

# THE SHORE SWARM

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE BEEKEEPERS GUILD OF THE EASTERN SHORE

APRIL, 2014

[WWW.BGESVA.ORG](http://WWW.BGESVA.ORG)

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## THE PRES MESS

April is coming soon and with it some real spring weather... we hope. Saturday, 3/22, felt like a real spring day and was good for working in bee hives. I saw two flying drones, first of this year, as they landed from a trip out of their boxes. They landed at two different hives and were a happy sight. Soon queen cells will be made in those hives.

I finished rotating empty bottom boxes to the top of my six hives. Plus, because we seem to get only one good bee day per week recently, I decided to add a honey super with mostly drawn comb onto each hive. My bees are continuing to make new wax burr comb as drone cells, which means the next real spring day that comes along it may be best to check for queen cells to use in splits.

As a secondary “funny story” I have 8 new stings on my ankles to prove that bees can still teach me about proper armor against stings. I had tucked my jeans into my boots and opened a hive. With bees flying all around me, I was busy cutting away burr comb and checking frames when the girls commenced stinging me on my ankles... inside my 12 inch high boots. This was a new place to get my immune system boosted 8 times at once!

As I looked down at my boots there were about 25 girls crawling in and out of my boot tops. The boots are black and topped with fake black fur which the bees were stinging as fast as they could get onto the fur. Others were going down into my boots stinging down to my insteps. I beat a hasty retreat and climbed into some bushes in my front yard but the bees were crazed by all the alarm pheromones and dozens continued to swarm around me. I yelled for

Carolyn to unlock the door and let me in but she was running both the washer and dryer and could not hear me. I doubted my neighbors would let me in either. As I tried to kill the bees I realized that each squashed bee meant more alarm scents flying into the air, so I began “really banging” on the front door! Carolyn heard that and let me in. I killed the rest of the stinging bees and got my boots off to find one bee entangled in my sock ready to sting me on my left big toe.

I must teach that hive to be gentler with me!

See you at the Chamber.

Paul

## APRIL MEETING

SATURDAY, APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup>

10:00 AM

EASTERN SHORE CHAMBER OF  
COMMERCE BUILDING, MELFA

## GUEST SPEAKER:

**OUR OWN MARINOS KALMOUTIS  
FIRST YEAR BEEKEEPER LESSONS**

In 2011, Marinos Kalmoutis, a local businessman and owner of a small farm, bought a complete bee operation from a local apiarist, and suddenly found himself the keeper of 48 hives. With little experience but armed with an intrepid temperament, common sense, and a willingness to learn and to take some stings, Marinos is making it work. He will share some

beekeeping lessons he has learned along the way with us.

**BEE THERE!**

And

**BE HERE!**



**OPEN HIVE DAYS!**

Mary Walker has arranged for the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of our Beginning Beekeeping class – the visits to living hives for close looks and hands on experience – to be held at 2 sites on Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, at 1 pm. Rain date is April 26<sup>th</sup>. Check our website, your email, or call Mary at 678-5813 if you're unsure about the weather.

The 2 sites are:

Accomack County

Marinos & Kathy Kalmoutis' house  
27276 Berry Road, Bloxom

Northampton County

W.T. Wilkins' house  
14184 Yeardeley Road, Eastville.

### **POLLINATOR SHORT COURSE**

One of our Shore Beekeeping friends, Matt Cormons, sends us the following :

The Xerces Society, an organization dedicated to the conservation of invertebrates, and NRCS will be holding a couple of Pollinator Short Courses in May. The short courses will be held on May 14 at the Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Virginia

Beach and on May 29 at the Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Blackstone.

Dr. Nancy Adamson, a Xerces Society employee who has been detailed to NRCS and works out of Greensboro, NC will be the lead instructor. I will handle establishment and management of habitat.

I have been attending and assisting with these short courses for a few years now. They are very informative sessions about the biology of bees, bee habitat requirements, and the establishment and management of habitat.

The Xerces Society will be announcing the registration. I selected the Hampton Roads location for its proximity to the Eastern Shore just south of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and to the Tidewater area where so many fruit and vegetable growers are located. We'll be aiming for a mixture of NRCS, SWCD, and Extension Service employees as well as Master Gardeners and landowners. The Hampton Roads location will be limited to 48 participants.

I'll forward the registration information to you as soon as I get it.

