

The Shore Swarm

The Newsletter of the Beekeepers Guild of the Eastern Shore

Volume 6, Number 2

www.bgesva.org

February, 2015

No Regular Meeting in February!

We're offering "Beginning Beekeeping" instead.

From the President:

Greetings BGES members and friends,

It's February and the depth of the winter. It's also the month when we hold the Beginner Beekeeping Class for those who want to learn what's involved in keeping bees here on the Shore. Everything is all set to go on Saturdays, February 7 and 14, at the Chamber office on RT 13 near Melfa. Many thanks to Mary Walker and all helpers for their preparations for this important event. It was clear at the January BGES meeting that beekeeping is growing in interest; we had the big conference room at the Chamber FULL. The class signup was complete a week before the event. That's the best indication of the interest here on the Shore.

For those interested in showing a public support for beekeeping, Virginia DMV is offering a new "pollinator" plate. It should be available at DMV offices soon. It looks like this:



Also, the Pittsylvania County Beekeepers Association is sponsoring a new Honey Bee license plate for Virginia drivers. A \$10 special interest fee is proposed to support apiculture through the Virginia Department of Agriculture. 450 prepaid applications are required for the license plate to be considered by the state legislature, much like the Pollinator Plates did. For more information, links to the application form, and a contact for inquiries about the pro-proposed Honey Bee plates, see the related article on the VSBA website: <http://www.virginiabeekeepers.org/>. The Honey Bee license plate design (honey bee will be correctly spelled as two words) has been approved by DMV. It will look like this IF they can get enough people to sign up:



The spring nectar flow is just ahead. BGES member Donna Fauber learned of the Shore's projected beginning dates as follows:

- Red Maple: February 8 (Most important flow of the spring)
- Sugar Maple: March 1
- Dandelion: March 15 with some earlier
- Chinese Holly: April 1
- Red Bud: April 1
- Tulip Poplar: April 25
- Black Locust: April 25
- American Holly: May 1

We'll want our hives at full strength and ready to go. It's almost too late to "grow" our bees through additional feeding for the red maple flow, but not too late to catch the rest. Feed, feed, feed until the flow is well underway (mid-March).

Keep buzzin',

John Chubb, President

**Editor's note: "Honey Bees" will be spelled correctly in the final version of this license plate!*

Beekeeping Class

Mary Walker has worked hard to put together what sounds like a very well planned and smooth running class this year. Each year participants are asked to evaluate the class, and their suggestions are taken seriously. Some experimental changes in our usual class format are being tried this year.

The class will run a little longer on the first day, and a light lunch will be provided to keep us all attentive and present. Speakers are being given a little more time, in the hope that the presentations will not seem quite so rushed and squeezed. Ample time will be given for small groups to rotate through each of three stations, to have hands-on demonstrations of various aspects of beekeeping: equipment, hives, procuring and safe handling of bees, etc.

Current members are all invited – no, encouraged! – to come to the classes to help welcome the “newbees” and assist with the class.

The Onancock Market



Are you looking for another outlet to sell your *liquid gold*? The BGES has reserved a spot at the Onancock market for the 2015 season. There is a \$10 charge to set up your table. This can be paid to the market tenant the day you plan to setup. The reserved area allows you the space for a 12' x 12' tent or 10' x 18' Truck space.

Vendors may begin to set up at 7:30am on market days beginning at 9am and at 6:30am on market days beginning at 8am. Vendors are required to be set up prior to opening bell. Vendors are required to stay until the Market closes.

So as not to crowd each other please contact Chris Merritt by email at Cmpens@hotmail.com or by phone 443-235-8350 with the dates you are interested in. I will schedule with the market so they can know who to expect that week. I will post a schedule on the website available to show which dates are open.

| The Onancock Market Schedule | |
|--|--|
| May 2, 9 and 16 | Open from 9am -12pm |
| May 23 and 30 June 6, 13, 20 and 27 July 4, 11, 18 and 25 August 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29 September 5 | Open from 8am – 12pm |
| September 12, 19 and 26 October 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 | Open from 9am – 12pm |
| November 21 | Pre-Thanksgiving Market open from 9am – 1pm |

Many thanks to Webmaster Evan Clements, who is retiring. For those of you who may not know it, Evan has been a fabulous friend and resource for BGES. He designed our website about 5 years ago, and been so generous in keeping the site up to date and always improving for us. For me personally, Evan has always known the solution for whatever problems I gave him, (and there have been many!) We are all so glad for Evan's very generous work.

And many thanks to Rusty Merritt, who is stepping in to serve in Evan's place.

Have you checked out our redesigned website? Well if not log onto www.BGESVA.org and take a look. Along with the new format we now have a new message board. Sign up and begin posting your questions and comments with the BGES community. There are a few topics that have been started for your consideration such as, how do you get bees, equipment to start with, natural beekeeping techniques and many others. Feel free



to start your own conversation. Over time this will become a useful tool for us all to grow in our beekeeping knowledge. You can also scroll through past newsletter issues to keep you up to speed.

