

Spilling the Honey

GBA Monthly Newsletter

Editors: Gina Gallucci and Linda Tillman



(Photo of bee on Mahonia by Gina Gallucci)

Message from our President: Jerry Edwards

I attended the annual Farm Bureau meeting at Jekyll Island and returned home quite pleased with its outcome. I spoke at the Commodity Conference to the Honeybee Committee, and they want to partner with our organization regarding agricultural, zoning, and product issues involving the honey bee.

Keith and Rose Ann Fielder represented the GBA with an information table at the exhibit hall and deserve our thanks for their efforts. Six hundred eighty people dropped by to talk " bees" so they were busy! More information about this conference will be

available at our GBA state meeting at Lake Blackshear Resort in Cordele, GA on the second Friday and Saturday in February. See you then.

Jerry Edwards

President GBA President

Saving the World, One Bee at a Time

Lessons in Beekeeping From Georgia to Maine

By Cindy Bee

Last February I moved to Maine. Everyone said it would be cold and bleak, and why would I want to leave Georgia where the bees fly nearly year 'round and there's always *something* blooming even if it isn't nectar producing? Why trade 50 and 60-degree days in what southerners call "winter" for the stark, enduring, single digits?

Admittedly, beekeeping is different here. It's been like learning the craft all over again, or nearly so. Everything is immediately weather contingent. Things happen faster and the people move with an exigency that's reminiscent of the bees themselves. There's only a short window of opportunity to collect the precious nectar and so the worker bees respond with the same urgency as the residents here, all driven by what I used to think of as "the north wind." One week the leaves fall; the next it's the snow that falls. At least it seems that fast.

The first difference I noticed was that people gather. They like to come to bee meetings; like to sign up and attend bee schools; like to attend open hive opportunities in the summer offered by the growing number of Master Beekeepers here. There's a pride in being educated about bees that reflects the difficulties in mastering the craft here in Maine. People here like to be "in the know." It comes from a long historic tradition of doing things right so one can survive the winter.

But if we were to take it season by season and start with the fall, hive productivity comes to a fast halt before Thanksgiving. By then, it's pretty much time to "gang" and/or wrap the hives. Ganging is pushing the nucs together, huddling them in a long line facing south where they can suck up as much sun as possible and gather warmth from each other as well. The hives here are painted a dark color, usually dark green so they can make use of solar gain all year. Many beekeepers also wrap their

hives in tarpaper for the winter months and put homosote (a compressed paper board with a small groove to vent moisture) under the top cover. I've wondered why we don't use homosote in the south, and I believe it must be because mold would grow so quickly on it. But it's wonderful stuff to suck up the moisture caused by the incredible heat bees will produce.

Getting one's bees through the long winter months is a challenge. If they don't starve due to an immobility of the cluster in the extreme cold, they may succumb to chalk brood or nosema or European foul brood, or a host of other possibilities. If the cluster becomes too small, they freeze. There's no feeding once the temperatures dip. Candy boards or even raw sugar in rim feeders are often seen as a "Hail Mary," done more to make the beekeeper feel better than actually to limp the bees along.

The winter is long and severe and only the strongest of hives, those fattened to the greatest capacity two deeps and a medium can hold, will emerge to see the dandelions - that cherished golden flower marking the end of winter. People up here don't kill their dandelions, nor any flower. The late blooming purple vetch is as much a friend as the long lasting clover or Black-eyed Susan. What gives way to celebration is determined by the wait, the struggle toward appreciation.

On those first pretty days of early spring, when the temperature claws its way to the upper forties or low fifties, beekeepers will put out pollen buckets. What a party to see the bees frolic and roll, dance and cover themselves as they gather the pollen substitute and manage their way back home. Hive entrances will be dusted with the yellowish mixture and bees will happily revisit the buckets until the pussy willow lure them to fuzzier pastures. It's a beekeeper's delight to see the hives alive and active and the rejuvenation is contagious. Bee meetings take on a different energy, the phone begins to ring with requests for nucs and queens, and honey customers return with their sweet anticipation of, "*now* how long until harvest?"

But winter isn't over. "Leaf out", a common term in the Northeast, seems to take forever. Spring is a slow and delicate season here, one that demands savoring and anticipation, as if she demands the entitlement of patience. To the beekeeper this means there's little or no nectar yet, not until April at soonest. Those hives that have made it might need to be fed (always internally), and bottom boards should be cleaned out from natural attrition throughout the winter where mouse guards prevent the pushing out of dead sisters.