Bob Glennon, CF, AICP  
Private Lands Biologist  
Conservation Management Institute  
Virginia Tech  
203 Wimbledon Lane  
Smithfield, VA 23430  
757-357-7004, x. 126

**BGES May Meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 6<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 at the BIC in Machipongo. Guest speaker – Dave Kvello on the subject of "SWARMS."**

### **OVERSEAS BEES**

BGES Member Bettina Dembek frequently travels, and writes about being in Germany earlier in March:

*I did go to the beekeepers' meeting in Germany and they all do "ecological beekeeping." There were about 40 beekeepers in the district meeting – amazing. I had no idea we had so many beekeepers and they were most welcoming. [Mary, if you think our space gets tight when we had our class, you should have seen that meeting. We were squeezed in in about half of the space that a local pub provided.] But it all worked out well. Most of the beekeepers have about 7-10 hives with one over 100 (he does it professionally but all ecological). The club has been around for >100 years but really seriously the past 40 years with outreach programs, talks, exhibitions, etc.*

*The talk was about ecological pest control – especially about the varroa mite, which is a huge problem for them. They all have to treat their hives and are convinced that if they didn't they would lose the bees. Quite frankly, the talk was a bit above my level of understanding with discussion about concentrations and treatment series and methods of applying the treatment. They work together with our agricultural research institute in Stuttgart Hohenheim and a lot of conversation was about evidence of what works and what doesn't. But there were also a bunch who did it more based on gut feeling – both parties with varying success. There was also a lot of talk of keeping the stress level for the bees down as much as possible since "only happy bees make good honey". Some are even against using smoke if possible to minimize any interference with the bees' regular life.*

*...Only to clarify, chemicals are a lot of things and a lot of it occurs organically in nature anyway. What the beekeepers in my valley are mainly using are not pesticides per se but biodegradable chemicals like formic acid (I think that's what it is called here).*

We hope we might be able to hear about the German approach to beekeeping as well as on the pesky varroa mites at a future BGES meeting.

### **RACCOON MISCHIEF**

Russell Vreeland writes:

*I have been attacked recently by raccoons in one apiary and by a hive falling over there as well....*

*What happened was a hive tipped (still not sure how) and the coon got most of the bees (including Queen). Then I found a small cluster in another hive with a Queen so I combined them and they had a chance. Coon got them again and finished it off. It nailed a weak hive so now I have to get back there and make sure it can't get to the remaining really strong hive. But the rain is stopping me because the drive in is a dirt track. That has me concerned and I need to get a fence around the hives over there now.*

(Many of us are seeing tilting hives after this soggy winter!)

### **AND FROM DONNA FAUBER**

*I went in a couple of my hives on Saturday. Used LOTS of SMOKE - No stings :-)*

*One hive was dead, this hive swarmed in late September so I'll bet they didn't have time to build up and re-queen. Very few bees dead or alive in there. Fall caught up with me. My fault. It's located at my in-laws so I don't see it all the time.*

*A nuc was going GREAT.*

*Another nuc...I saw the queen and the poor things are few in numbers. Maybe enough bees to cover one side of a frame. A tiny bit of capped brood. I can't believe they didn't die this winter! I plan to boost them or ...*

*One hive looked too normal. Saw the queen in the top box with brood and honey and pollen and the bottom box was empty. Swapped them.*

*The next hive had brood in the bottom box and the top box. It had honey frames all over. I left it alone for now; it will be the one that swarms unless I get back out there! Packed in there and yes, drones and capped drones with purple eyes. No queen cells.*

*Added supers and queen excluders to all... Next warm day, I'll finish looking through and make a plan to deal with stuffed hive and itty bitty nuc.*

*My hives beetles are survivors; they made it through the winter. ICK.*

(Note for new beekeepers: Donna mentions the queen and brood being in the top box, and says she swapped them. Through the winter the clustered bees move steadily upward through the hive, as the cluster's leading edge of bees consumes honey stores. This usually leaves the bottom box empty, and gives the beekeeper a chance to replace old worn frames and wax with new. Donna also mentions seeing lots of drone brood...this brood looks different from worker brood. It's very recognizable because it is bigger and its capping bulges out from the comb much more than the cappings of worker brood.)

#### **FROM MARY WALKER – SWARMS!**

*I had a little swarmette under my woodenfeeder yesterday- just a ball of bees about the size of a softball. I didn't discover this until late in the day, but I did have a nuc ready and I just moved the wooden piece into the nuc – but alas- gone today....Trying to roll with the punches..*

#### **AND FROM PAUL KIST...**

*I got into 4 hives of mine on Saturday. I did not smoke or spray them. A few got upset with me. Here are the results: Two hives have drone larva and capped drone brood in them... may hatch out in 10 or so days. One hive has a full top box of honey from last fall. Two hives had empty bottom boxes which I rotated to the top.*

*Two bees managed to sting me. All six hives had hundreds of bees out orienting from new hatch-outs. Lots of nectar and pollen were coming into the hives, mostly from the big maple next door. I think there may be queen cells near the end of March so I better keep an eye on the bees near that time.*

#### **FAVORITE BEE FLOWERS**



Photo by Matt Cormons

Can you identify these early spring flowers? Matt Cormons, local author, farmer, botanist, and beekeeper, has supplied these photographs of flowers that our honeybees find exciting at this time of year.

These are called Veronica, a member of the speedwell family. In March we see bees carrying Veronica's creamy white pollen into their hives.

