Virginia Webb Wins Top Award in World Honey Show

This past August the world convened in Dublin, Ireland, for the 39th Apimondia International Apicultural Congress. Along with lectures and exhibitors, there was the World Honey Show in which America stole the stage. Here are the results.

Virginia Webb, Clarkesville, Georgia, won a Gold medal for her 24-jar entry. It is hard to over-state the significance of this award. It is considered “Best in the World,” crème de la crème, number one. This award is the one that other honey exhibitors covet because it is the hardest to achieve. Let me explain why the 24-jar entry is so difficult. First, each of the 24 jars must be the same in perfect condition: no honey on lids, filled to an exact proportion, no smudges on the glass, no debris in the honey, etc. The 24-jar entry must conform to European Union label regulations. Not an easy task. In addition, Virginia took home four other awards: Silver medal in Decorative Display of Honey, Silver for Light Honey, Silver for Medium Honey, and Bronze in Dark Honey. Virginia was the top medal winner in the honey show, taking home a total of five. The U.S. National Honey Board sponsored her Display Class while Gamber Containers sponsored her other entries. Other winning Americans included Wayne Morris from Montana with Gold Medals for his Ross Rounds and Section Comb Honey and one Bronze Medal for
Chunk Honey. Judy Schmaltz from Clarkston, Minnesota, won a Gold for Crystallized Honey, and Ray Nicholson from Wadena, Minnesota, won a Bronze for his Ross Rounds. Finally, Carl Webb, husband of Virginia, won a Bronze for the 24-jar class and a Bronze for his Beeswax Block.

Virginia and Carl Webb exhibit medals won at the Apimondia honey show

Winning the gold at Apimondia takes more work than just pouring some honey and cleaning a few jars. Here is a synopsis of the work required for Virginia to take home the gold. A year prior to the show, Virginia reviewed the classes and rules for the World Honey Show and decided on which classes she would enter. She contacted Gamber Containers and asked if they would sponsor her entries. They agreed and she complied to their rules as well as Apimondia’s honey show rules. In spring 05 the best colonies were selected for the spring honey flow, and section boxes along with Ross Rounds were placed on the hives. After the flow, honey was separated into light and dark categories and then extracted, strained and set aside. At the end of June, supers along with Ross Rounds were placed on colonies for the Sourwood flow. For Virginia’s 24-jar class she chose sourwood honey instead of spring. Each jar set in her kitchen for weeks being strained numerous times, letting it settle between straining. Jars arrived from Gamber in July and each was washed twice and air-dried before the honey was poured. After the honey was poured it was time to label the jars. Commercial labels which conform to European Union regulations are required for the 24-jar entry. This includes name, address, country of origin and “best by” date. Along with the 24-jar class, Virginia entered ten other classes, one of which was Display Class which included over twelve pounds of honey, beeswax candles, pollen and mead. This display was sponsored by the National Honey Board.

So how did Virginia get all that honey to Ireland, you ask? First, she had to apply for state, federal and Irish licenses and certifications in order to ship honey out of the country and into Ireland. She mailed her 24-jar entry to the hotel since the airline would have prohibited her from carrying the extra weight. After arriving in Dublin, Virginia spent days in her hotel room cleaning jars, removing air bubbles, attaching labels, and ensuring proper levels of honey in each container. That’s the kind of dedication it takes to win best in the world. When I asked Virginia if she would do it again, she replied, “Absolutely.” Congratulations to all our state-side winners. Well done!
The University of Georgia Honey Bee Lab hosted the Georgia Beekeepers Association fall meeting September 30th and October 1st. It was a successful meeting with a variety of speakers, a fabulous honey show and close to 80 in attendance. During the business meeting, new officers for the Georgia Beekeepers Association were elected.

**GBA 2005-2006 elected officers:**

- Robert Brewer – President
- Evelyn Williams – Treasurer
- Wayne Barnett – Vice President
- Jessie McCurdy – Board of Directors
- Keith Fielder – Secretary

**2005 honey show winners**

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<th>Category</th>
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<td>Light Honey</td>
<td>Keith Fielder</td>
<td>Michael Gailey</td>
<td>Martha Kiefer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amber Honey</td>
<td>Wally Batchelor</td>
<td>Lee Hagan</td>
<td>Michael Gailey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dark Honey</td>
<td>Ed Mellon</td>
<td>Michael Gailey</td>
<td>Virginia Webb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>Martha Kiefer</td>
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</table>

**Winning entries for the 2005 GBA honey show**
Once again JM and Frieda Sikes cooked up heaping portions of crab, shrimp, sausage, potatoes and corn to feed the masses. It was a meal fit for a king, queen and her entire court. Both JM and Frieda were awarded a lifetime membership which was presented by PN Williams during the business meeting.

