

MARCH 2024

MCBA NEWSLETTER

MONTGOMERY COUNTY BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION



NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

REGINA RHOA

So just as we were getting used to the snow and the arctic chill (well maybe not), spring feels like it sprung. As I write this, today was 64, the second day over 60. I am sure a lot of you were out looking at your hives. Some of you were even opening up your hives for an inspection. I know I was. The girls are bringing in a boat load of pollen and some nectar. We currently have crocuses, snow drops, hellebores, skunk cabbage and maples in bloom in Collegeville. I have one of my nucleus colonies starting to become pollen bound.

The one thing that you must consider this time of year is starvation of your colony, more than any other time of the year. The queen is starting to ramp up egg laying, and the colony food requirements have now skyrocketed. I had one nucleus with 4 frames of brood already. The hive will go through food at an alarming rate. I had put large bags of fondant on all my hives less than a week ago and most colonies already ate through it. This is especially important if we have rainy or cold weather for several day when the bees cannot fly. The bees can starve in a blink of an eye. So, whether you are fan of fondant, sugar camp, sugar bricks or something else – don't let your bees starve before they even get a chance to think about swarming. With the nighttime temperatures still dipping low, it is a little too early to feed sugar syrup, unless you want it dripping back on your cluster.

Our beginner class started this year with a bang. Jeanne Gable and Kelly Downs are joint teaching this year, which is their second year in a row. They did a phenomenal job welcoming over 70 students. If you are willing to be a mentor for one of these students, please reach out to Robert Brooks at mcbavp@gmail.com.

Last month I congratulated Sister Isadora and Sister Thekla of Holy Protection Monastery in Whitehaven, PA who just recently completed their Master Beekeeper Certification through Cornell University. The sisters wrote an article for this month's newsletter on the Cornell program and their journey.

Cheers and happy beekeeping

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ANNOUNCEMENTS/EVENTS

MCBA Special Interest Classes

Special Interest classes for 2024 have been posted on our website and are open for registration. MCBA will send class reminders periodically in advance of upcoming classes, so keep an eye out for announcements/emails. There are 2 special interest classes coming up that cover timely seasonal material:

March 14, 2024

Topic: Swarm Control

Location: zoom

Instructor: Mark Antunes

Time: 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

[Register Here](#)

April 2, 2024

Topic: Early Spring Management

Location: 4H Center located at

1015 Bridge Road, Collegeville, PA 19426

Instructor : Michael Awckland

Time: 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

[Register Here](#)

CCBA Annual Conference - March 9th

It's not quite too late to register for the Chester County annual virtual conference. With 5 "tracks" and over 2 dozen total presentations, this is a great opportunity for all beekeepers. Presentations will be recorded and available to watch for 2 weeks for paid registrants. Click [HERE](#) for more information/registration. CCBA is also giving a \$1 donation per registration from MCBA members, so don't forget to mention MCBA when you register!

MCBA Wax Dipping Event

March 23rd (rain date: 24th)

NOTE: The 2024 wax dipping events are now at a new location:
113 Forrest Road, Telford, PA 18969

For additional information, visit the event page [HERE](#)

ANNOUNCEMENTS/EVENTS (CONT'D)

MCBA Mentorship Program

LAST CALL for mentors in 2024!

As of Tuesday March 6th, we have approximately 14 volunteer mentors with nearly 70 beginners signed up for our New Beekeepers' class. Mentees will be assigned in the next several days, so if you are interested in helping the next wave of beginners, please send a note to MCBA Vice President Robert Brooks at MCBAVP@gmail.com by Friday, March 8th

Wild Ones Event

Tuesday, March 19th

6:00PM EST

Robin Wall Kimmerer: "Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants"

If you are interested in honeybees, there is a good chance you are also a native plant and/or environmental enthusiast. And if you run in those circles, you have likely heard of Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer. Botanist and author of best-seller "Braiding Sweetgrass", Dr. Wall Kimmerer's poetic and inspiring voice seeks to remind us of the lessons we can learn from our natural surroundings and what the world could look like if we returned to a gift-giving society. The online event is \$18 for the general public and \$14 for Wild Ones members - to learn more and register, click [HERE](#)

2024 New Beekeepers Class #2

Tuesday, March 19th

Montgomery County 4H Center

6:00PM-9:00PM

(Class registration closed)

CORNELL ONLINE MASTER BEEKEEPER PROGRAM

Sisters Isidora & Thekla

As Regina mentioned in last month's newsletter, we recently completed the Cornell Master Beekeeper Program. There's nothing like the live classroom setting for learning, however Cornell has done a great job with its online Master Beekeeper Program and we'd like to share our experience with MCBA. Please keep in mind that there has been a key personnel change in the Extension Office, so things may have changed since we completed the program.