This is "henbit"



Photo by Matt Cormons

Henbit is frequently mistaken for purple dead nettle, below. When bees are visiting dead nettle, they carry tangerine-colored pollen back to the hive.



Photo by Ann Snyder

And this is chickweed, also known as stichwort.



Photo by Matt Cormons

One of the serendipitous pleasures of beekeeping is learning to look closely at the tiny world bees inhabit. These weeds are actually very beautiful when you take the time to look at them closely.

If you are careless and neglectful about cutting your lawn, you might be rewarded with these lovely flowers!

#### **TO DO IN APRIL FROM *BEEKEEPING BASICS***

- Monitor colony honey supply, especially if the weather is cold and wet
- Inspect brood nest for laying queen, disease, and pests
- Introduce package bees on drawn comb
- Reverse brood chambers when weather moderates
- Requeen colonies with failing queens
- Add supers to strong colonies at the time of maple or dandelion blooms
- Unite weak colonies
- Equalize the strength of all colonies.

#### **A Nameless New Newsletter Feature**

Hello all BGES! Over the last couple of months Ann Snyder, in her usual quiet manner,

has been urging me to begin writing a small (and maybe occasional [like every other month]) column for our newsletter. As you can see she has succeeded and this is the first one. Being the first one I figure I can write this on no particular subject while simply explaining to you what the idea is and how it should work. This column will have no particular focus. At times I will be reviewing bee books that you might like for your own personal library, at other times I might bring you some news related to bees here or in the scientific realms. Alternatively we can use it to answer your Honey bee related questions if you would like to send me any. Another possibility is that I might occasionally ramble about something that I find rather interesting or have learned about Honey bees, native bees or the damned Raccoon that just fattened itself up on a couple of my hives.

Okay so what is the topic for this column? Well it is a couple of things to announce. First of all the Swarm list has been added to the newsletter and I would hope that all of you will help distribute it. Remember if you get a call from far away or if you don't need any more bees please consider passing the caller on to someone else. Do it in a professional way and tell the distraught caller that YOU will contact another beekeeper for them: then do it. If you get a call please make sure you or someone else gets there. I have had two people tell me that last year they called someone on the list and no one showed up.

My second topic is a quick one that I recently read which pertains to our bees. We all learn that one of the jobs of "Nurse bees" is to keep the brood properly warm and that if you are

making a split the bees that are on the brood will always stay there as you move the frames. Most of the time we figure that the bees keep the brood warm because of their activities on the comb and in part that is what happens. What I recently learned is that this is actually a rather inefficient system and that our bees have a better way. When we look at a frame of brood we always look to be sure that the young are in contiguous cells (sign of a good queen), but have you ever noticed that there are always open cells in every area of brood? If you look closer you would notice that these cells are always surrounded by capped or young brood. Most of the time, we attribute these to hatched brood but I learned that isn't the case. What happens is workers remove and eat eggs laid in these cells leaving them open. Then the workers run and vibrate their wings causing their core temperatures to increase and when they are nice and hot they dive into these open cells. Now as their bodies cool the heat is transferred to the surrounding cells and even through the comb to brood on the other side. Thus making one nurse bee an incredibly efficient heating system. I thought that was pretty neat.

Finally I hate writing columns like this without having a name and I haven't come up with something I like. So I am open to suggestions from the workers. What should we call this column for our Newsletter? Maybe we can have a contest with the prize being Paul Kist's voice on your answering machine? All suggestions are welcome no matter how weird or not. I hope your bees are doing okay.

Russell

#### 2014 Eastern Shore Honeybee Swarm List

If you see a swarm of bees this spring don't run for the Raid. Grab the phone and call one of the individuals listed below. They will come to you and safely collect the bees. This is a free service of the Beekeepers Guild of the Eastern Shore.

Accomack County

Name/contact	Contact	Extraction from Structures
Russell Vreeland	757-442-7029	Yes
John Long	(757) 442-9126; (757) 693-2476	Yes
Angela Barnes situations	(757) 665 – 7202; 757-710-4940	In some
Robert Leatherbury	(757) 787-4444; (757) 789-5109	In some situations
Mark Cline	(757) 350-5146	Yes

Northhampton

Russell Vreeland	757-442-7029	In some situations
John Long	(757) 442-9126; (757) 350-2476	No
Andrew Barbour	(757) 331 – 4777	No
David Boyd	(757) 621 – 7907	No
W.T. Nottingham	757-331-1610; 757-331-4552	No
Donna Fauber	757-286-1683	No
Mark Cline	(757) 350-5146	Yes
W.T. Wilkins	(757) 647-0927	In some situations
Mary Walker	(757) 678-5813	No

Maryland/Northern Accomac

Chris Merritt	443-235-8350/410-957-0543	some removal
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Please let Russell Vreeland know if any of this information is incorrect.

It is not too late to add your name to this list if you would like to receive calls about swarms and cut-outs.