The webpage is still a work in process. As a club we greatly appreciate all the work Evan Clements has done on the previous one. With your input we hope the website will continue to grow and be a useful resource for the club.

Any questions, concerns or items you would like to see added please contact a BGES board member and we will talk to our new webmaster Rusty Merritt about the possibilities.

From Russell Oreland:

Winter Ponderings

So here we are in the deep of winter. All of our bees are clustered and staying warm together. There isn't much to write about in bee land but how about a human lesson from our girls? All of us (or our family members) have been out in the super cold days and have come in "chilled to the bone" and maybe shivering a bit. Then the first thing we do is run to the kitchen for a nice "hot" cup of coffee, tea or warm milk trying to get warm. Did you know that is the wrong thing to do? There is simply not enough hot water there to warm our core temperatures and if someone is really cold (like hypothermic) even taking a hot bath is wrong. So what to do? Take a lesson from your hive!



During the winter our bees eat most (or all) of their stored honey! They do this because that concentrated sugar provides lots of extra calories allowing them to shiver longer, and shivering raises their (and our) core body temperatures quickly. In temperatures below 65 – 70F our bodies can't defend themselves against the cold so we need the extra calories.

So here in winter take a safety lesson from your bees. To get warm leave the coffee in the pot; drink a cold coke or eat a teaspoon or more of last year's honey and shiver a bit. You will warm up quicker! I teach boating safety and whenever the water cools below 70F the right hand pocket of my life jacket has about 6 honey straws just in case. Maybe you should put some in your winter emergency packs. It might be a life saver. If anyone wants to see the video proof of what I am saying, let me know... I can show you the study.

Stay warm or shiver!

Russell

Beekeepers often share interesting articles. Here are two from our members:

Donna Fauber reports that Skunk Cabbage has been seen blooming across the bay already. She shares this article, which is reprinted from www.honeybeesuite.com.

Honey, what's that smell?

*I've always heard that honey bees would collect pollen from skunk cabbage, but I've never actually seen them do it until yesterday. Skunk cabbage, *Lysichiton americanum*, is extremely attractive to flies, and the flowers I saw yesterday were loaded with flies as well as bees.*

In Honey Plants of North America (1926), John H. Lovell writes that some beekeepers in the eastern United States prized skunk cabbage because it was one of the earliest pollen-producing plants and was responsible for early brood development. He goes on to say that the hood (or spathe) protects bees from the wind so they can collect pollen on days that otherwise might be too cold for foraging.

Lovell was writing about the eastern skunk cabbage which is similar to our western species. According to a Washington State University bulletin, "Western skunk cabbage derives its name from the malodorous, distinctive "skunky" odor that it emits. The brilliant color of the flowers earns it an alternative name of 'swamp lantern.'" The bulletin also mentions that skunk cabbage is one of the first plants to bloom in the spring. It begins to emerge in February and may continue to bloom throughout March and April. According to Lovell, skunk cabbage is strictly a pollen plant. If any nectar is secreted at all, the amount is miniscule....

Rusty



Bee collecting pollen on skunk cabbage. This useful plant can emerge in swampy areas *through ice*. It actually generates heat as it emerges! What a great source of pollen, just as the bees most need it as they raise the young bees who will be so important in the Spring.



And from Wendy Martin:

<http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/01/15/bees-hexagons/>. This is a fascinating little film called "Why Bees Build Perfect Hexagons" by Maria Popova. It will really make you appreciate the perfect design of honeycomb. Thank you, Wendy, for this delightful find.

I would like to recommend two books from our local library. Bettina Dembek wrote last month about the Buckfast Bees that she saw in Germany. This type of bee is so wonderfully docile and hardy, but so strangely unknown in this country; it is a race of bee developed by Brother Adam in England.

The Eastern Shore Library has *Beekeeping at Buckfast Abbey* a slim book written by Brother Adam himself. Brother Adam was appointed to assist the head beekeeper of Buckfast Abbey in England in 1915 – a fateful year in which practically all the native bees in England were wiped out by "Isle of Wight disease," (a mite). Brother Adam noted that the only surviving bees in the monastery were those of Italian origin, and through careful work in genetics, he further developed these bees and helped to restock the entire country. The book is not so much about disease as it is about sound principles for managing hives and genetics. It includes a great final chapter about mead-making, by a real connoisseur. 638.1 Ada.

Sweetness and Light: The Mysterious History of the Honeybee by Kattie Ellis 595.799 is a really good read that takes you through the ages and includes all the great names and stories in beekeeping: Euell Gibbons, Langstroth, Swammerdam, etc. The author reminds us that the bee is the most studied creature in the world, (next to man) and has been our companion in almost all times and places.

Hope to see everyone February 7th and 14th at the Beginning Beekeeping Class, and at our next meeting, which will be Tuesday, March 3rd, at 6:30 at the Barrier Island Center in Machipongo