



# THE HONEY POT

## MONTGOMERY COUNTY BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

### UPCOMING EVENTS

May 10, 7:00p

**Monthly Meeting**

Brookside Nature Center

1400 Glenallen Rd, Silver Spring, MD

*\*\*\*Check the listserv as meeting location could change if Brookside renovations incomplete\*\*\**

### *President's Letter*

by Leon Vandenberg

We just finished our short course. We had approximately 100 new beekeepers signed up to take the class and most of the original attendees finished the class. I want to thank Tracey Waterman for once again doing a super job in organizing the class and the speakers. I will have to admit, even though I have been keeping bees for a few years, I still learn from the speakers of these classes. Since the class, we have continued with mentoring at our apiary at Brookside Nature Center, demonstrating how to install packages. Quite a number of new beekeepers were in attendance, many who went right from Brookside to their own yard to install their own packages. It was really good to see the enthusiasm and the questions these beekeepers had.

On another front, it looks as if Brookside Nature Center still will not be available for our April meeting. Unless you hear otherwise, we will once again hold our meeting at the Holiday Senior Center. We did not want to cancel this meeting as we just graduated our new class of beekeepers and by that time we all will have been working our hives. I am expecting that all of us will be facing both good and bad circumstances with our hives and will lead to a lot of discussion on what we did or could have done.

Over the last couple of months; Maureen, Dara, Phil and myself have been working on improvements with our website. In the very near future you will start seeing some of the changes. We now can accept credit card payments via the website for things such as membership or class registration.

We will be setting a date for a spring barbecue at our next board meeting and I will get that date out to everybody as soon as it is set. We are also going to be working with the Sentinel Hive Project as we did last year. The data they collect across the nation helps each of us who are keeping bees. In this region, beekeepers have loss approximately

40% of their hives each of the last couple of years. I am hoping that, with the information they are collecting, we can reduce this number down.

Pam Hepp has been getting a lot of requests for beekeepers to speak to school groups, scout groups, senior groups, church groups and the list goes on. If anyone is interested in speaking please let her or I know. In the past, I have done a few of these and will be speaking to a cub scout group this month. You know much more than the attendees of the group you will speaking to and Pam has all kinds of information that you can take along. In the past, I've even borrowed a demonstration box from Jim Fraser and installed a frame of my bees for a show and tell. This works very well when you are speaking to children as it is probably the most attention-getting thing you could bring with you.

Until next month

### *International Bees*



Honey at a Moscow indoor market Phil Frank



Dara Ballow-Giffen

Bee foraging in Tuscan countryside.



Phil Frank

Cannes, France

## Honey Bee Power Plants

by Marie Rojas



### Carolina Silverbell – *Halesia carolina*

This month's featured plant is the native Carolina Silverbell. Grown as both a multi-stemmed large shrub or single-stemmed small tree, this one is perfect for the woodland garden in moist, acidic, high organic matter soils in sun to semi-shade. In the wild, it is found as an understory tree on the slopes of hills, ridges, and mountains; and along streams. In your garden, it would pair well with rhododendrons and other acid-loving plants.

Other attributes include:

- ◆ 30' x 20' tall at maturity.
- ◆ White, bell-shaped flowers April to May.
- ◆ 2 star nectar and pollen source rating from Peter Lindtner's Garden Plants for Honey Bees book.
- ◆ Very pest resistant



Here it is grown as a shrub.



The tree form, growing in a nursery.



The pretty, bell-shaped flowers.

## *Letter from the South*

by Bill Miller

The very first “Letter from the South” featured a swarm on the plant fence where I worked (in August no less). That was my introduction to Alabama swarms. While that was 11 years ago (and I have since retired), bees still swarm. March is swarm season in southern Alabama, and 2017 has been a banner year for swarms. I started February with 9 active colonies, and by the time March was over I had 19 colonies; all of that increase coming from swarms I caught. At the start of the month, I looked over my store of equipment and wondered whatever possessed me to buy so much gear. By the end of the month, all my spare gear was in service and I had to have my name taken off the local swarm catcher list. I couldn’t house another swarm.

Most of the swarms I caught came from my own home apiary, and from those swarms I made two observations. The first observation was that reversing the brood boxes on colonies is at best only marginally effective at preventing swarms; all my colonies had been reversed in the middle of February, but at least 7 of the 9 swarmed anyway.

The second observation was that all the swarms I got from my home apiary had unmarked queens. All my home apiary queens were marked as of last fall, and bees don’t raise queens during the winter (so say the textbooks). The textbooks also say that swarms normally contain the existing colony queen, but can occasionally contain a virgin queen. So, had my colonies superseded their marked queens during our warm winter? Had my colonies elected to swarm with virgin queens? I guess I’ll never know. All I know is that the expected white dots were absent on the backs of the queens that came with the swarms.

Swarms love stacks of beekeeping boxes stored outdoors, and they are quite ingenious at getting into allegedly sealed stacks of boxes. After years of getting surprised

when I went to get a super out of a storage stack, I adopted a “Take advantage of this” attitude this year. I set out a swarm trap hive consisting of two nuc boxes (frames of old drawn comb in the upper box, and the lower box empty), put a Swarm Commander swarm lure that I won as a meeting door prize on the bottom board, put the whole assembly on top of my box storage stack, and from then on just waited. Sure enough, Mary and I came back from an outing to discover a swarm had moved in. PS: If you try this yourself, you will want to check on the new colony after a few days. Expect the bees to have built comb in the empty box. You want to get to the lower box before the bees have gone too far with



their comb building. You’ll have to clean out that comb and put frames in the bottom box to get proper comb.