During the Board of Directors meeting last spring Bill Owens organized a committee to report on the feasibility of the GBA taking a more active role in the state 4-H entomology program. Bill felt it was time the GBA encouraged beekeeping interests among children and young adults and by doing so would bring new members to the association. The committee, which consisted of Keith Delaplane, Robert Brewer and Keith Fielder, presented a report to the Board of Directors’ fall meeting. By unanimous vote the board established a Senior 4-H Beekeeping Scholarship which will be sponsored by the GBA at the level of $500 per year. The GBA, in collaboration with the state 4-H office, will announce the scholarship to county 4-H agents no later than January. 4-H district winners advancing to the state level with a beekeeping project will be eligible for this award. A GBA representative and Keith Delaplane, faculty member in charge of the 4-H entomology program, will choose the recipient after reviewing both the portfolio and oral presentation. The GBA will retain the right to withhold the award if a suitable winner is not found. Not only will this scholarship encourage an interest in beekeeping among the best and brightest of Georgia’s youth, but it also benefits the GBA by direct association with state luminaries, politicians and university administrators who attend the annual 4-H banquet.

Finally, on a personal note, I want to thank the GBA for an honor I never thought would come my way, winning the Beekeeper of the Year Award. When PN stood and announced my name as this year’s winner, I was stunned. I believe my exact words were, “No way, you’re kidding, really?” Then I was speechless. I did manage to say thank you while holding back tears. Becoming involved with honey bees has been one of the best decisions I ever made. Thank you Georgia beekeepers, from the bottom of my heart, for making this the best career, and the best year yet. See ya’ll next year.
This past August, GBA president Bill Owens held the first Junior Beekeeping Short Course at the UGA bee lab. It was a successful short course with 26 children and their parents in attendance. The classes are designed for children and young adults who are interested in beekeeping and for those who have had no prior experience working with honey bees. After the overwhelming success of his beekeeping short course, Bill plans to offer another class in March 2006. If you are interested in attending the course, information will be posted on the GBA website (www.gabeekeeping.com) or you can contact Bill Owens directly at fflowens2001@yahoo.com.

Reg Wilbanks Featured in Inaugural *Bee Culture* Column

Recently I was asked to write a column in *Bee Culture* magazine focusing on the fundamentals of beekeeping in the southern U.S. This was a challenge. How does one incorporate information on an area with such a wide variety of honey plants, soil types, and climates? What Maryland beekeepers are doing in October is different from beekeeping activities the same month in Georgia. To add to the confusion, what northern Georgia beekeepers are doing in April can be completely different from their southern counterparts. Hence, I decided to drop the “Beekeeping in the South” idea in favor of showcasing personalities that are uniquely southern. Every few months I will be interviewing commercial operators, hobbyists and researchers in an attempt to illustrate beekeepers in the South. Beekeeping practices, different modes of operation, and tricks of the trade will be showcased instead of seasonal beekeeping tasks. The first “Southern Personalities” issue was published in the November issue of *Bee Culture* magazine. Some of you may not receive this magazine and I would like for you read the issue since it profiles one of our own, Mr. Reg Wilbanks.
Reg Wilbanks comes from a long line of beekeepers, himself being the fourth generation. Reg is owner and operator of Wilbanks Apiaries, Inc, one of the country’s largest commercial operations that ships package bees and queens nationally and internationally.

