



The Monthly Newsletter of the Mecklenburg County Beekeepers Association March 2018

President's Buzz

A Belated "Telling the Bees"

A close co-worker told me once that when she sat in on that first meeting Dean and I held together, she thought we were going to kill one another. We disagreed on a number of items, and neither was willing to budge. We had driven to the site together, so she wondered if we would survive the drive home. Well, survive we did. And after a rocky start, a relationship grew over the space of a number of shared projects, with Dean as the project manager and me as the project engineer/subject matter expert. It grew to the point that in the last few years, we readily described one another to others as best friends. We travelled together to meetings at the facilities for those projects, and spent a lot of "windshield time" together, sharing our lives, talking about our families and laughing at some of the situations we found ourselves in. One thing that Dean shared with me was his beekeeping hobby. He started keeping bees as a child when he helped his dad with his father's bees. Unlike his siblings, he continued beekeeping as an adult, struggling to adapt to the changing conditions as new pests and diseases were introduced.

I was fascinated with his bee stories, and "caught the bug", culminating in Marianne's and my enrollment in MeckBees' 2012 Bee School. While I relied primarily on my mentors for information and assistance, Dean and I would talk about bees a lot, comparing what we were seeing in our hives (he lived near Boiling Springs), and what kind of equipment we were using. Dean actually started to rely on me for counsel, because he had not had the benefit of teachings about varroa mites, hive beetles, and other pests and diseases, and I could share more recent information on how to help the bees with those. It wasn't long after I started keeping bees that Dean's health started to decline, and he had to have major surgery that greatly weakened him. As a result, he could no longer lift hive boxes, and wasn't able to do much but watch the activity in front of the hives, and clean out the hive beetle oil trays under the bottom boards.

Dean's health never recovered. As I write this article, it's been almost exactly two years ago that he retired. He lived less than six months after his retirement date, fighting with all of his strength to live so he could enjoy his final years with his beloved wife.

Even though she's over an hour drive away, we have stayed in touch with his wife, Genie. Occasionally we talked about his bees, but by the time spring rolled around, last year, I was working again, and didn't have enough time to tend our own hives, much less drive down to Boiling Springs to check on Dean's bees.

Neither of Dean's kids ever caught the beekeeping bug, so I guess I wasn't too surprised when Genie called me a couple of weeks ago, and said that her son was loading all of Dean's beekeeping equipment in her car to give to me. Since I currently work at a plant near Boiling Springs, could I meet with her for lunch that Monday? My reply was, "Certainly!"

We met for lunch at a little place called "The Dutch Broad" in the town of Cliffside, which is near the Broad River. We

March's Meeting

**March 15
7 PM**

Mouzon United Methodist
Church
3100 Selwyn Avenue
Charlotte, NC



caught up with one another (she's moving to live closer to her daughter), and shared many memories of Dean. I asked what became of the hive that remained when he died. She said those bees didn't make it, either. It made me think of the poem, "Telling the Bees" by John Greenleaf Whittier, where the "chore-girl" sung to the bees of their mistress' passing, begging them to stay home and "fly not hence!" In her grief, I doubt Genie gave the bees much thought. So, did they know their master was no longer home, and decide to fly off in search of a new home and master? I wonder . . .

Much of the equipment Genie gave me that day was new (having been bought shortly before Dean got too ill to care for his bees), or in good condition. Genie wanted me to make sure the equipment receives a good home. So, some will be given as prizes to our newbees in Bee School. Other equipment may be made available to our regular members at the next bee meeting. A few things I am keeping. If you are the lucky recipient of some of Dean's equipment, please send him a kind thank you. I'm sure he's looking down on us from heaven, and will respond with a smile and a hearty "you're welcome."

A Strange Winter

Some winters are normal, others are cold, and some are warm. This winter has tried to be a little of all three. After a much colder than normal January, the weather seems to have turned 180o, with the weather being significantly warmer than normal.

This has resulted in some interesting changes in plants blooming that I haven't seen before. Some examples:

Our mahonias, which normally bloom in January, providing an early pollen treat for the bees, only started blooming a couple of weeks ago.

Our camellias, which normally bloom at a fairly steady pace from roughly Christmas into early March had their early blooms killed by the week of severely cold weather in early January, and showed no signs of resuming through the next month. I was convinced that the other flower buds had been killed by the cold. But much to my amazement, the camellias are in full bloom. Unlike other years, it's as though they have saved up all of their flower buds to open up at the same time, resulting in a blaze of red that I've never seen in the nearly 30 years I've lived here.



We have a number of different varieties of hellebores, and they bloom at different times. Some start around Christmas, while others wait until March to open up. Again, nothing opened up in January, but ALL of them have opened in the last couple of weeks, and we are experiencing a lovely rush of blooms from our hellebores all at once.

One regular that is currently in bloom is our tulip magnolia, with its gorgeous array of lavender/white blooms. Most winters, the buds opportunistically open up on a warm February day, only to turn brown a few days later when cold weather returns, turning them a nasty brown while they are still in their prime. But if the current weather forecast is correct, we may get to enjoy these blooms for the next week or two.



All of this is reflected in the pollen buildup we're seeing in the hives. We're also seeing some fresh, wet honey in some of the comb. The long stretch of warm weather has encouraged the girls to take risks with their brood, and most of the hives I checked this weekend have far more brood that the bees in the hive can protect if cold weather forces them into a cluster. There is a lot of capped brood, and I'm hoping that a large number of bees will be emerging in the next week, increasing the bee population to necessary levels to protect the brood nests if temperatures should drop.

