THE MONTHLY PEEK into hive life

NORTHEASTERN INDIANA BEEKEEPING ASSOCIATION – MAY 2024

Our objective is to promote the art and skills of beekeeping in Indiana and throughout the world. By doing so, we preserve and improve the general environment in which we live, assist in providing better crop yield, provide high quality honey, and we do our part to preserve bees.

What's new in the May issue:

- President's Minutes
- Telling the Bees poem
- New Members
- Calendar of Events
- A Peek into Your Hive Life (Pictures from members)
- Field Day Events
- April meeting highlights with Natha Gidley Meteorologist
- Beecheck
- Stahlman Beekeeping Issue 17, Vol 6
- Beekeeping Around the World – Scandinavia the brown bee
- List of Officers
- American Bee Journal Subscription
- Bee Culture Subscription
- Places to buy bees, nucs and queens from our members
- Advertisements

From the Desk of the President: *Dr. Chris Lasalle*

May Presidential Minute

I have finally gotten through all of my hives. Swarm cells are everywhere. Many hives I have gone through have no queen but still tons of bees. Time to get supers on and splits made to keep them from swarming further. As of the last meeting there were only 4 people signed up for the swarm list. Please contact Rick Stephens if you are interested. I think there will be tons of calls for someone to get bees from trees!

I have only lost one colony from the winter. I credit my good luck to better varroa control. Most of the hives have made it through very strong.

Last month I mentioned my mini swarm that had really just absconded from my resource hive. Good to have, as I put it on top of my failed colony. This colony had lost their queen and there was a laying worker so nothing but drone brood. Still a decent number of bees made it through winter in this failed colony. Now that it has a new queen (actually last year's queen), it should be ready to go. Next I will need to go through the hives that have swarmed and make sure there is a laying queen. Also, something I found out the hard way. Make sure to check above the queen excluder. I have had queens return to the upper entrance instead of the lower entrance where she hatched. Need to get her back in the brood chamber or there will be a mess in the honey supers. This being baby bees instead of honey.

Reminder that Field Day will be our last meeting in the spring and summer. We will meet again in September. Please remember to bring your bee equipment and chair to sit on for Field Day. I cannot stress enough if you are a new beekeeper, this is not the meeting to miss. This is where we get our hands dirty. Many questions I get asked as a mentor get answered at Field Day. Questions like; how do I do an inspection, what should I be looking for, and how do I do a split. In addition, what are the warning signs that my hive is not doing well. This and more plus a great lunch. All is free except for lunch. Coffee and doughnuts will also be available. Keep your fingers crossed for good weather. May can be anywhere with regards to temperature.

See you in the Field.

Chris

Telling the Bees

Let's tell the bees
Their keeper has died
An intimate communion has ended
The wings that brushed their skin
The legs that held on
Will cling to something new

To not tell them,
It wouldn't be right
Come spring
They'd wonder
They'd know
They'd leave—

So, let's tell the bees
Our sisters in life
This communion has ended
But life remains

And someone was still here
Who could
Tell the bees

And so, a new communion begins
With those who remain
In a shared sense of loss
That'll last a time

Until all old life turns over
New life begins
And the old communion
Of telling the bees
Remains

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Brett Wilfong
Huntington

Rebecca McCann
Fort Wayne

William Stolz
Pennville

Grace Berg
Fort Wayne

Colton Cox
Leesburg

Karen Peterson
Fort Wayne

Donald Surine
Fort Wayne

Allison & Rick Sheets
Fort Wayne

Connie Chapman
Fort Wayne

Rebekah & Keaton Christiansen
Garrett

Mark & Amy Grzybowski
Grabill

Tyler & Bia Carboni
Fort Wayne

Dan & Elizabeth Noll
Fort Wayne

David Hollis
Fort Wayne

AJ & Alyssa Hamilton
Fort Wayne

David & Beth Lovitt
Fort Wayne

Kyra & Michael Zadylak
Bluffton

Tyler & Kaythlin Asplund
Roanoke

Ashley Boetther
Fort Wayne

Jillian Thomas
Fort Wayne

Tom Sprunger
Decatur

Natalie Leedy
Columbia City

Shannon Case
Columbia City

Andrea Schwieterman
Bluffton

Shelley Chapman
Leo

Dan & Melissa Kramer
Leo

Anthony Schillace
Columbia City

Amanda Esterling
Markle

Nicole Haupert
North Manchester

Andrea Beard
Avilla

Eden Mock
Bluffton

Greg Brite
Decatur

Charles Cox
Roanoke

Logan & Julie Beer
Berne

Virgil Shive
Fort Wayne

Carol Bierbaum
Berne

Kimberly Littlejohn
New Haven

Mark Demske
Claypool

Jacob Reusser
New Haven

Jenny Bertram
Fort Wayne

Logan Nickloy
Auburn

John Martinsky
Fort Wayne

Gretchen Epich
Fort Wayne

Kelly Parks
Fort Wayne

Laura Stalhut
Fort Wayne

SWARM LIST:

IF YOU WANT TO BE ON THE SWARM LIST,

TEXT RICK STEPHENS AT 260-610-1040

PLEASE INCLUDE: NAME

PHONE NUMBER

ADDRESS (HE NEEDS YOUR LOCATION)

Please *save the dates* for these important upcoming events:

May 11 - Saturday May 11th, May FIELD DAY + NEIBA Club Meeting, Buskirk Engineering

June – NO MEETING THIS MONTH

September 19 – Thursday September NEIBA Club Meeting, 7pm @ Classic Café

Topics:

AZ hive demonstration with Dana Goodman and Casey Filler

Winter Prep with Dave McComb

October 17 – Thursday October NEIBA Club Meeting, 7pm @ Classic Café

Topics:

State Apiary Inspector with Jarod Spokowsky

November 21 – Thursday October NEIBA Club Meeting, 7pm @ Classic Café

Topics:

Purdue to discuss bee genetics and bee types (Russian vs Italian)

A Peek into Your Hive Life

PLEASE SEND PICTURES OF YOUR HIVES!!!
TO: meanqueenhoneyfarm@gmail.com or reidenbachjp@gmail.com

This is a horizontal Langstroth hive. No heavy lifting and the bees are covered until you need to work with them. Shown without roof.

FIELD DAY EVENTS

We have a TERRIFIC 2024 NEIBA Family Fun Field Day Event planned for May 11th, generously hosted once again by James Wheeler and Family out at Buskirk Engineering and The Wheeler's Bee Store, located at 7224 E 900 N, Ossian, IN! Field Day is a wonderful opportunity to come together as a beekeeping community to enjoy fellowship with all of our friendly beekeepers, to learn more about how to better care for our bees and to be more successful than ever before with our hives.

I**n addition to having our State Bee Inspector, Jared Spokowsky** (Apiary Specialist & Nursery Inspector, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Entomology & Plant Pathology) **we are extremely fortunate and thrilled to have landed one of our club's all-time favorite speakers, Dr. David Hocutt, to give... not one... not two... but THREE OF HIS TOP AND MOST INTERESTING PRESENTATIONS during our morning field day session this year!**

We will start the morning at 8:00 am with Free Coffee and Donuts and then begin with our presentations at 8:15 am.

