



## The Shore Swarm

The Newsletter of the Beekeepers Guild of the Eastern Shore

Volume 6, Number 1

[www.bgesva.org](http://www.bgesva.org)

January, 2015

From the BGES President:

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2015 from me to all our members and those interested in beekeeping. May this year be as interesting and successful as you would like it to be. As more and more people find the joy and fulfillment in beekeeping, our pollinator population will grow, not to mention our access to real, raw honey. Now is the time to let your friends know about our February Beginner Beekeeper's class (details below).

As January marks the near center of our hives winter-over, it would be a good idea to pick a nice day sometime this month and give them a check. Of course, if you are feeding them (especially if you have to), keep that up as the coldest part of the winter is still ahead. I find

this is also a good time to take stock of supplies and any plans for expanding an apiary. It's always a good idea to have an extra nuc or hive ready for any swarms or splits in the spring. Now there's no rush to get any frames, foundation or hive boxes ready (especially those needing assembly and painting); see what you need, place an order and get ready for spring, the busiest time of year for our bees. When March arrives, you'll want to BEE READY! Lastly, I received for Christmas what appears to be a particularly neat book, *The Bees* by Laline Paull. It is all about the life of a hive as lived and told by one of its workers. Fiction that's full of facts.

Keep buzzin',

John Chubb, BGES President

Meeting this Saturday  
January 10<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 am  
Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce Building, Melfa

Panel Discussion "all about Honey"  
Planning for Upcoming Class

Mary Walker is again heading up the planning for the upcoming Beginning Beekeeping class and here is some preliminary information. Volunteers are needed for all kinds of support, from welcoming people

to providing refreshments, to manning some of the learning stations, to talking about particular topics. If you have time or talent or suggestions to offer, please let Mary know. This class is one of our most important outreach activities. Regardless of whether participants end up becoming beekeepers or members of the guild, they learn a great deal and become advocates for bees. If you know folks who have an interest in exploring beekeeping, encourage them to register for the class. We'll talk more on Saturday about the class.

## **2015 Beginning Beekeeper Class**

When: February 7 & 14- two Saturdays from 9:00a-2:00p (times may change slightly)  
Where: Chamber of Commerce, Melfa, Virginia  
Sponsor: Beekeepers Guild of the Eastern Shore  
Purpose: Basic education for those interested in keeping bees  
Cost: \$20 for first family member; \$10 for additional family members  
Contact: Mary Walker at 678-5813 or John Chubb at 678-5469

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### How much time is required for keeping a bee hive?

Time is needed for ordering and putting together equipment, inspecting hives, and gathering/processing honey.

#### How expensive is beekeeping?

A basic beehive set-up can be purchased for around \$200. Those with carpentry skills may be able to construct necessary equipment for much less. Protective clothing includes a hood, gloves and cover-all jacket or suit. Many of these things may be put together from low-cost items. Bees can cost anywhere from no-cost to \$125/hive, depending on the source. Many beekeepers collect and sell honey which offsets the initial costs associated with getting started. The state of Virginia provides a grant opportunity which can also offset costs.

#### What physical strength does a person need to work with a beehive?

Some physical strength is required to lift the hive frames and boxes. However, there are mentors available from the Beekeepers Guild of the Eastern Shore who will demonstrate ways to avoid lifting heavy loads.

#### Where does a person get bees?

The Beekeepers Guild of the Eastern Shore raises NUCS (small hives with a queen), selling these for \$100-\$125/ nuc. Bees naturally swarm in the spring and occasionally these are caught and made available to new beekeepers at no cost. Also, package bees are available through the Internet and commercial bee equipment companies.

#### Is there help available for new beekeepers who are just getting started?

Yes, the Beekeepers Guild provides mentors from Kiptopeake to Pocomoke. Mentors are experienced in the getting started and maintaining bees in this area.

***The following letter comes from our own Bettina Dembek, a Chincoteague beekeeper and citizen of the world. Look for some provocative new ideas in what she writes:***

Happy New Year Y'all,

I hope you are doing well and so are your bees.

I just got back from Germany where I spent a couple of weeks over Thanksgiving and met up again with the beekeepers of my valley. They are always a wealth of information. Their club has been around for over 100 years and especially over the past 20-30 years, as the beekeeping has also become more of a research interest, some of them have partnered with a pretty advanced agriculture university just outside Stuttgart.

So I thought I'll share with you some of the things I've picked up as I went along with one of their most senior beekeepers, Herbert, as he was inspecting the club's and his hives. One of their big concerns is the varroa mites and they attribute most losses to not dealing with varroa as pro-actively as they think one needs to.

I was amazed when Herbert called me that Friday morning and told me that the conditions were decent enough for an inspection. It was just above freezing and probably like many of you, I thought that you wouldn't open the hives in such temperature anymore. To my surprise, Herbert told me that he would prefer it if it was even a couple degrees below freezing.

