

# COMB Courier

Mid-Michigan—Land of the bee

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Editor: mike ffrench

## No COMB meeting for March

Due to ANR week at the Kellogg Center at MSU there will be *no meeting* at the MSU Pavilion in March. The next meeting will be in April.

## On the head

Beekeepers axiom. You can read or recite about how to drive a nail into wood. The angle of the nail; the force required for the nail to penetrate the wood; and the correct grip for the hammer and the placement of the nail. What they can't explain is the amount of pain you will experience when you hit your thumb with the hammer.

## The month of joy

April must surely go down as the month of joy for the purveyors of package bees. It is the time of year when the panel trucks and semi-trailers, loaded with bees, head north. But alas, it carries no joy for those of us who have endured the winter losses, and now have to pay for them.

The price of packaged bees has soared since I first started beekeeping. Seven years ago they were \$65—\$70 per package, now they are \$110—\$120. While I am not against people making a living, I am against me providing that living.

Where will it all end? Should the price of package bees continue to rise, then people like myself will have to bail. The cost of bees is only a small part of my disconsolence. Losing my bees over winter, is not only a consideration to my staying in the bee business, but the loss to nature itself is heart-breaking. Even the honey that is not consumed over winter is contaminated by residue, mice droppings, and mold. I do save most of it, but my ethics will not let me sell it. Am I alone in this desolation of the spirit, or it felt by other beekeepers?

What then, can I do to stem this tide?

First off I can resolve to be a better beekeeper. How do I do that? I can read books until my eyes water and attend lectures until my ears and butt ache; attend conferences until I reach nirvana with caffeine. I can do all of these, but they will not replace actual work experience in the field. That is where the real beekeeping takes place.

I have applied a lot of thought to this problem. With only a few hives at my disposal, I spend only a small portion of my time checking my hives. Whereas, a commercial beekeeper spends some time every day with his hives. This constant attention has its rewards—good beekeeping practices.

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So, the question begs, how do I spend more time with my bees when the time and attention does not merit it? Time is a precious commodity, and its uses have to be justified if we are to consider the demands made on it by other interests and obligations. Gazing for hours on end at my beehive in the vain hope that the bees will come out and explain to me what they want of me, is not what I'm looking for. For I know it will never happen! I have to look for other avenues of learning if I am to expand my knowledge of bees.

If I don't fail—I won't have to bail!

Then I came up with the idea of co-opting other beekeepers within a two-mile radius (forage and mating distance) who might be receptive to visiting other apiaries with the avowed purpose of maintaining better beekeeping practices. The collective knowledge of these groups can, hopefully, lessen winter-kill and its chilling costs.

The voluntary nature of these groups, entitles you to join or leave at will, there is no pressure or coercion. You can be a lone wolf or hunt with the pack, as long as it successfully results in stronger and resilient bees, it doesn't matter. Healthy bees are good for Michigan, and good for the planet. Who wants to be a member of the generation known as the *last of the beekeepers*? Not me!

## Offshore, onshore

Corn and soybean growers are the biggest users of chemicals. Much of these crops are exported—but the toxins used on their production, remain here.

## Not dead yet

CUMOFLOSS: an obsolete plant toxin is still being found in bee colonies. So much for the claim that toxins become inert after a month or two.

## Anyone for bridge

Farmers who also keep bees are the bridge between those who use chemicals and those that oppose their use.

C.O.M.B. Monthly meeting.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of the month 6:30pm.  
MSU Pavilion, Farm Lane, E. Lansing

## Bee Read

If you have a comment, query, problem, or an interesting story or anecdote concerning bees that you would like to share with your fellow beekeepers, here is your chance. Send it in to [mjbusybee@frontier.com](mailto:mjbusybee@frontier.com) or [debbie.foote1962@gmail.com](mailto:debbie.foote1962@gmail.com) or hand it in at the meeting. Jane Carhartt may be contacted at [janesbees@yahoo.com](mailto:janesbees@yahoo.com)  
This is your newsletter, make use of it!

## Bee Classifieds

If you have any bee-related items you would like to buy, sell, or trade, this section is for you. This service is free for members of C.O.M.B. You may submit ads to Mike French or Deb Foote. There will be a nominal fee for associate members.

Deadline for next issue is April 2nd