J**ared Spokowsky will be sharing updates and insights on bee pests and diseases.** He will also be bringing along FREE BeeCheck yard signs for anyone interested in using them.

Our Featured Guest Speaker, Dr. David Hocutt will be speaking on:

1) **Sustainable Beekeeping**
2) **Making Splits**
3) **Beekeeping Tips and Suggestions**

After the morning presentations, we will break for another Fantastic Field Day Lunch catered by Terry Clancy and The Classic Cafe:

1) Breaded Jalapeno Cheddar Brat with onions and assorted condiments on a Pretzel Roll (or)
2) Hamburger with choice of lettuce, tomato, onion on a Hawaiian Roll
3) Fresh Broccoli Salad

4) Rainbow Tortellini Salad
5) Fresh Fruit Salad
6) Assorted Gourmet Cookies
7) Honey Lemonade and Bottled Water

The cost of the catered lunch is a mere $15.00 per person (which is optional). Anyone is welcome to bring their own lunch ***or*** send an RSVP to BeeGreatCompany@gmailcom or by texting 260-229-8356.to make a reservation with our treasurer DAVE for the number of lunches they would like for themselves/their families in advance so that Terry can plan accordingly. You can also pay at my.cheddarup.com/c/field-day-73997 or at the door.

After lunch, we will have several Hands-On, LIVE HIVE DEMONSTRATIONS led by Duane and Tony Rekeweg and James Wheeler and TEAM.

There will also be drawings for all sorts of terrific door prizes **(Including a FREE NUC!!!),** a **Hive Smoker Contest** and possibly an indoor workshop or two after lunch as well (TBD).

*** The Wheeler Bee Store will be OPEN ALL DAY for your shopping convenience for ALL of your beekeeper needs. ***

Be *sure* to remember to Bring Your Bee Suits/Protective Gear for the afternoon Live Hive Demonstrations... and... Bring YOUR FAVORITE LAWN CHAIR TO SIT IN FOR THE MORNING PRESENTATIONS (*as no chairs will be provided*).

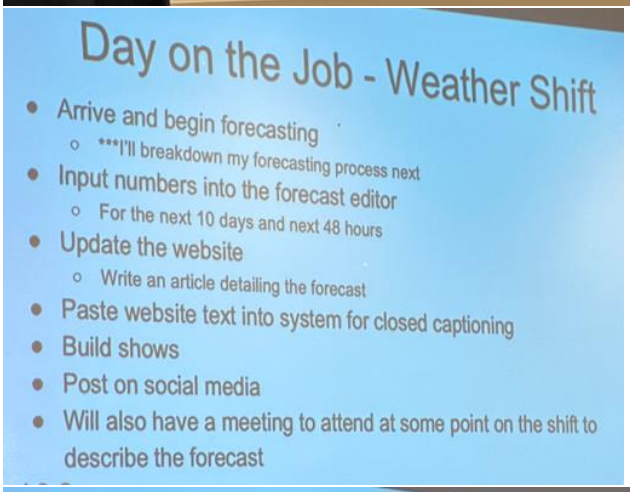
Looking forward to one of our Very Best Family Field Day Events EVER!

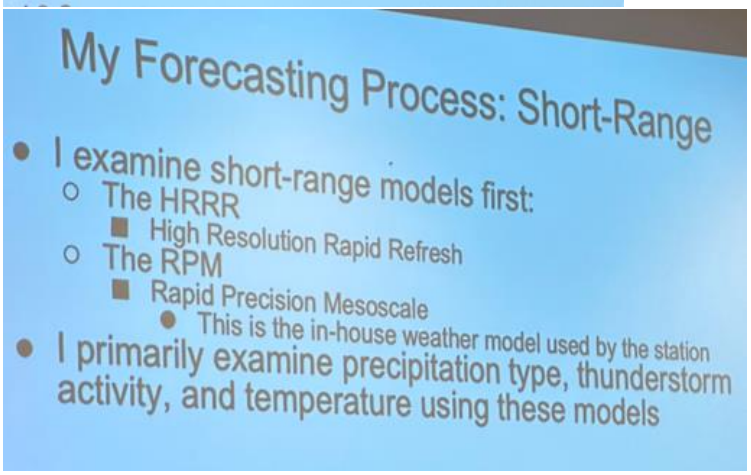
Respectfully, James Ringswald
NEIBA Field Day Coordinator

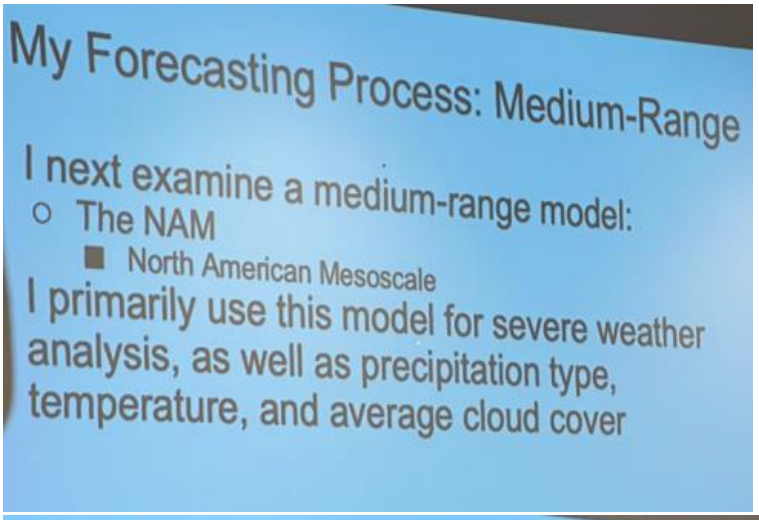
April Meeting Highlights

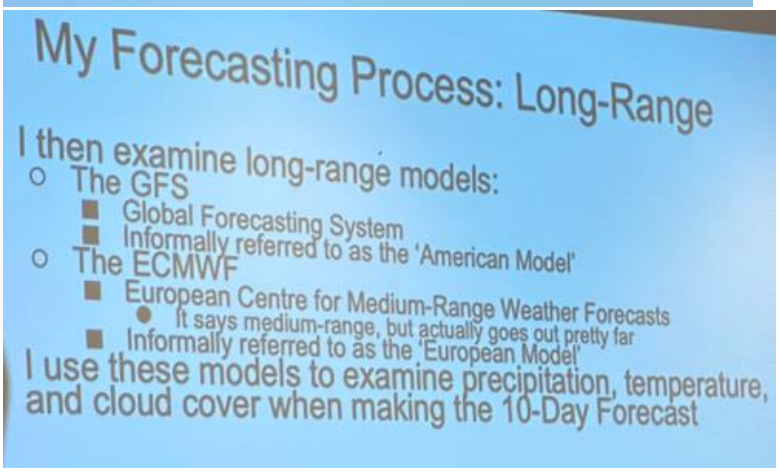
Nathan Gidley from WANE 15 was introduced by David Mullins. He has an important job letting us know what the weather is going to bring us.

