

## **Bee Chronicles**

**3 March 2026**

Second week of February it was warm enough I did a complete tear-down inspection of my colonies. One had frozen dead. The queen was in the center of the dead cluster. The bees had their heads in cells among the dead brood. A very organized looking group. There was plenty of honey and pollen for food. Obviously a "chill kill". I expected this colony not to make it due to the small cluster size.

That was my third loss since last fall. First to go in late November was my best, biggest colony. Probably, disease from the mites, even though I had treated them regularly. It is common to lose your best colony. Sad but normal. That really big colony has the most mites along with the most bees.

Early January inspection revealed my smallest colony had perished. Probably due to cold and a small cluster.

Mid-February inspection showed number three dead colony. Again, a small cluster. This was after the first cold spell but before the second and deeper, longer cold snap.

24 February. The weather is trending warmer and I should be able to inspect the colonies this coming weekend. 1 March 2026.

My five surviving colonies were all brooding in mid-January. Small brood areas, about the size of my hand. On 2-4 faces of frames.

My February inspection showed the 5 surviving colonies with brood areas twice the size of my hand on both sides of 4-5 frames. The bee populations were large enough they were shoulder to shoulder covering the south end of all the frames with some bees on the next two outer frames from the brood patch.

It is exciting to see such a good early start. Enough bees I expect the cluster to survive. However, as cold as the "chill" was I expect to see some of the brood area die because it was out side the cluster on the coldest days. This is normal and

okay. The net gain is that the brood that survives will give the colony a head start in March.

This inspection revealed all queens looking good and busy laying eggs. Good brood patterns with some exhibiting a doughnut pattern. The center had hatched out in January providing a population increase to the cluster. The queen was back filling the doughnut hole. Good News!

I hope all five of these colonies will be large enough to split in early April. An early split with a mature queen will expand rapidly with drawn comb and some comb with honey from the donor colony. You will slow the expansion if the bees need to make wax and draw comb.

All my colonies have 8-10 frames of wintered over capped honey from fall syrup feeding. This will provide lots of food until the flowers are blooming. It will also provide excess to move with the splits.

Nectar coming into the colony from the slow spring bloom will go first to feeding brood as it expands.

My concern will be obtaining pollen for the new brood. The nurse bees can use stored honey on cool days but will there be enough pollen inside the hive to keep the queen laying eggs at her maximum rate. No problem, I have been feeding pollen substitute powder in field feeders all winter long. On warm days the bees bring it home and store it. Now they will use it directly as brood food.

Around 15 February every year the foragers stop going to the pollen field feeder. They are bringing in henbit and alder pollen. I also see the bees on Hellebores, Jonquils, and crocuses (or is that croci)?

Bluett's are starting to bloom a little early. They are close to the ground where it warms early.

I am watching the Red Maple very closely. The new stems are nice and red which is the first sign of bloom coming.

I was in Athens, GA. 9 February 2026. The Japanese magnolias are blooming. They are about a month ahead of us here in Blairsville. French magnolias will be

next and then blooms will start moving North. Watch for pink flowering Apricots, pink Red Bud, white Bradford Pear, in that order. This is all bee food.

Remove mite medication when you see the buds forming on wild Black Raspberry and wild Blackberry. When they bloom it is the start of honey to eat collection. That is time to put your honey supers on.

Good luck and get excited!