



# BEELINES

*Journal of the Ulster County Beekeepers Association*

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The Ulster County Beekeepers Association welcomes and encourages all having an interest in honeybees. We meet on most first-Mondays of each month 7-9 p.m. at the Rosendale Community Center, 1055 Route 32, Rosendale, N.Y. Non-members are encouraged to make a small donation to the Speaker's Fund.

# Striving for a Balance in Wildlife

by Grai St. Clair Rice

If you are a beekeeper in Ulster County, under perpetual threat of bear, more than likely you will end up talking with someone at the NYS Department of Conservation Wildlife Division, with a plea for help and information. What you will find are a group of dedicated individuals with a wealth of experience and a breadth of responsibilities.

Matthew Merchant is a Senior Wildlife Biologist for the NYSDEC Bureau of Wildlife. He heads the Bear Program in Region 3, based in New Paltz, covering a wide stretch of counties in the area with a growing bear population, and their human neighbors. He is a very busy man these days. Matt balances the realities of state bureaucracy with a knowledge and love of nature. His temperament with animals and people exudes calm and comfort.



Matt Merchant with a relocated Black Bear Cub.

Matt's experience with bears goes back to his student days in Maine, earning his BS in Wildlife Management in 1991. As a work-study student, he worked with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Furbearer Unit. One summer was spent live-trapping bears in Northern Maine to help with a study on habitat use.

This experience proved incredibly valuable three years ago in the Ashokan Reservoir area when a logging project dislocated a bear den in winter. Momma Bear and cub had to be moved to keep them safe. Her defensive behavior was subdued with drugs while a team, led by Matt Merchant, rebuilt a cub den for them at a good distance from the work being done. The den was bedded with leaves and built structurally sound to emulate the original den. Momma Bear and cub were left to their new den in peace.

All in a days' work, Matt assists the public in dealing with bear conflicts, as well as when the bears are endangering themselves or others. His duties include continuing research on the regional bear population.

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# Striving for a Balance in Wildlife

by **Grai St. Clair Rice**  
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Bears are great climbers and swimmers, however they prefer to limit their territory to only what is necessary for food.

Matt is also the head of the Region 3 Sportsman Education Program, providing training and certification in Hunting, Bowhunting, Trapping, and Waterfowl Hunting to help develop skills and attitudes suited to good hunters. Matt was pleased to say that New York State was the first state to require hunter education for obtaining a license. An understanding and respect of nature is a key to finding a balance with NYS's Black Bear population and human society. Their

territories are expanding with their numbers, and a healthy co-existence is the goal of the DEC's work being done in education and outreach to the human component of the equation. We have a responsibility to keep from providing food for the bears in the form of birdseed, garbage and bees.



Bee Yard Destroyed by Bear

The more we all know about the biology, habits, foods and territorial orientation of Black Bears, the state's second largest mammal, the better we can protect our own sweet bees from their enormous claws and jaws.



**Matt Merchant will share his knowledge and insights and help us see the way forward in the relationship of bears and beekeepers at our May 3rd Meeting.**

Also see the companion piece on [Bear Proofing](#) in the **Beekeeper's Toolkit** section, page 4



BEELINES started this periodic column on Beekeeping Tools so we can better understand what is available and how to use them. Please email suggestions to [UlsterCountyBeekeepers@yahoo.com](mailto:UlsterCountyBeekeepers@yahoo.com). Written submissions are encouraged.

# The BEEKEEPER'S TOOL KIT

## BEAR PROOFING OUR HIVES

The presence of bears is a growing reality in New York State. As beekeepers, this is particularly troubling as we find more and more hives in our area are either toppled or completely decimated by hungry bears. The high protein larva in a beehive is a choice food of bears, with the honey as dessert.



Photo of plump, juicy Drone Larva from Uglyagnes' Photostream on Flickr. Note the Varroa mite (on third from right).

It is heartbreaking to see the bees we love and tend become food for the uninvited bears. The experience of beekeeping changes when it involves late nights of worry, armed with lights, noisemakers and an queasy feeling in the stomach. There have been too many cold, damp mornings picking clumps of stunned bees off the ground after a bear hit, with a new understanding of affection for our honeybees.

There are numerous methods that can be

employed to thwart these mighty creatures coveting your hives. What you choose to do will need to take into account your proximity to bear territory, your terrain and out-buildings, your budget and your willingness to engage in adventure. Unfortunately, an idyllic hive out in an open field of wild flowers is not a good option in bear territory.