His job starts very early in the morning. If I remember correctly about 2:30 am. Then he works his magic to compile all the information from different weather sites to bring us the weather forecast.



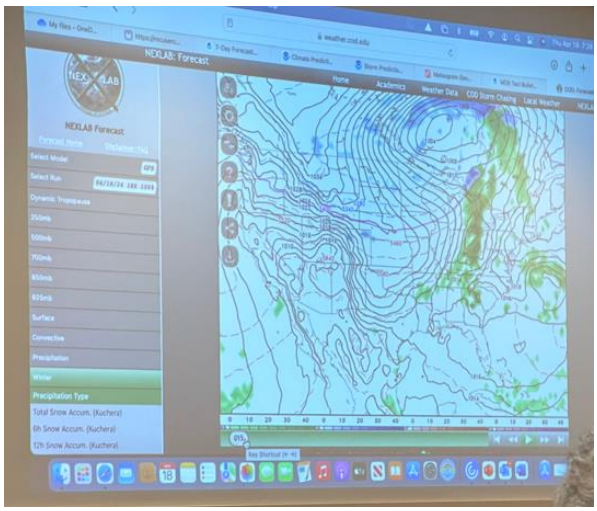






Here is a list of some of the different sites he has to visit to get our weather. Check them out, they are very helpful.

- National Weather Service Northern Indiana: https://www.weather.gov/iwx/
- Weather Prediction Center: https://www.wpc.ncep.noaa.gov/#page=ovw
- Storm Prediction Center: https://www.spc.noaa.gov/
- Climate Prediction Center: https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/
- Iowa State Meteogram: https://meteor.geol.iastate.edu/~ckarsten/bufkit/image_loader.phtml?site=kfwa&nam=on&nam_mos=on&namm=on&gfs_mos=on&gfs=on&gfsm_mos=on&gfsm=on&nws=on&rap=on&obs=on&nam4km=on&con=on&ratio=11&max_t=on&cobb=on&compaction=on&mean_mt=on&max_mt=on&mean=on
- COD Meteorology (Weather Models): https://weather.cod.edu/forecast/
- Pivotal Weather: https://home.pivotalweather.com/



Some Terms to Know

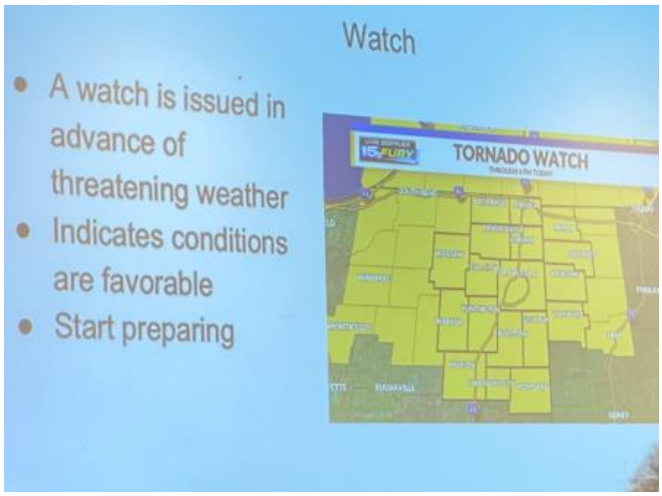
- **Temperature** - Perception of hotness/coldness
- **Humidity** - Moisture in the atmosphere
- **Dew Point Temperature** - Temp required to reach saturation
- **Pressure** - Weight of the air
- **Wind** - Speed of moving air
- **Visibility** - Distance in miles of how far you can see
- **Wind Chill/Heat Index** - What it feels like

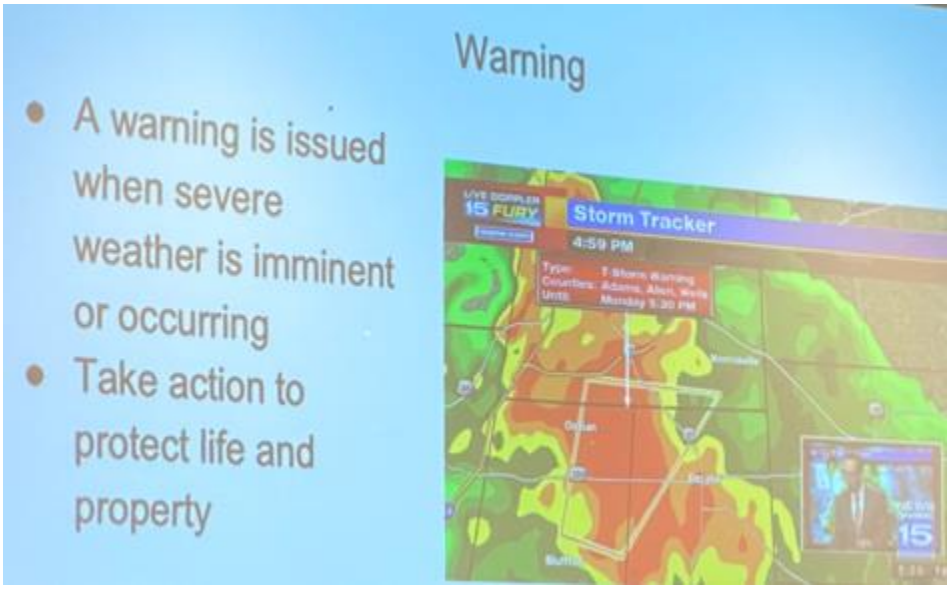
Severe Weather Categories

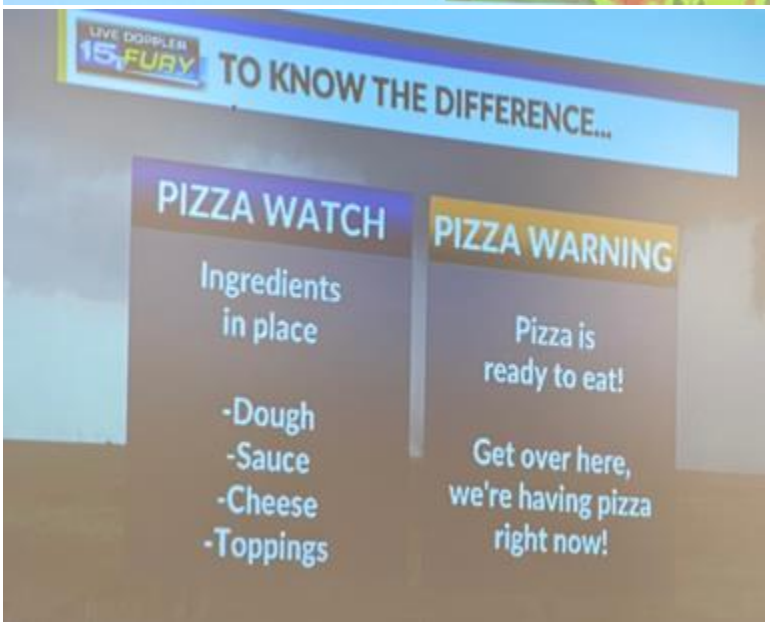
- **Wind**
- **Hail**
- **Flooding**
- **Tornadoes**
- Lightning
- Winter Storms
- Hurricanes
- Drought
- Extreme Heat
- Extreme Cold

