

Northwest Georgia Beekeepers Association

www.nwgabeekeepers.com

Happening in the Hive

The Queen's laying began to increase after the winter solstice (Dec 21st). 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.

Hive Inspection Check List

Cold weather generally prohibits full hive inspections in January & February, but you can perform these minimally invasive checks:

- **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 dry sugar, sugar bricks, candy board or fondant.
- **Ensure entrances remain clear.** Falling leaves, snow, and dead bees can block entrances. Help keep the entrances clear to ensure good ventilation and allow the bees to perform cleansing flights on warm days.
- **Check food stores on sunny, warm (60F+) days when there is little to no breeze.** Lift off the inner cover and ensure there is food (honey or sugar) directly next to or above the cluster. If needed, move honey frames from the edges of the hive closer to the center. Avoid going in to the brood area – ideally you are only doing a brief manipulation in the honey super. Be mindful that you are breaking the propolis seals, so it's best not to open the hive right before a cold snap.

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



Forage

Camellias, hellebores, and mistletoe can provide pollen in winter. Next expected nectar flow is red maple in late January or early Feb.

Pests

Varroa mites and Small Hive Beetles overwinter in the hives.

Assuming fall/winter mite treatments were performed, the varroa populations should be low at this time.

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.

Mice sometimes enter hives to keep warm in winter. If this is an issue in your apiary, install mouse guards on the hive entrances.

Looking Ahead: Start planning now for the following February activities

Buying Packages & Nucs

New beekeepers, as well as some veterans looking to replace winter losses or expand, will want to purchase packages and/or nucs. Packages/nucs are typically available late March-May in our area, but ordering early gets you an earlier delivery date (which is beneficial because it gives the colony more time to establish before the next winter). Research breeds, options and vendors now so you can place your order in February (if not sooner).

Moving Existing Hives

Beekeepers often have need to move existing hives. Perhaps the current location was not ideal or maybe the beekeeper is expanding to an out yard. Whatever the reason, if you plan to move existing hives to a new location, start evaluating potential apiary sites now. This way in February you can prepare the selected location and move the hives. February is a good time to move hives because the hives are still small and generally light.

Preparing Apiary Locations

If you are taking up beekeeping in 2025, you may be getting bees as early as late March, so you will want to prepare your apiary in February. Go ahead and start walking the property now to evaluate potential sites. Observe sun/shade patterns (keep in mind they change over the year), wind, and drainage. Consider ease of access and proximity to equipment storage as well as potential issues, such as flight paths near pedestrians or pets. This way you can select a site and begin to prepare it in February. Site preparation might include leveling the ground, building hive stands, setting up a fence (in needed).

Preparing for Swarms

Our swarm season starts in March, so it's recommended to put out swarm traps and/or bait hives by late February. There are various swarm traps available for purchase, but you can also make your own or use an empty hive that you already have. There are also commercially available swarm lures and recipes online to make your own. Weather you decide to purchase or DIY it, go ahead and get your swarm traps ready now so they can be put out in February.

Equipment Preparation

Take inventory now of your equipment and make a list of repairs and purchases needed. Place orders for new equipment now so that you can assemble and paint it in February – that way it's ready to go in March when colonies are expanding & swarming.