The program takes about one and a half years to complete and consists of 5 segments: Honey Bee Evolution, Biology, and Behavior; The Science and Art of Beekeeping; Managing Pests and Diseases; The Rewards and Contributions of Beekeeping; Final Exam Series. Each course segment consists of 7-9 modules (each with discussion questions and a quiz) and a final project. There is no text book, per se; course information is available online and can be downloaded. There is a recommended schedule to help keep you on track, but the only due date that is firm is the date and time the course officially ends. A facilitator is assigned to each segment and is impressively involved in the discussions, answering personal questions and making comments. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in discussions; some are graded mini research papers and are required. The discussions are where a lot of information and experiences are exchanged. We compiled a whole library of scholarly articles that were posted in the discussions. There is also an "office hours" session held via Zoom which provides an opportunity to see your facilitator and classmates. At the end of each segment there is a final project, which is very practical yet challenging. Students must pass all quizzes, graded discussions and final projects to be eligible for the final exam series.

We found preparing for the final exam series to be quite challenging. The exams are conducted during the summer and include a written test, hive inspection, and a 15-minute power point oral presentation. 2023 was the first time Cornell allowed each portion of the exam to be scheduled either in-person or remotely. Studying for the final exam series made us realize how much information there is in the class material. In addition, Cornell does everything possible to help the student succeed. As part of the preparation, they offer two written practice exams, one video of a remote hive inspection, and two videos of previous students conducting their presentations. Most enjoyably, all students are invited and encouraged to be part of the audience for remote presentations done by fellow classmates. As a member of the remote audience, you can see what works and what doesn't—and you learn a lot about a variety of topics. FULL rubrics are provided for both the hive inspection and oral presentation to help the student succeed.

CORNELL ONLINE MASTER BEEKEEPER PROGRAM (CONT'D)

There were only two things we felt they could improve on. First, graded discussions, final projects, and the 15-minute oral presentation require online research. Many articles are behind pay walls and this got noticeably worse with time. If the university could provide a library card it would make the research process a lot easier. Second, there was a significant “disconnect” between the level of difficulty of course quizzes and that of the final written exam. The reason for this “disconnect” became apparent when we traveled to Cornell to complete the exam series--they simply do not have the staff to individually grade more demanding quizzes.

Great news, Cornell offers a discount to students belonging to a bee club and the price was more than reasonable. You can enroll in the segments individually or bundle them. There are frequent offerings of all segments, so we had no trouble scheduling them ahead of time. Cornell does require that participants in the program have at least three years of bee keeping experience before enrolling.

Overall, this was a wonderful learning opportunity and we would encourage anyone who has pondered participating in this type of program to check out Cornell. We didn't know what to expect in terms of online learning, as it was a first for both of us. The facilitators were outstanding, which kept the class lively. Also, the course content was interesting and at an appropriate level. As mentioned earlier, we opted to take part of the examination at Cornell's Dyce Lab. Their facility is modest and not showy in the least. It made us realize how dedicated the extension personnel and researchers are. We give them a lot of credit for their devotion to helping bee keepers and honey bee research.



GENERAL MEETINGS

February Recap

Thank you to Scott Famous and Dr. Heather Mattila for a terrific February session. For the recording, please check your email, and note the format of the recording will be slightly different moving forward. There was a very minor hiccup in how the session was stored, so for this month you will be directed to a file via Google Drive. Moving forward it will be the recorded Zoom link.

In the mini session, Scott discussed the concept of a ‘virgin queen program’ and its benefits. **Note:** this is not to suggest MCBA is transitioning away from the queen cell program - **it is not**. The Queen Cell Program isn’t going anywhere. That said, the MCBA and queen cell producers are always batting around ideas to add value to our club for its members, and offering virgin queens has tangible benefits that beekeepers may find desirable in the future.

In the main presentation, Dr. Mattila gave a fascinating talk on feeding pollen, and whether or not it is worth it for the beekeeper. I would urge you to watch her presentation, as this is a topic oft debated in the beekeeping community, and my summary may not do the topic justice.