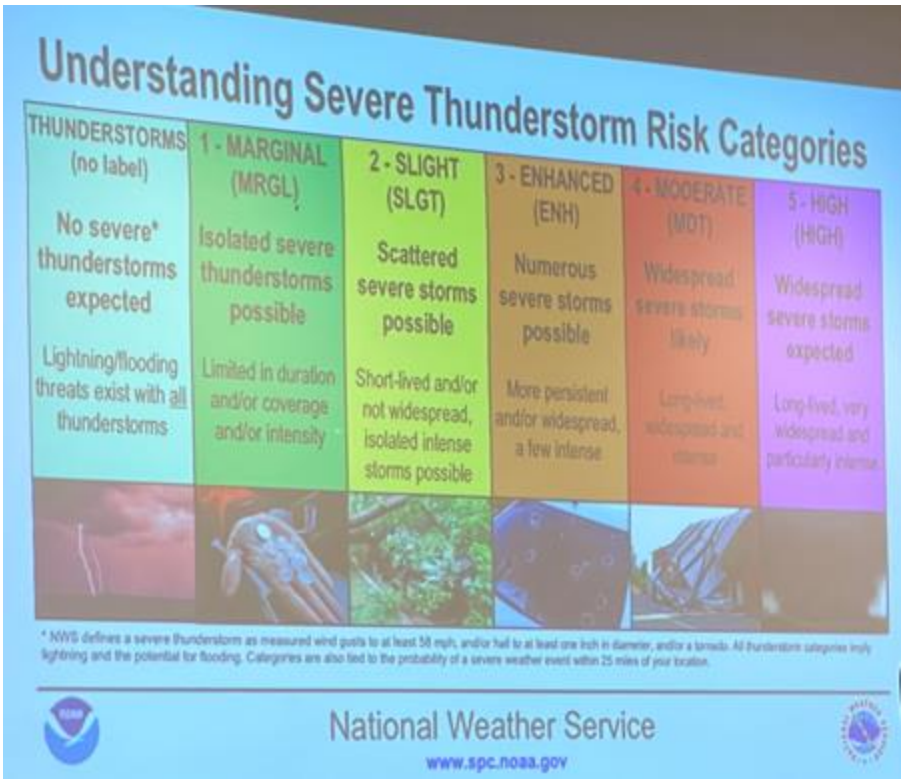
Severe Ingredients - SLIM

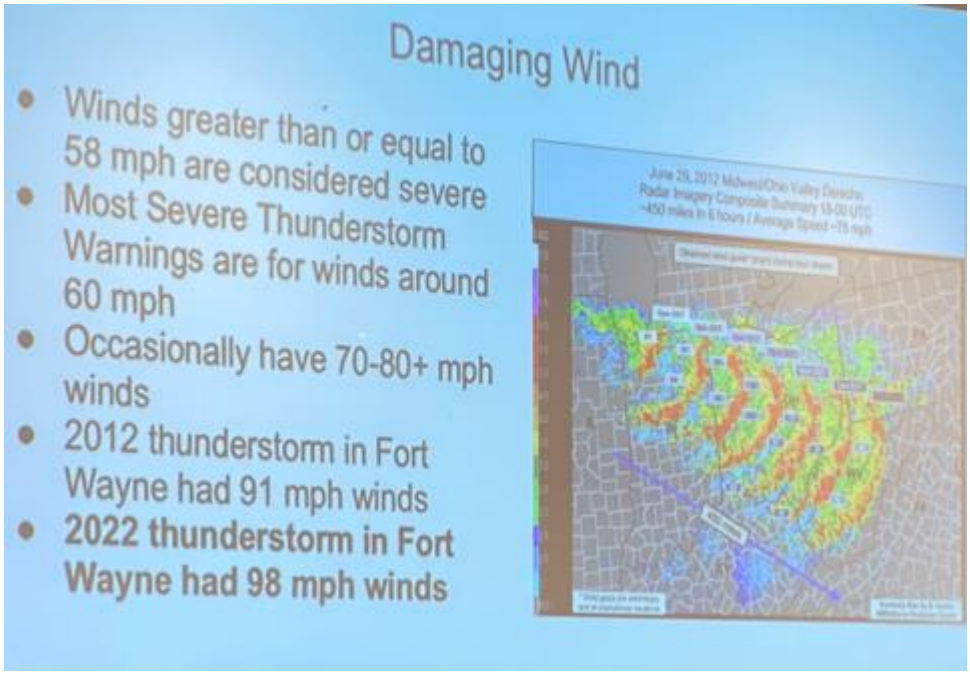
- Shear
- Lifting Mechanism
- Instability
- Moisture


Watch
A watch is issued in advance of threatening weather
Indicates conditions are favorable
Start preparing
TORNADO WATCH


Warning
A warning is issued when severe weather is imminent or occurring
Take action to protect life and property
Storm Tracker
4:59 PM


TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE...
PIZZA WATCH
Ingredients in place
-Dough
-Sauce
-Cheese
-Toppings
PIZZA WARNING
Pizza is ready to eat!
Get over here, we're having pizza right now!


Understanding Severe Thunderstorm Risk Categories
THUNDERSTORMS (no label)
No severe* thunderstorms expected
Lightning/flooding threats exist with all thunderstorms
1 - MARGINAL (MRGL)
Isolated severe thunderstorms possible
Limited in duration and/or coverage and/or intensity
2 - SLIGHT (SLGT)
Scattered severe storms possible
Short-lived and/or not widespread, isolated intense storms possible
3 - ENHANCED (ENH)
Numerous severe storms possible
More persistent and/or widespread, a few intense
4 - MODERATE (MDT)
Widespread severe storms likely
Long-lived, widespread and intense
5 - HIGH (HIGH)
Widespread severe storms expected
Long-lived, very widespread and particularly intense
* NWS defines a severe thunderstorm as measured wind gusts to at least 58 mph, and/or hail to at least one inch in diameter, and/or a tornado. All thunderstorm categories imply lightning and the potential for flooding. Categories are also tied to the probability of a severe weather event within 25 miles of your location.
National Weather Service
www.spc.noaa.gov


Damaging Wind
Winds greater than or equal to 58 mph are considered severe
Most Severe Thunderstorm Warnings are for winds around 60 mph
Occasionally have 70-80+ mph winds
2012 thunderstorm in Fort Wayne had 91 mph winds
2022 thunderstorm in Fort Wayne had 98 mph winds

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Local forecast by "City, St" or ZIP code
Enter location ... Go
Location Help

News Headlines
- April 2024 Precip Map/Extremes For Our Coverage Area (most places between 1.00-4.75"...but considerable variability)
- 2024 SKYWARN Storm Spotter Training Schedule (down to our last one)
- Spring 2024 Frost/Freeze Info (Frost Advisories/Freeze Warnings fully underway for the spring season)

2024 SKYWARN Storm Spotter Training Schedule (down to our last few!)

Hastings, NE
Weather Forecast Office

Training Schedule | About Spotters | What To Report | Amateur Radio | Becoming A Spotter | FAQ | Resources

Spotter Training Classes (Back to top)

Spotter training classes cover severe weather hazards including thunderstorms and tornadoes. This includes the general structure and movement of severe thunderstorms, identification of important storm features, and safety concerns.