Swarm season does have its upside. My latest method of showing that swarms are gentle is to offer to take a picture of the swarm with the person calling it in. Most folks are willing to get their picture taken with their swarm, and the attached picture is of one of those folks with her swarm. She was a little nervous to be so close to the swarm, but the bees behaved themselves.

Lest you think I spent my entire beekeeping March catching and hiving swarms, I did do some other things. Our Wiregrass Beekeepers Association’s Beginning Beekeeping course was mostly in March, and it finished up with a field session at my new apiary on our Farm Center grounds. I got the idea for putting an apiary there from the apiary on the Brookside Nature Center grounds (I trust the Montgomery County Beekeepers still have an apiary there). I’ll be using this apiary as a continuing education tool over the course of the year.

Moving on, mid- April is the expected start of our local nectar flow. I already have supers on my production colonies, and the bees should start working them soon. I’ll let you know how they are doing next month.

## Meeting Recap

by Maureen Jais-Mick

### *How Do Honey Bees Differ from Other Bees?*

*Presented by Timothy  
M. McMabon, EAS  
Master Beekeeper,  
Georgia Master  
Beekeeper*



As MCBA members, while we have a primary interest in the honeybee, the environment in which *apis mellifera* lives and makes honey for us is the same one in which thousands of other species of native bees pollinate and perpetuate a diverse variety of plants.

A few bee facts:

- There are 20,000 bee species
- There are 4,000 bee species in the U.S.
- There are 430 bee species in Maryland
- 90% of all bee species are solitary
- 10% are colonial (like the honeybees)
- 70% of species nest in the ground

So how are honeybees different from the other thousands of bee species? While they have much in common, *apis mellifera* has the following combination of factors that sets it apart:

- They have barbed stingers
- They have hair on the eye
- The males look different from female
- They progressively feed their larva (instead of sealing food in with the larva and leaving)
- They are cavity nesters (about 30% of bees nest in a cavity)
- They make honey (only bees that over winter make honey)
- They make and use comb

- They swarm
- They are polyandrous (queens mate with many different drones)
- They are colonial (live in groups)
- They have a corbicula (pollen basket)
- They do not hibernate or go into a period of dormancy
- They do the waggle dance to share information with hive mates

As Tim talked about each item on the list of differences, attendees were able to ask questions and better understand why each attribute is used by honeybees and how each species of bees uses its unique physical attributes to pollinate or derive benefit from the plants in which it specializes. It was a fascinating talk, illustrated with amazing photographs from the work Tim has done with bees in South America and as a volunteer in entomologist Dr. Sam Droege's lab.

## Beewilding Takoma Park

Presented by Dr. Sam Droege, Wildlife Biologist,  
Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

March 21, 2017

Presented by  
Friends of Sligo  
Creek



Sam Droege has been spent most of his career at

the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. He has coordinated the North American Breeding Bird Survey Program, developed the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program, the BioBlitz, Cricket Crawl, and FrogwatchUSA programs and worked on the design and evaluation of monitoring programs. Currently he is developing an inventory and monitoring program for native bees, online identification guides for North American bees at [www.discoverlife.org](http://www.discoverlife.org), and with Jessica Zelt reviving the North American Bird Phenology Program. His group maintains high resolution photographs of insects and other macro natural history objects at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usgsbiml/>

March was the month for learning about native bees, as Tim McMahon's presentation at our monthly meeting was followed by Sam Droege's presentation on native bees and the importance of a diverse population of bees to maintain a diversity of plants. Native bees have little in common with *apis mellifera*, the honey bee.

There are about 4,000 native bee species in the U.S., and about 434 of them are in Maryland. Prince Georges County has 254 of those species and Montgomery County 200. The national diversity hotspots are the deserts of the Southwest. Here in the East we have less plant diversity, so less native

bee variety. Not surprisingly, the bee architecture matches the flower system, meaning that bees have evolved to access certain plants. About 75% of native plants, 30% of crops and 50% of trees rely on insect pollinators – anything with color probably depends a bee.

Many bee species are specialists – that is they rely on a single plant or a small group of plants for the pollen they feed their young; and those plants rely on a small group of bees to pollinate them. The message was explicit: For a full spectrum of plants we need a full spectrum of bees. An example is the willow, which attracts eight species of specialist bees. Droege also talked about power companies (PEPCO in our area) and how they can manage the areas around power lines so that they only mow annually to allow the meadows to be available to the native bees.

Along with managing woodlands and power line areas and planting native plants along highways and in our neighborhoods, he talked about suburban yards – how often do homeowners mow and do we really need to do so? The native plants that interfere with grass provide forage for native bees. Two other useful recommendations: 1. Control invasive plants and 2. Eat more deer.

For detailed information on specialist bees: [http://jarrodowler.com/specialist\\_bees.html](http://jarrodowler.com/specialist_bees.html)

<b><u><a href="http://www.MontgomeryCountyBeekeepers.com">www.MontgomeryCountyBeekeepers.com</a></u></b>		
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