

## Project Update, January 30, 2014: Buried in Snow

### A Comparison of Strength and Survivability of Honey Bee Colonies with Conventional Versus Northern-Requeened Packages

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#### SARE FNE 12-756

Our colonies are buried in snow, clustered in for winter most of the time now. We try not to disturb them at this time of year. We don't even walk out to check them very often. For the most part, it doesn't do much good to check the bees in winter, and disturbing them by knocking on the colony or checking the screened bottom board insert is just that—disturbing them.

We did, however, take the chance on January 30, 2014 to check the colonies and remove the equipment of the colonies we have lost. We waited for a warm day and quickly checked each colony by either seeing flying bees, listening to the hive, and if we didn't see or hear anything, checking the colony from the top. Four of our colonies that were alive in December had died since our last check.

We removed the equipment from the yard and are now storing it in the barn with screening to protect it from potential mouse damage, as it is important to protect the combs that a lost colony leaves behind. We thoroughly inspected the brood combs looking for signs of communicable disease (there were none). This drawn comb will be a blessing to a new colony in the spring,

so we are careful to protect it from damage either in the yard or in the barn.

As for the colonies still in the yard, we have candy boards on the hives that are lighter than we'd like to see them, and several of the colonies have begun eating the candy. We will check them again towards the end of the month and replace candy as necessary. Until then, we wait for warm days to see evidence of cleansing flights, and hope for the best. Each new snowfall creates a clean palette of white against which we see dead bees in the snow. I am often amazed how far from the hives I'll find a bee in the snow—I rarely see them flying far from the hives, just only find one expired, way up in the driveway, or out at the back border of the property. The bees never cease to amaze me.

There are still several months of winter remaining, and we hope that the colonies that have survived this far are able to hang on until spring. It is too early to compile the data on the colonies for reporting purposes, but we are reviewing our summer inspection sheets and organizing the many photographs that we've taken in the bee yard. We will be presenting the results of all three years of the

project at the Eastern Apicultural Society meeting this July in East Kentucky. I know that between April and July, we'll be super busy with our colonies, moving hives to new yards, preventing swarming and teaching—so I'm trying to get as much of a head start on the year's-progress part of the report as possible. It is amazing to look at the photographs with the green grass and bright sunny dandelions and imagine that the snow will eventually recede and turn to spring again. I enjoy the photos of the queens in their cages, or as we were marking them, and their brood patterns. We have a few photos of small hive beetles (just one or two) and even a few of white-eyed drones. Each colony is an amazing miracle of nature.

If spring comes early, when the next *Bee Line* is ready for the presses, we hope to have the final results of the project. I suspect the bees are also hoping for an early spring. 🍌

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