- All classes to be conducted by the NWS Hastings office in 2024 are scheduled and posted below.
- All classes start at 630 PM, and last about 2 hours
- They are **free** and open to the public.
- Classes are appropriate for all ages. **Ages 10 and up** will likely get the most out of the training.
- Pre-registration is NOT required unless specifically noted for a particular class.
- Classes are scheduled in collaboration with local emergency management officials.
- You may attend a class in any location, offered by any NWS office, regardless of where you live.

SKYWARN

~~April 30~~	~~NE~~	~~Harlan~~	~~Alma~~	~~Alma Fire Station, 509 West Main St.~~
May 9	NE	Dawson	Farnam	Farnam Fire Station (rescheduled from April 25)

Online Spotter Training Course

The online course is a great introduction to storm spotting and can also be used as a refresher or a way to reinforce what you have learned in an in-person class.

Online Spotter Training Course

Important note: At this time the NWS Hastings only accepts new spotter registrations from people who attend a class in person. The reason...relaying accurate information effectively is critical during severe weather. Therefore, we feel that it is important to attend spotter training in person to optimize this process.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Nlv-c1SfbTVBitXLCfm2ru0BLJ5z3zwZ/edit

This is a link to Nathan Gidley winter outlook 2023-2024

Welcome to BeeCheck™

BeeCheck is a voluntary communication tool that enables beekeepers and pesticide applicators to work together to protect apiaries through use of the BeeCheck mapping program. It is not a substitute for any state regulatory requirements.

For more resources and information, please visit **FieldWatch, Inc.**

Access My Map

If you are a producer or an applicator and already have a BeeCheck account, log in here.

Login

Username:

Username

Password:

Password

Log In

Forgot password

Don't have an Account yet?

If you are a crop producer with bees, please login with your FieldWatch account.

beecheck Apiary Registry by FieldWatch

Map My Apiaries

Click here to sign up and register your hives

driftwatch Specialty Crop Site Registry by FieldWatch

Map My Crops

Click here to sign up as a commercial crop producer.

fieldcheck By FieldWatch

Applicator Registration

Click here to sign up as an applicator

Beecheck is a very helpful tool in beekeeping. It shows the farmers where hives are located in the area so they can apply their chemicals accordingly.

Stalhman Beekeeping Notes are available from Dana Stahlman, he is a very knowledgeable beekeeper. He puts out this newsletter twice a month with invaluable information on bees.

STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING NOTES

2024 Vol 6
issue # 17

Published by Dana Stahlman Raleigh, North Carolina Email: stahlmanapiaries@aol.com
Published free as a public service to anyone interested in honeybees. Email me to be added to my mailing list. Published 4-27-24

Honey Flow Part III

It has been many years since I had to get up in the morning and go to work. Since I moved to North Carolina life has been pretty easy. But my two hives have grown to four hives. I made a split which is going to be my donator hive and I have ordered new queens to replace all the queens that are currently in my production hives. Several are from swarm cells. I have given up trying to raise queens in my back yard due to the number of colonies with unknown drone populations near-by. Hygenic queens have out preformed the queens I have raised in my home yard. More about that donator hive in later issues.

Two queens in my hives are two years old and came thru winter in great shape. The bees are getting a honey crop as I write this. However, I have found a good mite population in my hives. That is a sign that I have a problem. I have followed Sue Colbey thru the years since I knew her at The Ohio State University. She indicated that old queens use up their sperm at some point and go into a state of decline. It is important to know your queens well enough to replace them before that happens. I am now thinking about winter survival and getting honey extracted as soon as this Tulip poplar flow is over. In mid June, I will be making splits. I will explain how I carry out my plan in future issues.

I am going to expand my hive numbers from the current 4 to 10. I have equipment for that number of hives. I figure by fall, I will have a few queens that do not measure up and because I like strong hives going into winter. I will combine some of those hives with poor preforming queens with stronger colonies. I will also have the option of using Mike Palmer's double winter hive – one hive above another. I might add that I am on a roll right now. Maybe when the summer temperatures reach the 90's I will rethink my plans.

Bees are still swarming. Those beekeepers using queen excluders will keep brood out of honey supers but the queen below the queen excluder may find her brood nest congested. That is one of the many reasons bees swarm.

Those beekeepers in northern states may still be getting package bees and nucs. Their honey flow is yet to arrive. Queen rearing in the north is also delayed due to climate conditions. Honey flows are normal in some areas depending on growing conditions and weather. Judi, my wife, and I will

be doing a lot of traveling this summer. My schedule is booked from western North Carolina to Maine and beyond. We will be returning to Ireland in September for the third time.

I learn a lot from these trips. I get to talk to beekeepers about their own honey flows and their sources of honey. In fact, I collect honey from these beekeepers. North Carolina is famous for its Sourwood honey flows. Sourwood honey is ranked among the best honey produced in the U.S. It is light amber in color with a fine flavor and is slow to granulate. The bloom lasts from two to three weeks well after other honey flows have ended in the eastern regions of North Carolina. It is considered a mid summer blooming plant. Many beekeepers move their bees to the mountains just to get this crop.

Regardless of where a honey flow is located, it generally lasts for a short time. Beekeepers in locations like western North Carolina are protective of those areas hives can be placed. Honey should be extracted as soon as possible due to small hive beetle issues and some honey varieties granulate very quickly. I am often asked, "how do you get granulated honey out of the comb?" There are methods used to heat honey in the comb but remember wax gets soft and melts easily. I usually advise the person asking this question to save it for winter feeding. One beekeeper shared that he sits granulated honey comb out for the bees to rob and recycle. The problem with that is it promotes robbing and the spread of disease.

Taking off honey is a term used by beekeepers. The job of removing honey from a hive is made easy with frames. In days of old, colonies of bees were killed to get the honey. Swarms were plentiful and killing a hive of bees to get its honey was wide spread. Even with primitive hives like a top bar hive, one must find a way to remove the honey and this usually requires destroying comb.

Some beekeepers are fblessed with both an early harvest of spring honey and then a later harvest with late summer blooming plants. Just remember that by the end of any nectar flow, bees will need a good amount of honey left for winter survival. As a beekeeper you must know something about when nectar is available in your local area. Weather plays a part in this as well.