Bears have a natural weariness of people and can be scared by noise and unexpected light. They are also quite intelligent and learn by association. If a bear associates a location with food they will return again. The other side of this is that if a bear has attempted to get into your hive and has been unable to do so, it will most likely not try a third or fourth time.

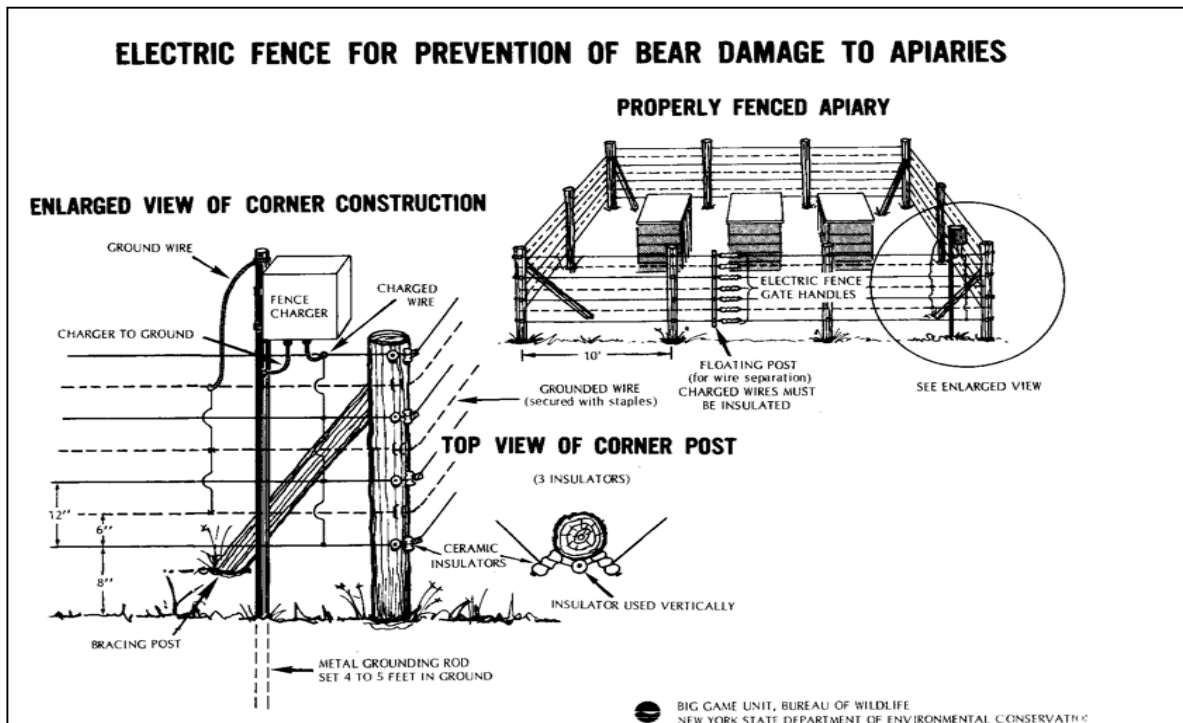


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## BEAR PROOFING OUR HIVES

If you are in serious bear territory you would do best to consider an electrified bear fence. Jim Ayers, in the bear country of Tabasco above Kerhonkson, built his apiary fence from this diagram in 1988, and has not had bear damage since.



This is the Department of Environmental Conservation's diagram sent to Jim Ayers in 1988.

The current costs for a 25' x 25' construction is estimated at \$280.

We recommend maintaining a twenty foot clearance from hives to electric fence to lessen the impact of its electro-magnetic field on the bees. This means a rather large enclosure which may not always be possible.



### Isolate Your Hive

Laurel Okorofsky placed a hive on a platform on second floor of her barn. Although bears can climb, this did add a level of deterrent.

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## The BEEKEEPER'S TOOL KIT

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# BEAR PROOFING OUR HIVES



Joanna Shafer's hive in Pine Plains

### Ratchet Straps & Cinder Blocks

Using ratchet straps through cinder blocks, secured banjo-string tight, can help hold the hive together if knocked over. Metal Banding Straps (obtained from Mann Lake) add additional strength, as do using hive staples for the base of hive, as well as the supers during particularly intense times of bear activity.

