence of their work.

We beekeepers can eat redbuds too. Redbud flowers taste like snow peas with an extra sweetness. They wilt quickly, so be sure to pick them just before tossing on top of a salad. The pods are also edible when green. If you have a regular driving route or walking path in Mecklenburg County, chances are you have a turn or a hill which by passing you come upon a redbud tree. Think of the bees, and think of fireworks!

Most of the information in this article was gathered from the following sources.

An older work with some fine illustrations:

Robertson, K. (1976). *Cercis: The Redbuds*. *Arnoldia*, 36(2), 37-49. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42954079>



(What's Blooming in March: Eastern Redbud cont'd)

A detailed write-up in the U.S. Silvics Manual:

<https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/1548>

On leafcutting bees:

https://entomology.ifas.ufl.edu/creatures/misc/bees/leafcutting_bees.htm

On blueberry bees foraging beyond blueberries:

John B Pascarella (2007) Foraging patterns of the southeastern blueberry bee *Habropoda laboriosa* (Apidae, Hymenoptera): Implications for understanding oligolecty, *Journal of Apicultural Research*, 46:1, 19-27

On nectar and pollen values:

Peter Lindtner (2014) *Garden Plants for Honey Bees*

Kalamazoo : Wicwas Press.

2019 MCBA OFFICERS

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

Email submissions to:
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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