The number of hives one plans to manage determines the methods used to harvest honey. Hobby beekeepers do not need an extracting building. Beekeeping is adictive! Two hives become ten hives and then maybe twenty or more.

The object is to get the bees out of the box of honey being removed from the hive. For a person with only a hive or two, brushing bees with a bee brush is easily accomplished. Each frame is removed from the box and the frame is held near the entrance as bees are brushed off. It may result in bees becoming aggressive. Another way is to smoke bees down into the boxes below. This causes distruption to the bees in the hive. But there is another way, buy a bee escape board that on cool nights allows bees to move from honey supers down to the bee cluster below. Bees

cannot then move back up into honey supers. This requires additional spending but if you have inner covers with a hole cut into it for a bee escape, it will serve the same purpose. Check your bee supply catalog for prices. Basically the bee escape works this way. The bees pass thru the escape in one direction but can not get back thru it if they try to return.

Another method to remove bees is a fume board (something like a top cover). It is placed over the honey super somewhat like an inner cover. It can be purchased or easily made. The key is an absorbent pad (could be a towel) which is sprinkled with a chemical product that repels bees. Products I am familiar with are (Bee Quick, Honey Robber and Bee Go). Be careful how you use them. Spill them on you and you will stink. My wife commented to me one time "What pig farm did you visit today!"

What is ripe honey? It is honey capped over. The general rule I follow is that a frame must have ¾ % of the cells capped. Open cells are near to bring capped. Ripe honey moisture content should be less than 18.6 % . This can be checked with a refractometer.

If the moisture content is a concern for you, A refactometer might be a good investment. A more common method to check moisture is to turn a jar of warm honey up-side down and watch the air bubble move upward. Slow movement would indicate less moisture and fast movement would indicate higher moisture levels. If the honey forms bubbles around the top of a jar, it might indicate high moisture. The problem with high moisture in honey is fermentation.

Looking down on a honey super, one can see white capped wax on top bars and cells near the top completely capped over. The weight of a medium super of honey will be about 40 pounds plus the weight of the box and frames.

This is a frame of completely capped honey.

Any frames with honey and brood should not be harvested. Place the frame back into a super and place that super above a queen excluder. After the brood emerges, the honey can be extracted.

Honey can be messy. This is a friend of mine extracting honey outside in her back yard. Note the help her husband is giving to her.

First, the cappings must be removed as shown in the picture to the left. Then it must be spun in an extractor to remove liquid honey before it is bottled.

There is something else that must be done. Extracting honey like this also includes bee parts and wax particles floating in the honey. Honey must be filtered to remove non-honey things.

This is a fine screen which allows honey to pass thru but it catches those non-honey particles floating around in the extractor. Note wax particles and several honey bees on the screen. That is typical of what one will see when raw honey is taken from an extractor.

By the way, if the filter is not used, all these things will float to the top of honey. Honey buckets with a honey gate located near the bottom will produce clear beautiful honey if the honey is allowed to settle for a few days before being bottled.

Always remember there is clean-up time involved in harvesting honey.

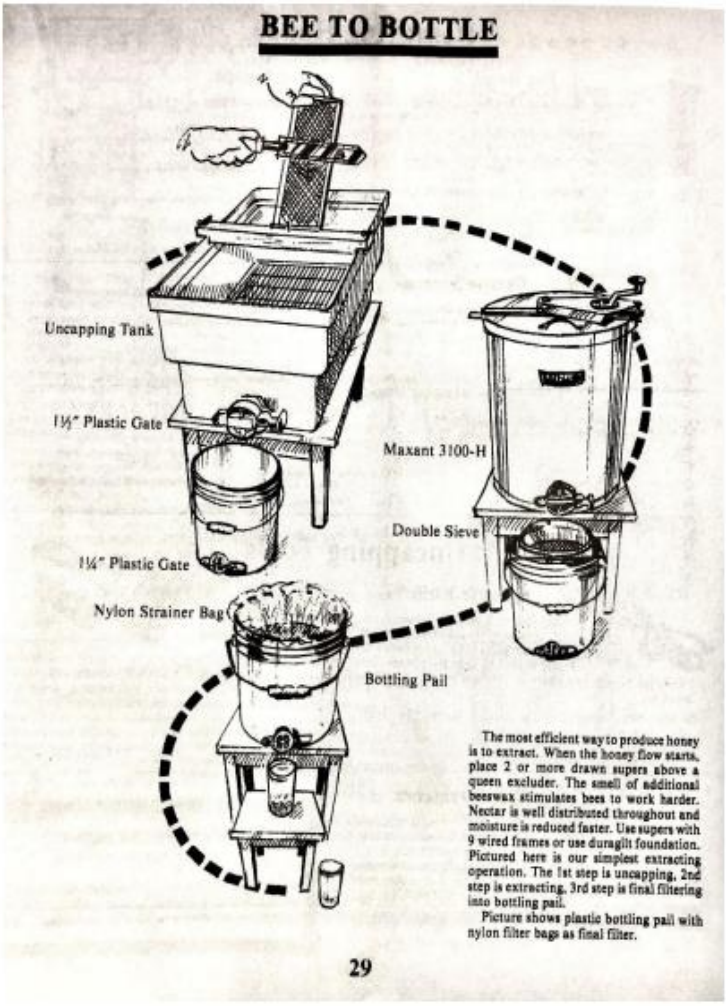
For those with a larger number of honey producing hives, the above process will not work well. Instead of a two or four frame extractor, they will use 12 to 20 frame extractors. Commercial beekeepers work with extractors that can handle 50 to 80 frames at a time. A used extractor is often hard to find especially if you need it now! They have a good resale value. Most extractors sold since the 1950's use stainless steel. Any old extractor or honey handling equipment might be made of galvanized metal. Lead was often used to seal seams in the metal. Thus, they should be avoided.

There is money to be made selling honey. In today's market, I don't see honey being sold for less than $12.00 a pound by hobby and side-line beekeepers. Often I see honey sold for $16.00 a pound. Hobby beekeepers can not afford to sell honey as cheaply as commercial beekeepers. The investment in bees, equipment and time justify the price of honey.

There is one other important point I would like to make. Local honey is unique. It is different from most store bought honey in that it has not been exposed to the high temperatures used by packers to reduce yeast to prevent granulation. Processed honey is usually blended honey from

many sources outside the U.S.A. If the honey contains pollen grains (most processed honey does not have pollen grains because of the way the honey is filtered) it is most likely produced by a beekeeper that bottles and sells honey. Honey with pollen grains can be used to identify the area where it was most likely produced. If I were to find pollen grains from Mesquite in honey produced in Michigan, I would know it was not produced in Michigan. Mesquite is a small tree that grows in semi-arid regions. Most likely it would indicate that the honey came from arid regions in Texas, New Mexico or Arizona. And Mesquite honey is light in color and has a mild flavor. It can easily be blended with other honey varieties and the bottle labeled - clover honey - as long as the mixture contains more than 50% clover honey.

The last I heard, the National Honey Board says "honey is honey even if it does not contain pollen grains".



