

## SARE Grant Colony Update, 4/5/11

by Erin MacGregor-Forbes, Master Beekeeper

Spring is fast approaching; some southern Maine beekeepers are reporting silver maple bloom and pussy willow pollen. I generally gauge my incoming forage by the activities of the observation hive that I keep in the house and so far they are not dancing forage locations. But I am waiting.

I checked the Westbrook SARE yard on 3/12/11 and found our first significant losses. Five colonies had died. This was discouraging, as my last check on 2/5/11 showed all colonies alive, but I recognize that winter losses often come late in the winter and into the early spring—and it is best not to count losses until the bees have reliable incoming food which is still several weeks away.

It was a good workout carrying the five colonies worth of equipment down the hill to my truck through 10-plus inches of snow, but I didn't want what honey was left to be robbed by the other colonies. Snowshoes come in very handy for checking bees in the winter, but add an extra-awkward dimension when carrying out equipment. I ended

up just slogging up and down the hill in my boots, and by the time I was done I'd mashed down a pretty good path. I am sure the honey and drawn comb will come in very handy for increase colonies or swarms this year, so I brought it home and will protect the combs from damage until they can be put to good use later in the spring.

The good news is that the rest of the colonies in the SARE yard looked very good. The day I inspected, the temperature was approximately 45°F so I did not keep the colonies open for long, but in the case of the live colonies, I did reorganize honey to move it closer to the bee cluster where necessary.

As we do every time we inspect the SARE colonies, I used our “hive inspection sheet” to keep notes on each colony, including my notes on the dead colonies and what appeared to be the cause. The inspection sheet is based on a standard commercial inspection sheet, but with a few modifications to make it easier to use and more relevant to our project.

A PDF of the sheet (shown ½-size at right) can be downloaded from the MSBA website at [mainebeekeepers.org/pdf/overland-hive-inspection-sheet.pdf](http://mainebeekeepers.org/pdf/overland-hive-inspection-sheet.pdf). I encourage you to print it and use it in your own apiary.

We will do our final inspections of the SARE colonies at the end of April or beginning

of May, depending on the weather. Then we will finish compiling the data and I'll write the final report and create a presentation explaining our project and the results. I will present the results at the EAS conference in Warwick, RI on Friday, July 29th at 1:30PM. I am very excited and honored to be on the program at EAS. I hope to see a big turnout of beekeepers from Maine and New England, as EAS is really the best beekeeping educational opportunity available in the US, and we are very lucky to have it so close to Maine this year.

Outreach is a big part of any Sustainable Agriculture program, and a major focus of the SARE project. As part of my outreach, on March 8, I had the honor of speaking at the Prince William Regional Beekeepers Association monthly meeting in Manassas, VA. The Prince William beekeepers also have a SARE Grant working with nucs and packages with their new beekeepers. They invited me to talk about my SARE project and also about small-scale backyard queen rearing.

The trip was fantastic and the group was really amazing. Nearly 100 beekeepers turned out for the Tuesday night meeting. I flew-in a few hours early and had a chance to do some hive inspections with my host, Karla Eisen prior to going out for dinner with several of the beekeepers. (The weather



Snowshoes come in very handy for checking bees in the winter.



was in the low 50s and some spring bulbs and Maples were blooming). After dinner I gave my talk. It was a great opportunity for me to get out and present the reasoning behind my SARE project and to cover some of the fundamentals of the project. Putting the presentation together for Prince William created good basis for the beginning of my full presentation.

I always value getting together with other beekeepers. There were a few people in attendance that I knew from EAS and other national meetings, but for the most part I met a whole lot of new people. The Prince William group is very active and enthusiastic, with many workshops at the intermediate as well as the beginner level. I came home with some neat ideas which I hope to bring to MSBA and the Cumberland Club, and I expect we'll hear from some of the Virginia



The Prince William meeting was full of enthusiastic beekeepers, including my host, Karla Eisen (left), and Keith Fletcher (right).

beekeepers who spend vacation time in Maine in the summer.

I'm glad to be on the home stretch towards real spring; I saw the bees in the Westbrook

SARE yard carrying in pollen for the first time this year on 4/4/11. I'm keeping my fingers crossed for the remaining colonies and looking forward to another great year of beekeeping in Maine. 🐝

**Food Stores**      Honey/Nectar      Pollen  
 High (everywhere)          
 Average                  
 Low                       
 Near Brood              
 Moved/manipulated    

**Disease / Pests:**     No     Yes  
 Chalkbrood             Nosema/Dysentery  
 Varroa Mites Visible     Tracheal Mites  
 EFB                     AFB     Small Hive Beetle  
 Varroa Associated Virus (Circle)  
 Deformed Wing    Hairless Bee    Stunted  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Medications:** Added Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Remove Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Apiguard     Apilife Var     Fumagillin  
 Mite Away 2     Terramycin

**Varroa Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**  
 Screened Bottom Insert:  IN     OUT  
 Screened Bottom Board Check: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Powdered Sugar Roll Mite Drop: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Drone Brood Check: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Alcohol Wash Mite Drop: \_\_\_\_\_

**Spring Feeding / Build Up:**  
 Pollen Substitute    dry \_\_\_\_\_ patties  
 Sugar Syrup 1 : 1 ratio \_\_\_\_\_ qty

**Spring / Summer Honey Flow Preparation**  
 Added Supers: \_\_\_\_\_ (D) \_\_\_\_\_ (M) \_\_\_\_\_ (S)  
 Added Pollen Trap

**Honey Removal / Extraction**  
 # Supers Removed \_\_\_\_\_  
 Pounds Honey for Extraction \_\_\_\_\_  
 Pounds Honey for Cut Comb \_\_\_\_\_

**Winter Preparation:**  
 Screened Bottom Insert:  IN     OUT  
 Homasole Insulation Added     Wrapped hive  
 Entrance Reducer / Mouse Guard

**YARD:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Hive ID:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Weather Condition Today:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Weather Condition Recently:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Who Worked Hive:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Who Taking Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Next Inspection Due:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Hive Temperment**  
 Calm     Nervous     Aggressive  
 Time to Requeen

**Located Queen**     No     Yes  
 Marked?     No     Yes    Color \_\_\_\_\_  
 Replace Queen - Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Laying Pattern**  
 Beautiful - Solid and Uniform  
 Good - Describe: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hygienic - Spotty due to Hygienic Behavior  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Mediocre - Intermittent or Random  
 Poor - Spotty  
 Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Eggs Present**     No     Yes  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Population:**     Heavy     Good     Moderate     Low  
 Rotated Frames in Brood Chamber  
 Added Additional Hive Body  
 Split Hive (new hive #): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Swarming Imminent - needs monitoring  
 notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**Excessive Drone Cells:**     No     Yes  
 Drone Population Estimate:  
 Low (30)     Average 30-100     High 100+  
**Queen Cells**     No     Yes  
 Along Frame Bottom # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Converted Worker Cell Frame # \_\_\_\_\_