Every year in December, they treat all their hives against varroa. 21 days after the first good frost it's time to do the treatment as they want to make sure that there is no longer brood in the hive. The queen stops laying eggs when it gets below freezing so any varroa infested brood has hatched and can be targeted with the treatment. If there was still brood in the hive, the treatment wouldn't be as effective since the varroa mite would re-emerge with the hatching bees and be right back in the hive. In addition to waiting 21 days, Herbert also measured the temperature in each cluster of bees to make sure there was no brood without having to take the hive apart. The bees would sit on the brood to keep it warm and the cluster would be about 20 degrees warmer than hives without brood. Go figure. The beekeepers in my valley all manage their hives very actively and all do a winter treatment against varroa. They are convinced that without that, they would lose way more hives. Their hive attrition is only about 10-15% over the year so they must be doing something right. In addition to the varroa treatment, they also manage their queens very actively. The chief beekeeper who has also been very involved with our local agricultural university's bee research, told me that his strongest hives are always the nukes he consistently builds over the winter and then merges with his old hive. He told me that he has no hive with a queen older than 2-3 years.

I'm only capturing a fraction of what I heard there and some of it was more Chinese to me so I won't even try to recap that. All I can say is that I saw things that I thought were impossible (such as opening a hive when it's that cold) and was very intrigued by the success they have with the survival rate of their hives but also the amount of honey they harvest.

I'm also absolutely in love with their bees who are so much less defensive than mine. They have a very expansive bee exhibit in our town garden and have schools and kindergartens visiting. They open the hives in the summer almost every other day and they think that the constant handling of the bees also contributes to keeping them so less defensive. When I was visiting in the summer I could attest to that. I've never seen calmer bees than these when they literally removed frame after frame from the hives and passed them around the audience. Nobody wore any protective gear and the bees stayed put on the frames and went about their business without showing any sign of stress. All that without any smoke or anything else. I couldn't believe it. I can see some of you frowning reading this and, trust me, I wasn't really too sure about taking that risk either but these bees just sat there. The majority of their bees are the Buckfast bees bred by a German (Karl Kehrle who is also known as Brother Adam) in the England Buckfast Abby. Brother Adam traveled the world to cross-breed bees for the best traits and his end result was the Buckfast (there are books about him). I absolutely love the Buckfast (okay, maybe I'm a bit biased). Does anybody have any experience with the Buckfast here? I believe you can buy them in the US but I didn't find much information about the Buckfast in the US.

I can't wait for the cold weather to be over so I can see my bees fly about more. I do miss watching them and hope they are safe and sound in their hive.

I miss you all too and hope you are also safe and sound and are having a great start into the new year.

My very best,  
Bettina



This is a photo of Herbert treating the hives.

***Considering making new hives?***

As we get into the time of assessing what equipment we must buy before the bees begin swarming and getting busy, don't forget the availability of grant money from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Here are some things to remember:

If you plan to participate in the "Hive Grant" you must buy the equipment **BEFORE** applying for a grant. You will need to show proof of purchase to meet the grant requirements and you will need to pay taxes on the money that you may receive as income. Grants will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. If setting up a hive is totally dependent on getting grant money, you might want to check with Keith Tignor as to the likelihood that you will receive the money.

### ***Local beekeeper to the rescue***

*The Shoreline*, the newsletter of the local group Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore, recently had an article by Kristine Williams about the Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response Program and how it helps sea turtles that are stranded, diseased, injured, or otherwise in distress. Here is an interesting excerpt:

*There are several ways people within the community can help us care for these animals.... Currently, we are using honeycomb that was generously donated by **Chris Merritt of the Beekeepers Guild of the Eastern Shore** to treat a boat-strike wound on the carapace of a loggerhead. Other beekeepers have also offered to donate honeycomb and cappings as needed. Honey provides a number of positive effects for managing wound care. It acts as a natural anti-bacterial and anti-fungal treatment, has antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties, and stimulates cell growth. Working with local beekeepers is ideal since there are certain beneficial enzymes within raw honey that are lost when honey is packaged for sale in a grocery store.*

***And finally***, we've received some requests from others who are interested in honey:

Hello all,

I'm Nathan Evans and I'm looking for local honey for making mead. If any of you have honey that you're willing to sell or know someone who is, would you be able to send me an email. I figured since you all are bee-keepers; you all would probably be the best source.

Thanks,

Nathan Evans, [evansne@dukes.jmu.edu](mailto:evansne@dukes.jmu.edu)

Also, Janet Fosque, the manager of the Onancock Market, wants us to know that if any of us would like to reserve a place in this market, we should fill out and return applications by January 30<sup>th</sup>. Forms can be downloaded from the website [onancockmarket@gmail.com](mailto:onancockmarket@gmail.com).