The Wilbanks business started when Reg’s great grandfather, Gresham Duckett, gave his grandfather, Guy T. Wilbanks, four hives of bees as a wedding present in the 1800s. With hard work, dedication and the help of his son, Warren Wilbanks, Reg’s grandfather, soon turned those four colonies into three hundred. In the early years the business focused on honey production. At that time their family resided in Banks County in north Georgia. Their honey market ranged from the surrounding area all the way to Atlanta. North Georgia is known for its sourwood honey which blooms during the summer months. However, honey flows can be un-dependable, being almost non-existent some years. Just ask any of the north Georgia beekeepers today. The past four years have seen little sourwood honey. Back to the story. In 1946, the family home was destroyed in a fire so Guy and Warren Wilbanks moved to south Georgia. South Georgia floral sources offered larger honey crops and had a reputation for being more dependable than their northern counterparts. However, the first year after their arrival the honey crop was a disaster. No crop, no money. So Guy T. Wilbanks had to take a job in the shipyards in Brunswick. Warren Wilbanks, Reg’s father, also needed to make ends meet so he went to work for the Georgia Department of Agriculture as a state bee inspector. The job not only offered an income but an opportunity to learn about different honeybee operations, primarily the queen and package bee industry. The family decided to diversify from solely producing honey to producing package bees and queens. A year later, the family moved to Claxton, Georgia, their present location.

Reg was involved in the family business taking only a short break to attend college. After receiving a BS degree in Industrial Management from Georgia Southern University in 1972, Reg returned home eventually becoming president of Wilbanks Apiaries, Inc. Since that time Reg has been active in all aspects of the beekeeping industry. Here are a few of Reg’s accomplishments. He was president for three consecutive terms for the Georgia Beekeepers Association and the American Bee Breeders Association. He served as Chairman of the Georgia Farm Bureau Honeybee Advisory Committee and as president of the American Beekeeping Federation in which he is still a member of the Board of Directors. Reg served as member of the American Farm Bureau Research Advisory Committee for fire ants and Africanized honeybees. In 1987 he was appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to represent the U.S. beekeeping industry on the USDA Varroa Mite Negotiating Rulemaking Committee. He is a member of the National Honey Board and represents producer region 6 which includes Georgia, Florida and Puerto Rico. He is the past chairman of the University of Georgia Agricultural Experiment Station Research Advisory Board. In 1984 he received the Georgia “Beekeeper of the Year” award. Reg also has numerous civic, state and local appointments to his credit. As you can see, Reg Wilbanks has not only been dedicated to his business but to the community in which he works and lives.

Now let’s turn our attention to the operation side of Wilbank’s Apiaries, Inc. They operate approximately 6,000 colonies primarily for the production of package bees which results in a sale of 15,000 – 20,000 packages a year. As for the queen rearing side of the operation, they run close to 15,000 mating nuclei which produce over 60,000 queens annually for sale worldwide. The colonies and nuclei are spread out over a six-county area which keeps Reg and his employees moving. It is an impressive operation, one
which I’ve had the privilege to witness first hand. When I interviewed Reg for this article, he and his crew of 20 were about to depart on a deep sea fishing adventure. After they returned to shore, Reg was treating them to a weekend of relaxation on the beach at Tybee Island. This business is hard work. He and his crew hustle year-round from sun up till sun down. Reg realizes this and rewards his employees each year.

Before I finish, let’s observe a typical year for Wilbanks Apiaries, Inc. South Georgia in January is still a little on the cool side. Red maple, which marks the beginning of the season for Georgia, is fixing to bloom; therefore a rigorous feeding program has begun for colonies selected for package production. This in combination with pollen collected off red maple stimulates the queen to lay eggs. Colony populations explode overnight. By the middle of February, the grafting operation begins. Newly grafted queen cells are coming off the first week of March. These cells are placed into baby nucs which have been stocked and are ready for production. If all goes well, including no major weather systems or unforeseen problems, the first round of mated queens are ready for sale by the last week of March. By the first week of April, an additional crew comes in to start shaking packages. This will last several months usually subsiding by the first week of June. However, they will continue raising queens through September. After the last of the packages are mailed out, the “shaking” crew shifts gears and begins re-queening every colony. As they enter each colony, they clean bottom boards, scrap lids, and remove burr comb between frames, top bars, sides, etc. When trying to produce 20,000 packages and 60,000 queens annually, speed is of essence. Colonies must be clear of burr comb and debris so frames come out easily without rolling bees and damaging queens. Materials that were ordered the first of July are arriving in the fall. By winter, packages are being assembled and repairs made. Just as the hammer is put down, January has arrived and the cycle begins again.