~Ed

If you would like to read the poem, "Telling the Bees," here is a link: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45491/telling-the-bees>

Cleaning Screened Inner Covers by Gerry Mack

We use screened inner covers for extra summer ventilation. Our bees, however, seem to consider it a challenge to cover the screens with propolis and wax. They will propolize the top side and sometimes from the hive side.



It's not easy to clean the screen by scraping: you can damage the mesh and propolis remains embedded between the wires. I have tried scouring with a wire brush and burning with a butane torch. Wire brushing took forever and the torch ignited the propolis which was exciting but made the wires brittle.



This year I tried a heat gun normally used to strip paint. I set up empty deep boxes as a work station with cardboard underneath to catch drips. It works quickly, easily and doesn't make a mess (except on the cardboard). The boxes seem to contain the hot air, speeding up the process.

Set your screened inner cover Upside Down on the work boxes. This applies hot air to the hive side of the cover which lets gobs of propolis soften and fall off the wire. Any wax melts instantly. Doing it the other way takes longer as it requires all the propolis to liquify and drip through the wire.

Work outside if you try this - hot propolis has an acrid smell and can get a little smokey.



In the Beeyard

David Segrest, NC Master Beekeeper

Is it winter, spring or summer? Every day is different. Every apiary seems to be different as well. Some people are losing colonies. Some colonies are doing great. The bees are flying almost every day. They are bringing in nectar and pollen. How should a beekeeper respond? Some of the situations are very hard calls because they are unprecedented.

A hive with 3 boxes has brood in the two top boxes. Should they be Demaréd (not sure that's a word, but you know what it means). My solution was to move the bottom box up. The top was a medium. There is brood in the top and bottom both now. "Never break the brood chamber." Well I just did. All of the boxes are full of bees. There's not much cold weather coming before the top box has time to emerge. Another super was added as well. These girls are bringing the stuff in. They may need it all for brood rearing, but I hate to deny them the opportunity to make surplus. Bees need a lot of room at this time of year. If they don't get it they will swarm. Also the nectar comes in to fill the storage area.

There were drones in some of the hives the weekend of the 17th and 18th and drone cells as well. That means it is time to start looking for swarm cells or start raising queens. It is not necessary to go all the way through the frames. Lift each box and look at the bottom of the frames. That is where the swarm cells will be. If there are queen cells on the middle of the frames, they are probably emergency cells and should be left alone.

The March meeting is about grafting. There will be three experts on a panel. Everyone does the grafting a little different so we will get different techniques. A lot of the request for meeting topics involved splitting hives. Some of the splitting methods involve new queens or queen cells so this will be laying the groundwork for raising local stock. Bees that are bred to be successful in the environment where they will be working are the best way for the beekeeper to be successful in the area where they work.

It is time to put up swarm traps.



*Dietlinde Zipkin grafting.
She will be part of the panel
on the "ides of March"*



What's Blooming in March: Blackberry

by Matt Burgoon

Common Name: Sawtooth or highbush blackberry

Botanical Name: *Rubus argutus*

Plant Type: Evergreen and deciduous climber

Typical Bloom Period: March-April

Nectar Usefulness: medium

Pollen Usefulness: medium



Rubus argutus.

“Hope you wore long pants.” I think I’ve said it a hundred times when planning excursions on foot with friends and their parents. I’m usually referring to the smilax vines but sometimes I’m warning about our native highbush, or “sawtooth” blackberry — *Rubus argutus*.

In Mecklenburg County, our wild blackberries grow along the edges of fields and roads, their seeds distributed in bird droppings to establish dense thickets anywhere they can get a full dose of sun.

Initially a tall shoot called a *primocane*, which has clusters of five leaflets and severe thorns, grows from a seed. In the second year the shoot grows leaflets in clusters of three. It is then called a *floricane* because it will bear flowers and fruit.

The flowers of *Rubus argutus* are white, with five petals. They are perfect — each flower has both anthers and stigmas. There are numerous stigmas in the center of the flower, and each one will form a seed when fertilized. Our honey bees and native bees pollinate blackberries, but in absence of pollinator activity, they will form seeds asexually, duplicating female genetic material to form viable seeds which are clones of the parent. This process is called apomixis.

Around each seed a fruit called a drupelet will form and the cluster of berries from a single flower is called a *syncarp*. These aggregate berries will turn from light pink to darkest purple and be ripe to pick in July. When picked, the white center, or torus, will stay with the berry; *syncarps* of the black raspberry *Rubus occidentalis* would leave the torus behind.

Our honey bees like wild blackberries, as they are a good source of nectar, and the pellets of pollen are gray. We keepers like them too: the fruits, leaves, and root bark have significant nutritional and medicinal value, especially in their antioxidant, diuretic, and astringent properties. We’re careful, though, to wear long pants when visiting a blackberry patch. And long sleeves. And gloves.

Most of the information in the article was gathered from the following sources:

On nectar and pollen values:

Garden Plants for Honey Bees

by Peter Lindtner;

Publisher: Kalamazoo : Wicwas Press, 2014.

On human medicinal use (of a close cousin):

<https://pfaf.org/User/plant.aspx?latinname=Rubus+fruticosus>

Further detail on apomixis:

<http://www.els.net/WileyCDA/ElsArticle/refId-a0002035.htm>



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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

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

