



# Bee Biz

**President's Message**  
**Coweta Beekeepers Association**  
**President Bobby Torbush**  
**March 2013**  
**President's Message**

I hope everyone is ready! My bees are showing signs that spring is practically here. Don't forget to check the food stores in your hives. This time of year many hives starve. They run out of stored honey and cannot get out to find any nectar producing flowers. Swarm season is also just around the corner. If your hive has a large population they will look to swarm, so start looking for those signs of swarm preparation.

We have planned a hive inspection workshop for April 13th @ 10AM and expect a great turn-out for the event at Country Gardens 2050 Hwy 154 Newnan Ga.

Registration for Young Harris Beekeeping Institute opens March 4th and will fill-up *extremely* fast. Look for details on line <http://www.ent.uga.edu/bees/young-harris/index.html>

I hope to see all of you at the next meeting, March 11th at 7:00 p.m. At the Extension office where Buster will discuss NUC instillation.

Bobby

## **Meeting**

Our next meeting will start at 7:00 pm at the County Extension Office at 255 Pine Road. Meeting date is March 11, 2013. Plenty of parking behind the office!! Refreshments are being

supplied by 2 different members, whom Lynn McElreath will get in contact with. **Drinks and ice will be supplied by the club along with paper products!!!**

## 2013 Dues

You can pay your dues for 2013 to Mike Copeland at a meeting or by mailing them to him at P.O. Box 159, Luthersville, Ga 30251. Dues for the 2013 calendar year starting January 1st thru December 31st, are \$15.00 per family. If you would like to receive your newsletter through e-mail please inform Donna, and give her your e-mail address. Dues are used in the following manner: for postage of this newsletter, supplies for our meeting, and the Christmas Party. If your dues are not paid by the printing of the April newsletter you will be purged from the system, so please pay your dues now, the club depends on its members!!

## Up Coming Events

Members of Coweta Beekeepers invited and Board members expected to meet Thursday April 4, 2013 at 6:30 p.m. at Rockback Pizza.

Dates are May 9-11, 2013 The UGA honey bee program offers the annual Beekeeping Institute in cooperation with Young Harris College.

The website has new educational materials including online books and videos in the Beekeeping Education Section. Check it out if you haven't been to the website lately.

<http://www.cowetabeekeepers.org/beekeeping-education>

# Understanding Swarms

By Steven Page, Certified Beekeeper GMBP

It is a shock to many that colonies of bees and humans have some of the same goals, with the primary one being survival. A secondary goal, perpetuating the species, requires that honey bees utilize a colony to produce a reproductive swarm typically just prior to deciduous tree leaf-out. The timing of the swarm at the beginning of the main nectar flow offers the best chance for swarm survival. Fortunately, humans continue their species without requiring the use of a colony.

Not all colonies swarm. This can be explained by understanding the phase of maturity of the colony and the strength of the colony. A weak colony will not produce a swarm because a swarm threatens the colony's survival.

A brief explanation of colony development is outlined below:

- First year colony – becoming established
- Second year colony (*only one of the following*)

- o Still becoming established, great honey producer

- o Establishes early (mature) – produces a swarm
- o Starts the year mature – produces a swarm

· Third and subsequent year colonies – produces a swarm

The question is what can a beekeeper do to reduce the chances of swarming and increase honey production?

First, the beekeeper needs to understand the mature colony's goals and functions during the late winter. In the Atlanta area the time frame is January 20 to March 31. Obviously, it is earlier in south Georgia and later in the Georgia mountains.

The mature colony's goal in late winter is to swarm. The colony spends the winter under the honey cap, and by January the queen starts laying eggs. The colony consumes honey thus opening comb in the bottom of the honey cap for brood rearing and nectar storage.

If the colony has adequate stores of honey, feeding syrup will only help the colony prepare and successfully produce a swarm. However it is very important that a colony with limited stored honey be fed to prevent starvation prior to main nectar flow. This does not require feeding continuously until main nectar flow. The syrup will be stored along with any nectar the foragers collect. After an adequate number of frames are full, the feeding should be discontinued. Three factors that help determine the amount of feed needed are the total honey remaining, weather conditions and amount of time left until late March.

Preparing for swarming, the colony must cease queen laying weeks before swarm cells are started. This is accomplished by filling cells of emerging brood at the top of the brood nest with nectar or pollen thus reducing the size of the brood nest.

Opening up the honey cap helps prevent swarming, but only supers of drawn comb will work. Foundation will not work because the colony is not ready to make wax. Adding empty drawn comb prevents the colony from completing all the preparations to swarm. The large area of empty comb is used by foragers to store all the nectar they can find, and the queen uses it to lay more eggs than would be possible otherwise. If the colony is unable to fill the entire hive with nectar by early April, then the goal of swarming is abandoned. Then to prepare for the coming winter, the colony collects nectar and stores honey until the nectar flow ends in May.

Two important tasks that must be accomplished when working in a hive in late winter are to keep the honey near the brood and to keep the brood frames together.

A successful procedure for opening the honey cap is detailed below. This plan works well if a few assumptions are in place. These are listed below in italics.

- *The hive consists of a deep and a shallow super.*
- *The deep super has some combination of brood, pollen, honey and empty drawn comb frames.*
- *The cluster and brood are in the deep super which is on the bottom board.*
- *The shallow super is mostly full of capped honey and is on top of the deep super.*
- *It is late January and the weather is sunny and warm enough to inspect the hive.*

· Two extra shallow supers of empty drawn comb are available.

If all the above assumptions are correct, then opening the honey cap should be successful. First, open the hive and check that the cluster is in the deep super. Leave the deep super on the bottom board and with the super of honey nearby, place a shallow super with no frames on the deep. Add frames to the super by alternating a frame of capped honey with a frame of empty honeycomb. Place another empty shallow super on the hive. Add alternating frames of honey and empty comb just like the first shallow super but alternate the empty and honey frames from the bottom shallow super. For example, if the bottom shallow has an empty frame of drawn comb on the left, the second shallow super will have a frame of honey on the left. Add another super of empty drawn comb.

See the graphic below.

This is a front view of the hive with the observer looking at the ends of each frame.

Each letter represents a frame and its contents.

Brood = B, Honey = H, Empty = E, Pollen = P

Before

H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	shallow super
E	H	P	B	B	P	H	E	E	E	E	deep super

After

E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	shallow super
H	E	H	E	H	E	H	E	H	E	H	shallow super
E	H	E	H	E	H	E	H	E	H	E	shallow super
E	H	P	B	B	P	H	E	E	E	E	deep super

Notice how the empty and full shallow frames alternate both vertically and horizontally.

I successfully used this method last year on two hives; each produced 100 pounds of honey. Last year's main nectar flow was early and intense. Many hives swarmed because of the continuous availability of nectar from early February all the way into the main nectar flow.

This method of swarm control was developed by Walt Wright. It is named *Nectar Management or Checkerboarding*.

Many of Walt's writings including *Nectar Management* can be found on the *Bee Source* website. <http://www.beesource.com/point-of-view/walt-wright/>

Managing colonies is a fulfilling, albeit time consuming, experience. Hopefully, some of this information will further extend your experience.