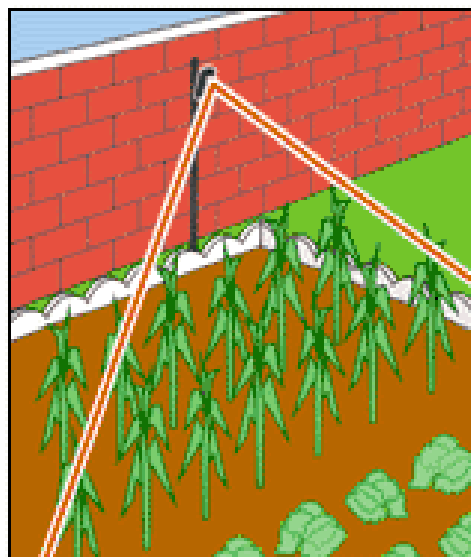
Running straps underneath a large sheet of plywood and then up over hive, can keep a bear from knocking the hive over, since the bear will be standing on the board and unable to push the hive over.

Some beekeepers employ the sound of a radio playing near their hives, and generally choose "talk radio" as a deterrent to advancing bears. This has worked for some, however bears can become habituated to its presence, especially as hunger takes over.

### The Critter-Gitter noise making gizmo

The "Critter-Gitter" is another option employing audio as well as light. "The Critter-Gitter uses a passive infrared sensor to detect the body heat of animals within a 40 ft. range. This battery-powered device then produces startling high-pitched sounds (note: sounds are audible to humans) coupled with flashing lights to scare animals away. The sound pattern changes randomly so animals do not get used to it." (Quote from ad.)

Trish Adamshack found this on sale for \$38 at [www.smarthome.com/6110/Critter-Gitter](http://www.smarthome.com/6110/Critter-Gitter). However the verdict is still out on how the bears and the neighbors will react.





## BEAR PROOFING OUR HIVES

### Desperate Measures

I'm sure there could be more sophisticated "personal safety devices" rigged onto or around the hives, with wireless communication to alarms in the house... but then what?!

If you are comfortable with guns, there is a special "nuisance" permit issued by the DEC which allows a beekeeper to shoot rubber buck shot at a bear menacing a hive. It carries the unfortunate name "Permit to Harass Wildlife." This would seem a last resort, as you must be 20 to 50 feet from the bear.

There is also a strict protocol required. You must either have a hunting license or have taken a Sportsman Education Class and received a Hunter's Safety Certificate. You don't need a license to get a permit; however, you do need to prove you are capable and safe using a 12 Gauge Shot Gun. You can find a upcoming free class by going to [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9191.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9191.html) then scroll down to find the "Hunter Ed" classes listed for Ulster County. The first of these classes takes place on May 8th at Gander Mountain in Kingston.

Rubber Buck Shot is ammunition that is not readily available at stores. In the past, DEC officers have been able to distribute a couple of shells to beekeepers who are experiencing repeated hive attacks, however the NYS budget crunch has ended this practice.

After searching online, and making some phone calls, I found them at [www.cheaperthandirt.com](http://www.cheaperthandirt.com) item # AMM-813. They are 12 Gauge Sellier and Bellot Rubber Buck Shot 2 3/4" with plastic hulls. A 25 Round Box sells for under \$26. This is not the kind of item that UCBA can purchase in bulk and resell to membership.

### What UCBA Can Do

UCBA is going to try to help beekeepers and the DEC by keeping records of incidences between bears and hives. Please report attacks, including repeated attacks, to the UCBA email. Indicate placement of hive, time of attack, deterrent employed (if any), result of the attack, bear sightings (if any), any other specific details you deem important and photographs of before and after. These details will help us track bear activity as it pertains to beekeepers in our area, and also help us ascertain what is working and what is not. At the end of each year, the data will be sent to the Region 3 office of the DEC.

Please realize that if you have a family dog that is helping you defend the hive and scare away a bear, it is best to keep that dog on a leash so as not to get too close to the intruding bear, especially if there is a chance that there are cubs outside of view.

If you are interested in learning more about Black Bears in NYS go to the DEC website, including the page [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/59031.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/59031.html). The UCBA library has a video on Black Bears which can be borrowed and viewed with your family, so you all have a better understanding of co-existing with these creatures. If you have a continuing bear problem and need the advice and help of the DEC contact the Region 3 Wildlife Office based in New Paltz at 845-256-3098.



# A Personal Experience

As reported by Trish Adamshack after two nights of bear attacks within one week:

"Randy and I were out at the Hives to get the hive that had been attacked before straight. We were suited up... we were setting up the alarm with string around the trees and Randy had to go back into the house to get something.



Trish Adamshack's toppled Top Bar Hive. The bear pulled two frames of honey out of the top but did not get to the brood.