March 28 - 7:00 PM

Mini Presentation - TBD

Main Presentation - Landi Simone

Reading the Frames

Landi Simone has been keeping bees for 27 years. She has been an EAS Certified Master Beekeeper since 2004, and has served as Master Beekeeper Director and, for ten years, as Chair of the Master Beekeeper Certification Committee. Landi owns Gooserock Farm in northern NJ, and makes her living from about 100 colonies of bees. She raises queens and sells overwintered nucs, produces varietal honeys and beeswax cosmetics and soaps. Landi’s practical approach to beekeeping stems from her life before bees; she’s a retired consulting engineer with degrees from Columbia and Rutgers.

“Reading the Frames”: Everything you need to know about your bees is written on the frames of their hive, but do you know how to read those frames? Good beekeepers are a hybrid of a first-rate detective and a veterinarian. In this talk, you’ll learn what to look for to be the best beekeeper you can be and give your bees the care they deserve.

Assessing Colonies From Different Angles

When it comes to assessing your colonies, there is no replacement for a routine inspection. This, of course, involves inspecting individual frames, and assessing both quantity and quality of worker bees, all stages of brood, stored pollen/nectar, “queen rightness”, and more. This is a great opportunity to plug this month’s general meeting. If you are taking the beginners’ course, I know it is a lot of information to take in, and you may not prioritize general meetings in your first year. But this month’s topic - “Reading the Frames” will be a great supplement offering insight into the backbone of the aforementioned routine inspection.

With that out of the way, there are other ways you can investigate colony activity and draw some high-level takeaways:

- **Assessing colony by weight** - This approach is often not very scientific and requires a bit of ‘feel’. But if you have lifted a deep hive body with plenty of nectar/honey stored versus a hive body that is either empty or primarily brood, the weight differences will be substantial. This time of year, lifting a hive body may not tell you the whole story, but if it feels light, that should trigger you to crack your inner cover, check your ‘emergency’ sugar, and add/replace if needed. A more scientific approach would be to deploy hive scales (however that is not typically in the budget for beginners given the startup investment required for beekeeping).
- **Assessing entrance activity** - This particular topic could be expanded into quite a lengthy discussion. As spring inches ever closer, the activity coming and going through the “front porch” will continue to ramp up. It is important to remember, many of these observations are offering potential clues to colony condition rather than conclusions. Here are a few examples:
 - **Orientation flights** - orientation flights, simply put, are foragers learning where their hive/hive entrance is located. With a noticeable “humming”, this sight can at first glance appear pretty chaotic as hundreds and hundreds of bees fly in distinct patterns simultaneously near the hive entrance. This is a welcome sign and should suggest the foraging workforce is building.
 - **Hive robbing** - hive robbing is often a product of environment and colony health. In other words, when field resources (pollen/nectar) are largely unavailable, the likelihood of robbing increases. At the same time, a weak colony is most likely to be targeted by nearby, strong colonies. This activity at the entrance will look very different than orientation flights. You will not observe the same rhythmic flight patterns. You are also likely to see some aggressive/fighting behaviors between rival bees. The full story will only be revealed upon a full inspection, but this would suggest to me I may have a weak or poorly defended colony. I would inspect at my next convenience, reduce entrances, and consider reducing hive space. Colonies that remain weak/robbing targets may be re-queening candidates (but at minimum, should be monitored)
 - **Inbound pollen** - with early maples and some other early spring pollen sources now available, you have likely seen a large uptick in full pollen baskets on mild-to-warm days. Your colony should be building now, and pollen is a key (essential) ingredient in rearing brood. While inbound pollen isn’t enough to definitively say your colony is queen right and healthy, it is certainly a positive sign, as pollen foraging is stimulated by the presence of brood pheromone.

THE BEGINNERS' CORNER (CONT'D)