I found this illustration in an old Brushy Mountain Bee Farm 1994 Catalog.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words.

This sums up the extracting process for a hobby beekeeper.

The extraction process has not changed much in the past 30 years.

BEEKEEPING AROUND THE WORLD

The Nordic brown bee

Contact: farm-animals@nordgen.org

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Honey bees are threatened by intensive agriculture, habitat loss and climate changes worldwide and are important to conserve, not only due to their honey production but also due to their pollination services. Three-quarters of the world's crops and one-third of the world's crop production is based on insect-pollinated plant species, and honeybees represent an important pollinator. Honey bees also provide other products, such as pollen, beeswax and propolis.

Today, there are four main types of honey bees kept in the Nordic countries: Carniolan, Italian, Brown and Buckfast bees. The first three are sub-species of the European honey bee (Apis mellifera) and the latter is a human-bred hybrid bee. The brown bees are also known under the names: European dark bee and black bee. We consider the brown bee to be the original honey bee species in the Nordic countries. They originally developed in the Southwest of the Alps a few million years ago and migrated North after the end of the ice age and reached Denmark and southern Sweden about 10,000 years ago. Only in the last 100-150 years have the other sub-species been imported to the Nordic countries.

Image: Hege Vatland Hvidsten

The brown bee (Apis mellifera mellifera) evolved under different climatic conditions in Europe and big seasonal variations, especially in the North. This has led to big variations in their characteristics and brood rhythm. In general, the brown bee is known to be hardy and frugal. They have a larger body size and longer hair than other sub-species. Their tongue is relatively short, which means that they leave nectar of flowers with deep nectarines to their colleagues: bumblebees and solitary bees, among others. The brown bees adapt their behaviour to the climate they are in. In general, it is often said that they are confident bees that are not in a hurry to fly early in the spring. In intensive agricultural areas, where arable plants typically have short-term, but intensive flowering, the brown bees cannot make the most of the early spring blooming. However, they may have an advantage in areas with flowering heather, and with dispersed nectar sources. In the Nordic countries, where the spring can be cold, and an early warm period could be followed by frost, it could be an advantage if the bees do not fly out too early. They are also known to fly even if the weather is cold and wet. The brown bees can therefore be a particularly good choice for the beekeepers in the Nordic countries.

Among the bee sub-species kept in the Nordic countries, the brown bee is considered worthy of preservation efforts because it is the native honey bee, and it is endangered with very few left of this bee worldwide. Other sub-species have been introduced everywhere, and due to the bees' special mating biology, it has not been possible to prevent crosses. Queens mate with drones that can come from any hive within a radius of about 3-4 km, and in some cases even up to 20km. If the brown bees are to be maintained as a pure sub-species, conservation measures are necessary.

Beekeeping in the Nordic countries

Image: Hege Vatland Hvidsten

We know little about beekeeping in the Nordic countries before the advent of Christianity. However, we do know that the harvesting of honey from wild bee colonies (honey gathering) has been practiced in both Denmark and Sweden since the early times. Even before the Middle Ages, Sweden had detailed laws on who had the right to the wild bee colonies in the forest, and on what conditions one could harvest honey from these. In Norway there is no certain historical documentation of beekeeping until the 18th century. However, the Vikings mention bees and honey (for mead) in their Sagas, and products from bees, such as honey and beeswax was used in Norway throughout the Middle Ages.

People were surprised when bees were found in connection with archaeological excavations in the Old Town in central Oslo in 1975. This material was dated to 1175-1225, and measurements showed that it was pure brown bees. Whether this is proof that beekeeping was practiced in Norway at this time as well, however, is an open question. Modern beekeeping, where the bees have been kept in man-made beehives, has been practiced since the 16th century both in Sweden and in Denmark. At the same time, publications from Swedish priests tell of widespread honey gathering from 1650 onwards.

Denmark

The Danish Beekeepers' Association was founded in 1866. The goal was "to get the regular man involved and teach him to look after the bees in the best way, in modern hives with movable frames". And one must be able to say that the Danes succeed: since the 1990-ies, 140 to 150,000 colonies have been kept in Denmark. However, there are very few brown bee colonies.

In 1990 there were around 400 brown bee colonies and today there is about 200 brown bee colonies in Denmark, most on the island of Læsø, in addition to some on the island Endelave, and a few apiaries scattered throughout the country. The number of beekeepers involved in the conservation work is about 20. The island of Læsø was one of the last places with pure brown bee colonies in the Nordic counties and today, a part of the Island of Læsø is conserved as an area reserved for pure brown bees as the only place in Denmark.

Finland

The first bees were brought here from Estonia in the 1750's. However, they did not survive the cold winters in Finland. The first surviving bee society was brought from Sweden in 1777 and placed in the garden of the Turku Academy in Ruissalo. The Finns were otherwise early in importing new species, as the first Italian bees came to the country as early as 1866. By the 1960s, pure brown bee colonies had almost disappeared. Only the Väinö Mäki strain has remained, which has now merged with other brown bee strains, and the current brown bee population in Finland come from Sweden and Ireland.

Today there is about 80,000 beehives in total, and out of these about 300 are brown bee colonies kept by approximately 30 beekeepers. Two breeders mate their queens on islands, each producing about 100 queens per year. One breeder produces about 30 queens per year in the deep forest, and more breeders are trying to start up breeding on islands. There is an association for brown bee beekeepers in Finland, which is also a member of the Finnish beekeeper Association. They are trying to recruit more beekeepers of brown bees. Thus, the keeping of brown bees in Finland is still under development.

Sweden

As early as 1750, a survey was conducted of the prevalence of beekeeping in Sweden, and the results showed that there were 30,000 beehives in the country. In 2000, it was estimated that there were 110,000 beehives in in total Sweden and about 14,000 beekeepers. There are much fewer brown bees, with an estimated 2000-3000 colonies of brown bees in Sweden today.

Brown bee enthusiasts in Sweden have been working to build up the strain of pure brown bees (project «NordBi») since late 1980's, with support from The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and later also the Swedish authorities. Breeding material has been based on the remains of Swedish brown bees, as well as imported Læsø material. Isolated places have been found that can be used for mating the queens (mating stations) and today there are several pure mating areas in several parts of Sweden — in northern Värmland, the whole of Härjedalen, most of Jämtland, parts of Medelpad, Västerbotten and Norrbotten. On the island of Lurö in Lake Vänern, there has been a mating station since 1984 where 800-1000 queens are mated every year. Half of these are exported to other countries in Europe.

Norway

The first reliable information about beekeeping in Norway is from 1740, when beehives were imported to Kristiania (now Oslo). The Norwegian Beekeepers' Association was founded in 1884, which contributed to further increased interest in beekeeping, and the agricultural census in 1891 showed that there were about 17,000 beehives in Norway. In 1992 there were approximately 90,000 beehives. Norway has pure brown bees in parts of the Agder counties and Rogaland. In this area, one has mostly had this species since the beginning of beekeeping. In 1987, the Norwegian authorities approved the municipalities of Flekkefjord, Sokndal and Lund as purebred breeding areas for brown bees. This means that within these municipalities it is forbidden to keep bees other than pure brown bees.

