

# Northwest Georgia Beekeepers Association

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[www.nwgabeekeepers.com](http://www.nwgabeekeepers.com)

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## Happening in the Hive

The Queen's laying began to increase after the winter solstice (Dec 21<sup>st</sup>). In order to rear brood, the worker bees vibrate their flight muscles to generate heat and maintain the temperature in the core of the cluster around 95°F. This requires a lot of energy (food). Also, the brood must be fed a concoction of jelly, pollen & nectar/honey. There is significant risk of starvation in January – March because the colony's food demands are increasing, their winter stores are dwindling, and forage is limited. Additionally, in very cold weather the cluster may not be able to move to reach the honey stores and can starve even if the stores are just a few frames away.

## Beekeeper's To Do List

- **Monitor hive weight and feed if light.** Gently lift the hive from behind, tipping it slightly forward, to judge its weight. If the hive is light, feed.
- **Inspect overwintered hives** on a sunny, warm (60F+) day when there is little to no breeze.
- **Set out swarm traps.** Research by Dr. Tom Seeley indicates that swarms prefer cavities with a volume of 40-60 liters. A 10-frame deep Langstroth is 43 liters. Two 5-frame boxes stacked vertically is also a good size for a swarm trap. Place swarm traps 15ft up, or as high as you can safely and easily reach. Add a commercially available lure or lemongrass essential oil to mimic queen pheromones, and add a frame of empty, drawn brood comb to help entice scout bees. Check traps weekly.
- **Prepare equipment.** Paint any new hive boxes, assemble new frames, coat new plastic foundation with wax, clean and repair old equipment, etc.

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Club Meetings are the Second Monday of each month  
6:30 pm - New Beekeeper Session  
7:00 pm - Program Speaker

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## Forage

Mahonia and dandelion are beginning to produce pollen. Red maple usually begins producing nectar in February.

## Pests

Varroa mites and Small Hive Beetles overwinter in the hives.

Varroa levels should be low this time of year, but many beekeepers do a spring mite treatment to reduce varroa as low as possible before high summer temperatures and honey supering limit treatment options. See next page.

SHB love pollen and pollen substitutes. If feeding pollen substitute, feed in small batches that the bees can consume quickly so as not to create a SHB breeding ground. Find more info on SHB and other pests at: [beeaware.org.au](http://beeaware.org.au)

## Looking Ahead: Start planning now for the following March activities

### Swarms & Splits

The presence of drone brood in late winter/early spring is a significant milestone in the colony lifecycle. Once the eyes of developing drone pupae darken to a purple color, colonies can be split and swarms can occur. If colonies are split or swarm before there are drones at this stage, the new virgin queen may be ready to mate before any drones are mature and the new queen may not mate sufficiently. Once you start seeing purple-eyed drone pupae, and definitely once you start seeing flying drones, monitor for swarm cells.

Plan now for how you want to manage the swarming instinct – will you perform splits, use the Demarre method, create and sell nucs? Make sure you have enough equipment for your plan.

If you want to collect swarms, register at <https://beeswarmed.org/> to receive notifications of swarms in your area. Get your swarm retrieval kit ready now so you can get to the swarm before they move on. Your kit might include: a nuc box, sugar water spray, frame of drawn comb, extension pole, tools for cutting tree branches, etc

### Early Spring Varroa Mite Management

March is a good time to perform varroa management/treatment. Spring management/treatment helps delay dangerously high varroa levels. Without spring management, mite levels can reach excessive levels by mid-summer at which time treatment options are limited due to high temperatures. By reducing mites in the spring, peak mite population may be delayed until early fall when more treatment options are available.

There are several mite management techniques which work well in early spring:

- Performing splits and allowing hives to requeen themselves creates a break in the honey bee brood cycle which disrupts varroa reproduction. Performing splits in spring also helps prevent swarming.
- Drone brood trapping involves removing capped drone brood and either freezing it or discarding it. This sacrifice of the drone brood also kills the varroa which prefer to reproduce in the drone cells. Be sure not to cull all drone brood, since drones are needed for mating.
- Organic and synthetic treatments are available, but be sure to select one which is appropriate for March temperatures. Also, if you are using a treatment which cannot be applied when honey supers are on, begin treatment early enough to ensure it's complete before the main flow starts in mid-April. The Honey Bee Health Coalition has an online tool to help you select the appropriate treatment:  
<https://honeybeehealthcoalition.org/resources/varroa-management/>