Mice are another problem of great concern here and quarter inch hardware cloth is stapled to the tiniest hole of an entranceway. If there happens to be a faintly warm day, some brave bees might emerge to cleanse themselves and do so through entrance holes drilled in upper boxes. These are also covered with hardware cloth.

Once the flow is on, when the blossoms of clovers, wildflowers, and apple (there are plenty of apple trees here – in the fall the fruit is so plentiful they roll in the streets in some places) begin in full, beekeepers will put on their first wet super.

Beekeepers in Maine typically leave their supers wet rather than putting them back on the hive for the bees to clean up after the last harvest. There's no concern about wax moths – most supers are stored in barns (a good many people here have tiny houses for ease of heating, but *huge* barns). The cold takes care of the wax moths, so there's no concern about chewed up drawn comb.

More importantly, there are no small hive beetles! I'm hoping these beekeepers in the Northeast aren't being too complacent about this pest. Occasionally one or two beetles will be spotted in a hive and reported to the group, but for the most part the beetles haven't been able to perpetuate here. Still, having lived through the horrors of this pest in the south as it demolished hives leaving a slimy nasty cleanup in its wake, I want to warn these naïve beekeepers, want to recommend they close their borders somehow against this atrocity. But that's impossible with the need to pollinate the blueberries and pollination contracts abound so bees are trucked in from territory rich in beetle population.

But back to the wet supers. These are placed on the hives and give the bees a tiny boost, a promise of the goodness to come. These small droplets of honey remaining on the cells awaken the bees to the needs and functions of the hive. There's nothing remotely like fresh honey to awaken a bee, to welcome her to the gifts of a new season.

Bees everywhere are extremely opportunistic. Here in Maine however, it seems they're ever ready to take full advantage of even the smallest of situations. Again, I hold they're thinking ahead, thinking that spring and summer will only last just so long. That's why robbing is always a prime concern here. Any feeding must be done internally, usually by baggie or bucket feeders. Entrances remain reduced except during the strongest of flows. If there's a dry spell (by 85 degrees here nectar can dry up), or if there is a hiccup in the flow between blossoms, robbing becomes a real issue. The beekeeper needs to be very diligent in observing the hives.

There are two distinct harvests here. The first comes from the spring flowers, those celebrated blooms from Alders then maples, apples and other trees. Clover is a constant standby all spring and into late summer. Unlike in Georgia, it seldom dries up and even then can rejuvenate into a healthy forage source with a simple rainy day. There are lots of basswood trees (linden), honey locust, and others to carry nectar flows.

By late summer the bamboo buds out and the bees are on the white blooms sucking the precious nectar known as "Knotweed." Knotweed is equivalent to our kudzu. It's invasive and pops up everywhere. Efforts to kill it are typically futile. The difference is that knotweed yields a beautiful red honey. It's the best tasting honey I've ever had, and beekeepers sell out of it at premium prices here.

The second harvest takes place around Labor Day. The last dying asters, only a few weeks away, signify the end of the season. Then the bees are treated for mites, the weaker ones (those late arrivals caught as swarms or removals) are boosted as much as possible before the cold closes the opportunity to feed.

By December the beekeeper looks out the back door across the snow-glistened yard. If one were paid in cash for good wishes, beekeepers would be rich. In another two months how many of us will be caught sneaking into the bee yard to put a hand, an ear, to the side of a hive hoping for a sign of life?

Beekeeping is different here in Maine. Keeping bees is always a challenge anywhere, but these people in the Northeast have good reason to close the gap between these tiny insects and the education it takes to tend them. Thus, there's a treasured closeness between keeper and bee. I've been privileged to stand in this realization and to join in the efforts to see the bees through another winter in Maine.

"Veiled in this fragile filigree of wax is the essence of sunshine, golden and limpid, tasting of grassy meadows, mountain wildflowers, lavishly blooming orange trees, or scrubby desert weeds. Honey, even more than wine, is a reflection of place. If the process of grape to glass is alchemy, then the trail from blossom to bottle is one of reflection. The nectar collected by the bee is the spirit and sap of the plant, its sweetest juice. Honey is the flower transmuted, its scent and beauty transformed into aroma and taste."