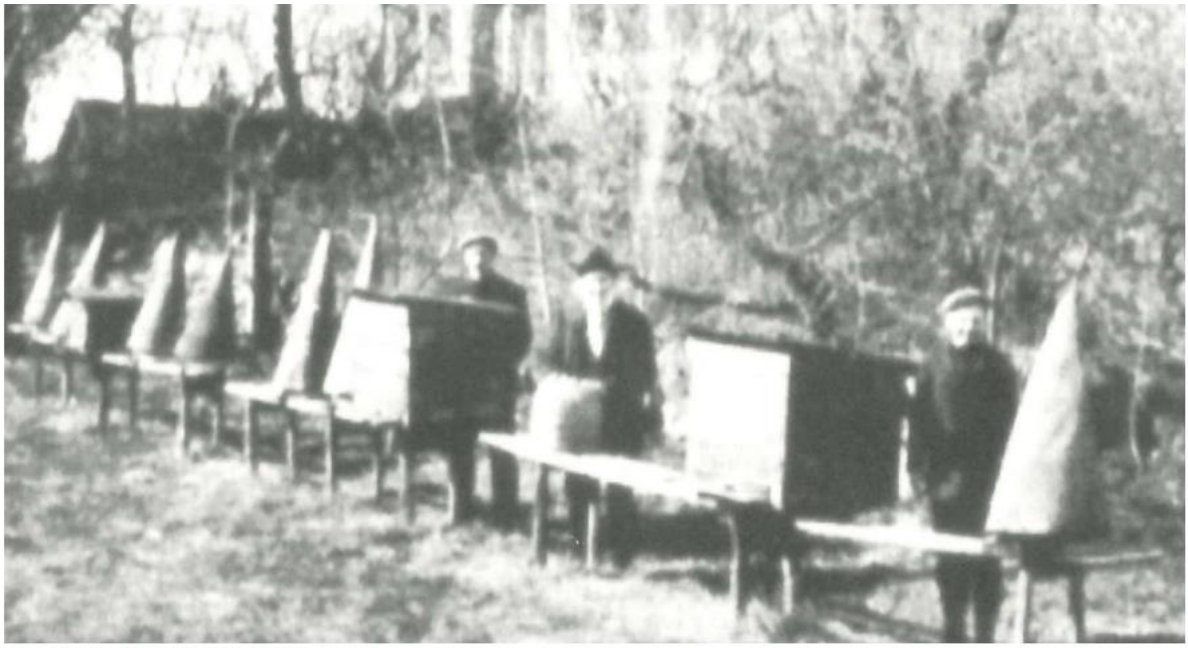

Image: Norges Birøkterlags museum

The Norwegian Beekeepers Association has been breeding Brown Bees since 1976, However, they also breed other bee species. In 2013, the Norwegian Brown Bee Association was established to work on conservation and breeding of the brown bee. Today there are about 50,000 honey bee colonies in Norway, and around 4000 beekeepers. Of these, about 4000 are brown bee colonies from about 400 beekeepers, where 1000-1100 of the brown bee colonies

Iceland

The first attempt at beekeeping in Iceland was in Akureyri in 1935 and it lasted for several years, but unfavourable weather conditions and difficulties in importing led to its abandonment. The next attempt was in 1943 in Reykjavík and lasted until World War II. Both attempts included brown bees imported from Norway. The third attempt began in 2000 and is still going on. It is not clear how many hives are alive today, but in comparison with recent years, it can be estimated that about 120 hives are alive in Iceland today, all Buckfast bees.

Due to the large winter losses, there has been increased discussion about changing species to the Nordic brown bee. When importing bees to Iceland, one must be extremely careful not to import diseases or mites as Iceland is currently free of brood mites. Private initiative has been made to import carefully vetted brown bee queens to Iceland, and NordGen's Nordic Brown Bee Network has aided in connecting this private initiative to other Nordic beekeepers. 10-20 queens each from Norway and Sweden will be imported privately. In addition, The Icelandic beekeeper association has planned an import of 4 fertile brown queens. The hope is that within a few years there will be viable brown bee colonies also in Iceland.

Brown bees outside the Nordic countries

There are brown bees outside of the Nordic countries as well. In an isolated area in the Maritime Alps in the south of France, queens are bred for sale in addition to an active network of beekeepers that have conservation areas in many parts of France. The starting point for these bees is the native French brown bees. This can be important material to take care of, as this area is considered the area of origin for the brown bees. In Austria, there are brown bees in Tyrol. From "Tiroler Imkerschule" you can buy purebred brown queens. In Switzerland, the breeding of Brown bees is well organised with several mating stations.

There is a large population of brown bees in Ireland and the British Isles, for example, the Island of Colonsay in Scotland. Isle of Man has banned import of other bees to protect from varroa mites, resulting in pure brown bees on the island. In the North-west of Italy, in Belgium and the Netherlands, small but pure populations occur too. Poland is having an active brown bee program; however, the local beekeepers are shifting more toward introduced bees. Germany has all but exterminated the Brown bees, with massive support for the introduced Carniolan bees.

Conclusion

There are two options when it comes to conserving genetic resources in bees: isolated living populations or the use of artificial insemination to exchange genetic material across borders. The former method is a very resource-intensive conservation method and artificial insemination is not widely available yet. Freezing of semen and embryos in a gene bank is also an option to conserve genetic material, but the technology for this need to be developed in addition to the best option being live, viable populations.

The brown bee is on the verge of extinction worldwide after dominating large parts of Europe until the 20th century. It is therefore of significant importance that conservation measures are implemented in those places where there are still pure strains of this sub-species. On an International level, SICAMM — The International Association for the Protection of the European Dark Bee has been impactful. In the Nordic region, significant work has been done through the Nordic Brown Bee Network, where experts from the Nordic Countries have come together to make an Action Plan, with an updated version in 2019. The action plan highlights and prioritizes actions for the conservation of brown bees. Cooperation amongst actors and coordination at national and international levels are of the utmost importance. More specifically, consistent characterization of bee populations in the Nordic region to facilitate the exchange of breeding material where necessary, and development and promotion of brown bee specific management techniques were identified as important conservation measures.

Most of the conservation work is done locally within each country. Without local beekeepers and their interest in conservation, the conservation work is impossible. Therefore, it is important to recruit new beekeepers and breed the brown bee with attractive qualities for beekeepers. The goal for the brown bee conservation work is to have viable populations of brown bees, with characteristics that beekeepers value, in each of the Nordic countries.

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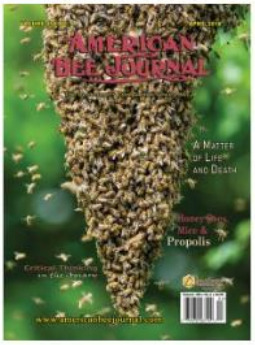

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