Since it was dark 9:15-9:30ish I said "I better stay with the hive", so I sat near the driveway on the rocks and was looking at the stars when I could hear--very faintly something in the woods...I said to myself it must be the bear... I then thought to myself are you going to be scared if the bear comes out of the woods? And I thought no, I'm not going to be scared, but I will get up and run screaming toward him if he does.

So, I sat very quietly and did not move, trying not to breath. The wood line was dark with shadows, and then I saw him. It was like a big black shadow against the wood line and I sat completely still. He was sniffing the ground near the hive.

I waited a few moments and then I stood up and ran toward him with my version of an African war cry. The question is was I scary enough? Mr. BEAR did not come back for the rest of the night.

So, start practicing in the shower if you are not sure what you would do if a bear came out of the woods... He was about the height of the top bar when on all fours. He Was Not huge. He was not SCARY. "



"Personal Safety Device" rigged around hives until the arrival of "Critter-Gitter".

PS: Trish has said she will decline any requests to demonstrate her 'war cry'.



# UCBA NewsLine

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UCBA Members at work and play

## The UCBA Yahoo Group is now ready to roll

Members have voiced interest in having a forum to communicate with each other and help support our common passion for honeybees. Marie-Celeste Edwards has agreed to be the monitor for the UCBA Yahoo Group, set up two years ago by Stephen Gilman and never utilized. The Yahoo group is open to current members to exchange ideas and information, and can be found at:



<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/ulsterbees/>

If you have specific questions please find Marie-Celeste at a meeting. Thanks MC!

## Swarm List For Website



Are you interested in being listed on a Swarm Call List to be published on the UCBA website?

There will be a sign-up sheet at the sign-in table at the May 3rd meeting. Please indicate your full name, area of coverage, and best emergency contact number.

This is a great way to get more bees and do a community service at the same time!

News and Upcoming Events

## Betterbee's Annual Field Day

Saturday, July 17, 2010.

This day-long event, with speakers and bee yard work, is a wonderful way to gain new beekeeping knowledge and meet other beekeepers. Registration is required for this free event by calling Betterbee at 800-632-3379.

You can arrange equipment orders with them in advance of the event, and pick up that day to save on shipping costs. [www.Betterbee.com](http://www.Betterbee.com)

Thank you, Betterbee !

## **BEEKEEPER'S CALENDAR - MAY**

- Swarm Season is underway. Position bait hives, with old comb, at a good distance from your hives and as high as possible.
- Bee Careful catching swarms, not because of being stung, just don't break a leg. Be wise, and bless the ones that get away.
- With nights still dropping into the 30s and 40s, any hive that swarms now will be in danger of having the new Queen expire in her Queen Cell due to the cold.
- Put supers on immediately. Comb builders need time to do their work before the serious nectar flow kicks in. Plant life seems to be progressing two weeks earlier this year.

# UCBA NewsLine

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## Past Events

### FAIRACRES FARM LAWN & GARDEN SHOW

UCBA's table at the Adams Fairacre Farm Lawn and



John Stegmayer and Hans Gunderud. Photo by Jim Ayers

Garden Show in March looked great. This was a popular contribution to UCBA outreach efforts for a second year. Thank you to the Stegmayers for organizing and for those who volunteered to talk with people visiting the weekend event.

## Future Meeting

### Inspired Packaging

Starting saving examples of interesting labels and packaging to inspire all of us, and bring your own if you have a special label. At some point in the future we will have a meeting to discuss packaging and design elements to consider. Grai will start a collection of material to keep for a display for that meeting.



Check out the SKS Bottle and Packaging site for beekeepers <http://www.sks-bottle.com/BeekeepingContainers.html>

### **YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS THE MAY 3RD MEETING !**

- Matt Merchant, Wildlife Biologist and the Department of Environmental Conservation's local bear specialist, will come and talk with us about bears and how to deal with this growing problem for beekeepers in Ulster County.
- In the month of April, many UCBA members' hives have been under attack by these large hungry creatures. Bear attacks are reaching critical mass and the more we know about how to defend our honeybees the better. The organic yard care panel will be organized for another meeting in the future.
- Matt Merchant will go first at the meeting. After Matt's presentation and question and answer, we will move on to other UCBA business including a discussion about mentoring both within UCBA and as it relates to Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and school education requests. Rob Overton will give details on the Boy Scouts Beekeeping Merit Badge campaign.
- UCBA member Rick Alfandre will bring is pieces of electric fencing to discuss in the later part of the meeting. He is bringing wire, controller and other parts that we can become familiar with, to demystify the installation of an electric fence.
- Plant Sale before the meeting..... so thin out your perennials or bring in your seedlings. There will be a couple of tables with plastic table clothes to place the plants on inside the meeting room. Also, if you have seeds to swap, including vegetable seeds that would be great to share.