~ Stephanie Rosenbaum

December Street Cred:

This article came from ApiNews, October 2012

Abstract of an article in the Journal of Experimental Biology

GERMANY- HONEYBEES CONSOLIDATE NAVIGATION MEMORY DURING SLEEP

Wednesday, 31 October 2012 17:01 Written by [Analia Manriquez](#)

Paper prepared by Lisa Beyaert, Uwe Greggers and Randolph Menzel

Summary

Sleep is known to support memory consolidation in animals, including humans. Here we ask whether consolidation of novel navigation memory in honeybees depends on sleep. Foragers were exposed to a forced navigation task in which they learned to home more efficiently from an unexpected release site by acquiring navigational memory during the successful homing flight. This task was quantified using harmonic radar tracking and applied to bees that were equipped with a radio frequency identification device (RFID). The RFID was used to record their outbound and inbound flights and continuously monitor their behavior inside the colony, including their rest during the day and sleep at night. Bees marked with the RFID behaved normally inside and outside the hive. Bees slept longer during the night following forced navigation tasks, but foraging flights of different lengths did not lead to different rest times during the day or total sleep time during the night. Sleep deprivation before the forced navigation task did not alter learning and memory acquired during the task. However, sleep deprivation during the night after forced navigation learning reduced the probability of returning successfully to the hive from the same release site. It is concluded that consolidation of novel navigation memory is facilitated by night sleep in bees.

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Link: [The Journal of Experimental Biology](#)

*“The careful insect 'midst his works I view,
Now from the flowers exhaust the fragrant dew,
With golden treasures load his little thighs,
And steer his distant journey through the skies.”*
~ John Gay, *Rural Sports* (canto I, l. 82)

Funny Beekeeping Story of the Month:**Bee-wo Jima**

By Curt Barrett



(This photo and others in this article by Bunny Vrooman)

For many a beekeeper the allure of capturing a swarm ranks up there with the rare chance of seeing a meteor shower or viewing a big dorsal fin while whale watching.

Early spring of 2012 had us all on high alert as swarm calls were in high numbers. Still a novice hobbyist, I'd never caught a swarm, but was willing to give it a try if the opportunity presented itself. I needed bees for one of my hives so I was hoping I'd get lucky.

On one early March afternoon I got THE call. It was my bee buddy, Bunny, with news of a swarm high up in her backyard hemlock. Her voice reeling with excitement, Bunny could hardly contain herself as she told me what was happening. She'd witnessed an unusually large number of bees swirling in the air above her back yard, near her hives.

A few hours later she spotted that beautiful, clustered mass of bees 30 feet up in the evergreen's branches doing what this amazing insect has done for millennia. Large and dark brown, molded around a nice forked branch way up high, the hive had swarmed and they were looking for a new home! Bunny was going to pass on the opportunity to capture the swarm and offered me first dibs! A golden opportunity awaited!

Conditions were not perfect. Daylight would be running out quickly after work; rain was in the forecast; temperatures were dropping; the swarm was very high in the tree which stood on a steep bank; and I had no tools with which to capture the swarm.

Those bees needed me and I needed them, but this all had to happen quickly if it were going to be a success.



With a call to another bee buddy, George, I arranged to borrow a swarm catcher. I enlisted the help of beekeeper Linda Tillman who gave some excellent suggestions before meeting her at Bunny's. Thankfully, we all live in the same neighborhood. I raced home, got my equipment, a hive box, some tools and drove by George's house to pick up the swarm catcher. I raced over to Bunny's a few blocks away. Linda had just arrived and Bunny, quite the photographer, was armed with her digital camera.

Some light rain showers had passed through and the ivy bed under the hemlock was wet. The sun had gone down, the temperature was dropping, but we were prepared. Linda and I got suited up and Bunny stood ready with the camera as her husband, Tom, looked on. Linda coached me through a very logical, methodical sequence of events. In an ideal situation, the swarm is not more than 10 off the ground; there are no obstructions between you and it; and the swarm is on its best behavior. That was not our situation.

The swarm catcher is ingeniously made of a big water cooler jug with its base cut out, inverted and fastened to the end of very long (30 ft.) telescoping painter's pole.

Planning is key so we extended the catcher to 30 feet and envisioned the arc path we

needed to follow to transport the swarm in the catcher down to the hive box near us on the ground. At 30 feet the extended painter's pole is somewhat flimsy but we practiced the arc from tree to hive box and positioned everything perfectly.