- **Inbound nectar** - OK, this one might be a bit of a stretch, as you can't see the bees arriving with a load of nectar. But as the nectar flow increases, you may begin to notice a large proportion of foragers shifting away from pollen-gathering. If you look at the bees exiting the hive, they will begin to fire out like bullets in increasing numbers, hot on a robust nectar source. If you pair this observation with an inspection, you should begin to notice an uptick in fresh, vibrant white wax being built onto frames. You may notice fresh nectar dripping out of cells with a gentle shake of the frame. This raises the question "am I ready to add another super?"
- **Presence of drones** - It won't be long until drones begin to emerge. In fact, as I write this, I recall seeing drone brood reported in our county over a week ago. I will not cover swarming here, as it is a more complex topic. But this suggests swarm season will be here soon, and populations/hive space should be monitored accordingly.
- **Assessing the mite/debris board** - If you run screened bottom boards, you are likely familiar with the mite/debris board insert that slides in at the bottom. These are also available with a tacky surface to help trap mites that have fallen from the brood nest. While I've never used a sticky board (and tend to run solid bottom boards), I do like to slide a board in the bottom (especially after a mite treatment) to see what kind of debris is accumulating.
 - **Mites** - if you haven't learned about mites yet, you will become very familiar in the beginners' class. I won't go into much detail here, but if you are seeing mites on your bottom board (in the absence of a treatment), there is a decent chance you are above a treatment threshold. We generally talk about mites posing problems later in the season, but this is worth keeping in mind. Mite checks should be a standard practice following mite treatments, but I am always curious to monitor 'mite drop' following treatments on my mite board as well.
 - **Wax debris** - you will always find some amount of wax debris (yellowish, grainy looking bits) on your bottom board, and this is totally normal. As bees uncover capped honey and repair/build comb, there is inevitably some "waste". However, if you suspect robbing, you may notice an unusual volume of this debris in a short period of time. Robbers tend to feverishly tear open capped honey to make a quick getaway with their loot.
 - **Other debris** - you may find all kinds of "foreign things" on your bottom board from dead beetle/wax moth larvae, to hive beetle droppings, to frass, to ants, etc. While we would prefer our hives be free of intruders, the fact is there are many actors in nature that would seek to take advantage of the colony if given the opportunity. The damage caused by certain intruders is relative; they generally struggle to gain a foothold within strong colonies, but can be very problematic in weak/dying hives. The presence of these things alone doesn't necessarily indicate a dire situation, but it is something to note for your next inspection. It may be worth inspecting frames on the outer edges of hive bodies where the bees may not yet be thoroughly occupying/defending.

COOKIN' WITH HONEY

Honey Cream Scones

(midwestliving.com)

Ingredients:

- 2 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup cornmeal
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 ½ teaspoons finely shredded lemon or lime peel
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon snipped fresh thyme
- ⅓ cup butter (no substitutes)
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- ¾ cup whipping cream
- ⅓ cup honey
- Honey (for drizzling)



Steps:

1. In a large bowl, combine flour, cornmeal, baking powder, lemon peel, 1/2 teaspoon thyme and salt. Using a pastry blender, cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Make a well in center of the flour mixture; set mixture aside.
2. In a medium bowl, combine eggs, the 3/4 cup whipping cream and the 1/3 cup honey. Add egg mixture all at once to flour mixture. Using a fork, stir just until moistened. (Dough will be very sticky.)
3. Turn dough out onto a well-floured surface. Knead dough by folding and gently pressing it for 6 to 8 strokes or until dough is nearly smooth. Pat or lightly roll dough into a 8-inch circle about 1 inch thick. Cut into 12 wedges. Place dough wedges 2 inches apart on a large ungreased baking sheet. Brush wedges with additional whipping cream.
4. Bake in a 400 degree F. oven for 12 to 15 minutes or until golden brown. Remove scones from baking sheet to a serving plate. Drizzle a little additional honey over each wedge before serving. If you like, garnish with thyme leaves. Serve warm. Makes 12 scones.

MEET THE BOARD

2024 MCBA Board of Directors

Officers

President - Regina Rhoa
Vice President - Robert Brooks
Secretary - Melissa Shainline
Treasurer - Jeanne Gable

General

Past President - Greg Lehman
Vince Aloyo
George Balock
Dan Boylan
Bob “Buzz” Buswick
Kelly Downs
Scott Famous
Derek Pruyne
Rich Steinbeiser

Note to all MCBA members: the board holds monthly meetings that can be found on our Events page [HERE](#). Members are always welcome to join these meetings to share thoughts/ideas, or to simply observe the inner-workings of the club.

Montgomery County Beekeepers' Association of Pennsylvania (MCBAPA) is a 501(c)3 non profit organization located in Montgomery County, PA. Our membership consists of individuals who are both commercial and hobby beekeepers. The MCBAPA encourages and promotes active involvement within our community and our organization. Membership is open to an individual who is a beekeeper or has an interest in beekeeping, and who wants to promote honeybee health.

Our Mission: Providing educational outreach to the public, supporting fellow beekeepers and working to promote sound beekeeping practices and honeybee health.