# Got Milk ?

By Teresa Eggers

That's what Boy Scout Troop 16 of Stone Ridge, NY asked when they decided to educate their community about Honey Bees and Beekeeping. The boys needed to come up with an idea to celebrate the Boy Scouts of America's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the annual Boy Scout show at their local mall where other troops would also be displaying Scout memorabilia, Scouting traditions and games. Troop 16 chose to display the old Beekeeping Merit Badge that was earned by Boy Scouts from 1911 up until 1995.

First the boys learned about honey bees and beekeeper's equipment from local beekeepers Jim Ayers, John Petit and Teresa Eggers. Then the boys decided to create a display that would help teach others what they had learned. They made some posters and planned to set up an empty hive for people to examine.

They also had jars of honey for people to see and some beekeeping literature.

But it needed to be fun for younger children. That's where the milk came into play. The boys collected 80 half gallon milk and juice cartons, cut away the folded lid area and reshaped them into a six sided box. Then by crushing the 4 bottom corners in slightly, they were able to staple them together to create a giant honey comb. This was suspended above a table.



Placed throughout the mall were cardboard flowers with "pollen and nectar" balls inside. Children and adults collected the pollen and nectar and brought it to the giant honey comb. Once they came to troop 16's display with their forage, they were given more information about the role of the honey bee in our food production, pesticides and other threats to the honey bee, and the life cycle of the bees. The children then had the pleasure and challenge of throwing their pollen balls into the giant honey comb. Their reward was a sample of honey in the form of a "honey stix" donated to the troop by Nature's Kick Corporation.

The Scout Show was a great success for troop 16 with many interested Scouts and non-Scouts passing by and asking multiple questions about the honey bees and beekeeping. Currently the Bee Keeping Merit badge is not offered by the Boy Scouts of America. Perhaps with more interest by other young Scouts it will be reinstated.



Boy Scouts of America  
Discontinued Beekeeping Merit Badge



## The Last Buzz ...

You know you're *married* to a beekeeper when...

- You spend at least one day a week on your hands and knees with a sharp knife scraping wax and propolis off your kitchen floor.
- You've ever used bee boxes as furniture in your house, for coffee tables, chairs, night stands, and storage boxes.
- You mow around mountains of bee equipment that never seems to make it to the barn.
- You plan weddings, child birth, surgery and funerals around honey extracting time.
- When buying a new truck, your spouse checks weight loads and measures the bed to see how many hives he can fit in it.
- You get stung by the bee that was clinging to your husband's bee suit when you picked it up to wash it.



Web site: [www.UlsterBees.org](http://www.UlsterBees.org)  
email: [UCBA.Beelines@gmail.com](mailto:UCBA.Beelines@gmail.com)

Ulster County



Beekeepers

Ulster County Beekeepers Association  
133 Plains Road  
New Paltz, NY 12561

To:

### UCBA Meets First Mondays 7-9 PM

at Rosendale Community Center, 1055 Route 32, Rosendale, New York

President: Grai St. Clair Rice - [nychoneybee@gmail.com](mailto:nychoneybee@gmail.com)

Vice-President: Laura Wells - [laurawells56@verizon.net](mailto:laurawells56@verizon.net)

Co-Secretary: Trish Adamshack -  
[trishadamshack@yahoo.com](mailto:trishadamshack@yahoo.com)

Co-Secretary: Marge Morrissey - [margem@hvc.rr.com](mailto:margem@hvc.rr.com)

Newsletter: Gary Binley - [UCBA.Beelines@gmail.com](mailto:UCBA.Beelines@gmail.com)

Librarian: Elizabeth Stegmayer - [ebiermacki@aol.com](mailto:ebiermacki@aol.com)

Equipment Steward: Rich Hines - ph # 687-7604

Set-up Committee:

Trish Adamshack - [trishadamshack@yahoo.com](mailto:trishadamshack@yahoo.com)

Cindy Joao - [HomeBees@yahoo.com](mailto:HomeBees@yahoo.com)

Matt Dilling - [matt@litebriteneon.com](mailto:matt@litebriteneon.com)

UPCOMING

MAY 3<sup>rd</sup> - BEARS

JUNE 7<sup>th</sup> - TBA

JULY 5<sup>th</sup> - UCBA's  
3<sup>rd</sup> Annual

SUMMER PICNIC