It was time. Bunny was ready; Linda was ready; I was ready. This rite of passage awaited and we hoped the bees were ready. Because of the embankment on which the tree stood, the pole had to be held at an odd angle from 30 feet under the swarm, but I got it positioned as well as I could and readied myself. I gave the catcher a quick upward push, jolting the bee cluster and causing it to fall en masse into the catcher jug. Now the fun began! The bee cluster was HEAVY and the extra weight in the jug at the end of the flimsy painter's pole made for a very precarious scene. That perfect arc we'd imagined and hoped to follow no longer existed. Each time we would move the flimsy catcher toward the hive box, it flew way off course and we rushed to counter its weighty, unwieldy trajectory. Linda and I were wrangling this jug full of bees to the ground, flip-flopping back and forth with several thousand bees' futures at stake! After some laughing and cussing, we managed to get it under control and safely dumped the bees into the hive box.

Bunny sent us her great photographic record of the adventure. Our favorite shot reminded us of the famous sculpture at Washington DC's Marine Corps War Memorial, based on the photograph entitled "Raising The Flag on Iwo Jima." You know the one.

Linda and I conquered that swarm capture and managed to invoke our own little Bee-wo Jima in the process.

GBA Club of the Month

Clarks Hill Beekeepers Association



Chuck Carroll started the Clarks Hill Beekeepers Association in the spring of 2008. Chuck served a two-year term as President and we met in Lincolnnton. We are now up to thirty members and have moved our meetings to a more central location at Walden's Pond, outside Appling. Charles Phillips took the helm as president in 2010. He also served a two-year term. Berman Kent, will now serve as president for the next two years.

We have had some speakers from our own club with many years of beekeeping experience share how they take care of their bees throughout the year. Jennifer Berry has made her way down from the University of Georgia several times to talk to us about mites and the many ways the Georgia Bee Lab and she personally takes care of bees. Eric Katz, one of the research assistants from the Georgia Bee Lab, told us how they go about testing bees and gathering information to help insure the honey bees' survival. Keith Fielder and Robert Brewer have spoken to our club several times and even helped direct a class for new beekeepers. Jonathan Hanger, from Aiken Beekeeper has talked to us about mites and several traps and techniques he uses in his hives. UGA Professor of Entomology, Dr. Keith Delaplane was one of our first speakers and he is scheduled to speak to our club again in February 2013

We are hosting a new beekeeping class in January. Everyone is welcome to come and learn about the bees and the plants that feed them.

Bee Well,

Deborah Sasser, Secretary, Clarks Hill Beekeepers Association

Please save the date. Our GBA spring meeting is Feb. 9th and 10th at Lake Blackshear Resort.

Upcoming Bee Events

- **Metro Atlanta Beekeepers Short Course**
January 19, 2013
Atlanta Botanical Garden
Atlanta, GA
<http://www.metroatlantabeekeepers.org/shortcourse.htm>
- **Tara Beekeeping Short Course**
January 19, 2013
Georgia Power Building
Forest Park, GA
<http://www.tarabeekeepers.org/class.html>
- **North American Beekeeping Conference & Tradeshow**
January 8-12, 2013
Hershey, PA
www.ABFNet.org
- **North Carolina & South Carolina State Beekeepers Associations**
Joint Spring Meeting
March 1-2, 2013
Rock Hill, SC

This is your newsletter

Your editors, Gina Gallucci and Linda Tillman

If you are enjoying our newsletter, please help us keep it up. We can't do it without your contributions. If you have an idea for something to share, a story to tell or a photo

you'd like us to see, please send it to gbanewsletters@gmail.com. If you think someone in your beekeeping group would be a good author of a short paragraph or two about tips for keeping bees, or a similar topic, please encourage him/her to send us an article. And if your bee club is presenting a short course or other educational opportunity let us know and we will list it in upcoming events.

We'd LOVE to hear from you,

Gina and Linda

“He shuts off the engine and alights from the truck. The only noise in the bee yard now is from the breeze in the towering pines, an occasional cricket song, and the subtle, enveloping hum of millions of bees. Looking down a row of hives, Smiley sees them dipping and diving, turning from brown to reflective silver as they dart from shade to sun. He takes a deep breath to admire and analyze the floral scents in the yard. “It’s a great day to be alive and keeping bees”.

From Robbing The Bees- Holley Bishop

GBA Officers 2012

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