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April 2025

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# Northwest Georgia Beekeepers Association

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

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## Happening in the Hive

The main nectar flow begins soon, so colonies will be transitioning from the spring build-up phase to the honey production phase. At this time, overwintered hive populations are large. It's common to see a lot of flight activity around the hives, particularly in the afternoons when the younger bees are taking their first orientation flights. There can be so much activity that orientation flights are often mistaken for swarming or robbing by newer beekeepers. Brood production will remain high throughout the flow, assuming the queen doesn't leave with a swarm. The main nectar flow also corresponds to peak swarming and drawing of new comb.

## Beekeeper's To Do List

### Inspect hives regularly and frequently (weekly recommended).

#### Look for:

- **Swarm cells & laying room.** Inspect weekly for swarm cells and to ensure the queen still has enough laying room. When the nectar flow is strong, a colony can become 'honey bound', where the brood nest is bounded and restricted by nectar-filled cells. A restricted brood nest can trigger swarming. If needed, re-arrange or add empty, drawn frames in the brood area or add a super above the brood nest to give the queen more room to lay.
- **Full (or partially full) honey supers.** When to add supers depends a lot on the strength of the colony and the strength of the nectar flow. A general rule of thumb is to add another honey super when the existing one is 80% full. If you are adding undrawn frames, you may want to add the super sooner (say, when the existing super is 70% full) so that the bees can begin to draw the comb of the new super. "Checker-boarding" (interspersing) the frames of the new super and existing one can encourage acceptance of the new space.

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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

Crabapple and black cherry are blooming, and tulip poplar (a major flow in our area) should begin soon. Continue feeding new packages but stop feeding overwintered hives when the flow starts.

## Pests

If you need to treat for varroa during the nectar flow, read the labels to make sure the treatment is approved to be used when honey supers are present, otherwise the honey should not be consumed by humans.

If a hive has swarmed, and especially if it has swarmed repeatedly, it can quickly become overrun by small hive beetles. Check the remaining bee population. If there are no longer enough bees to patrol all the frames/boxes, reduce their space until their population rebuilds.

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

Colony population, swarming, wax creation, and the main nectar flow typically continue through May, so continue to perform weekly inspections in May. For all hives (overwintered or new), each time you inspect, check for swarm cells, sufficient laying room, and full honey supers as described in the April Beekeeper's To Do list on the front of this handout. If you begin to run low on supers and frames in April, order more ASAP – you will likely need them in May. If you have strong overwintered colonies and the flow is good, you might be able to do a honey harvest in May. If you want to do this, go ahead and purchase bottles/jars and any other supplies you might need. Remember, club members can borrow the club's extractor, filters, and uncapping equipment.

Additionally, each time you inspect you should assess the queen's state. Just because the queen was present and well during your last inspection doesn't mean she's still there – you often can't tell if a hive has swarmed just by looking at the number of adult bees in the hive. It's not necessary to see the queen, but if you wish, marking her with paint can help spot her. Also, marking queens with the current year's color can help you identify if the old queen has been replaced by a new. If you want to do this, you can order paint pens from beekeeping supply stores. Otherwise, examine the brood to infer the queen's state:

- If you see eggs, larva, solid areas of capped worker brood, and areas of drone brood that is a great sign. The presence of eggs means a laying queens has been there in the past 3 days.
- If you see eggs (only one per cell), larva, and capped brood, but ALL the capped brood is drone brood, this usually indicates the queen did not mate and can only lay unfertilized eggs. This is uncommon, but can happen with queens born early in the season when drones are limited and weather is poor for flying. Find and kill the queen, then install a new, mated queen.
- If you don't see eggs but do see larva and/or capped brood, the colony and old queen may have swarmed or may be preparing to swarm. Look for swarm cells. If you find swarm cells, you can perform a split or other management technique. Do not cut out all the swarm cells unless you have seen the existing queen.
- If you don't see eggs or larva and the only capped brood is drone brood, then the hive swarmed 3 weeks ago and all worker brood has emerged; drone brood is still present because of its longer pupation. Inspect again 1.5 weeks to 2 weeks later – by then a new queen should have successfully mated and should be laying eggs. If you still do not see any eggs, then the colony is queenless. Multiple queens could have emerged and killed each other, or the new queen never made it back to the hive from her mating flight. At this point, there are no young larva to raise in to a new queen, so purchase a new mated queen to introduce.
- If you see multiple eggs in each cell and ALL capped brood is drone brood, this usually indicates laying workers. This can occur when the hive swarms and fails to raise a new queen. After a time of being queenless, some of the workers will begin to lay drones. Often the best course of action is to disband the hive, shake out all the bees a couple hundred yards away from the apiary, and distribute the boxes/frames to other hives.
- Spotty brood (drone and worker brood interspersed together, brood of different ages/stages interspersed together, or a lot of empty cells interspersed with brood cells) indicates a failing queen. You can cull the queen, then let them raise a new one, provide them with a queen cell from another hive, or give them a mated queen.

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