When I asked Reg why he chose beekeeping as a career he told me he enjoys working outside and with nature. He enjoys the constant challenge that beekeeping delivers on a day to day basis. How the nature of the job changes each day, each week, each month. He told me “beekeeping is in my blood” and in the blood of my sons. His two sons, Patrick and Timothy, comprise the fifth generation of Wilbanks beekeepers. When he was talking about why he loves working with bees and the challenges he faces, it sounded like so many other beekeepers I have spoken to over the years. I think there is something inherent in all beekeepers - a desire to work with one of nature’s most fascinating insects.

Or else we’re all a little crazy? Take your pick.

**Honey Bees Cook Invaders to Death**

According to a study in China, honeybees defend their colonies against giant killer wasps in a very unusual way with body heat. The bees mob the invader wasp, mass around its body, then vibrate their wing muscles to generate heat – and not just a little heat, but enough to cook the wasp!

There are two species of honeybees living in China, the native *Apis cerana* and introduced European honeybee, *Apis mellifera*. Both species trap the wasp once it has entered the colony and then engulf her in a living ball of bees. The bees then begin to slowly raise the temperature until the wasp dies from hyperthermia. However, they come within 5°C of killing or cooking themselves during the process, which is a small margin when you think about it. There are no little thermometers inside a beehive, hence they must be aware of hive temperature by touch and feel.
the rising temperatures themselves before they reach a critical threshold. Tan Ken of Yunnan Agricultural University in Kunming, China, reports that the native bees have this heat-balling ability where the European bees don't. This makes sense if you think about it. The Asian bees have long shared their range with this colony invader *Vespa velutina*, but European bees have only became widespread in Asia about 50 years ago and have had less time to adapt to the wasp. These attacker wasps are "gigantic," says Thomas Seeley of Cornell University, who studies bee behavior. Of all social insects, this species has the largest workers, with wingspans that can stretch 5 centimeters. They build large papery nests similar to their North American cousins the hornets. The wasps specialize in breaking into other social-insect nests and carrying off larvae as food for their young. “I've seen a single wasp overwhelm a colony of 6,000 bees” that doesn't make the “heat balls,” says Seeley. The invader wasp will stand at the nest’s entrance and as one guard bee after another comes out to defend its home the wasp cuts them into pieces then waits for the next to appear. When all the defenders are dead, “the wasps strip-mine out the larvae,” he reports.

Researchers used to think that the few dozen bees surrounding an invader were just trying to sting the wasp, but recently it was revealed, with the help of thermal cameras, that it is the balls’ soaring heat that actually kills the wasp. To test the bees’ margin of safety, Tan and his research colleagues presented tethered wasps to six Asian and European colonies. At each nest, worker bees engulfed the wasp immediately. Within 5 minutes, the center of a typical bee ball had reached 45°C. To check the bees’ and wasps’ tolerance for heat, researchers caged each of the species in incubators and systematically cranked up the temperature. The wasps died at 45.7°C, but the Asian honeybees survived to temperatures reaching 50.7°C and the European bees to 51.8°C. Researchers reported the native Asian bees, ancient adversaries of these killer wasps, mobilized half as many defenders as the Europeans. Furthermore, Asian bees not mobbing the wasp were more likely to take shelter during an attack than were bystander European bees. Heat balling is the flip side of bees nursing larvae in a nest, says Seeley. To keep the youngsters at the right temperature in cool weather, honeybees space themselves around the nursery and shiver their powerful flight muscles to generate heat. Seeley notes, however, that the nursemaids don't raise the temperature above 36°C, so the brood stays safe.

**Management Calendar: December – February in Georgia**

By this point your colonies should be tucked in for winter, even though winter hasn’t officially or climatically arrived yet. With temperatures still averaging in the 60s, bees are still making foraging flights which in turn means extra consumption of food stores. Keep that in mind and check those colonies in question.

If your colonies are queenright, packed with pollen and honey, disease and pest free, protected from the environment and have a large population, they should have no problem coming through winter. However, if any of the above is overlooked you may be disappointed when spring comes and your boxes are empty of bees. Since our climate is mild in winter you can occasionally inspect your colonies. When temperatures rise above 60°F, it is fine to quickly inspect a colony. Try not to break the cluster, and place the frames back in the order in which you took them out. Primarily, at this point you are checking honey stores. If they are in need of food, mix a heavy sugar solution (2 parts sugar to 1 part water) and feed them directly on top of the cluster with either inverted plastic pails, buckets or gallon zip-loc bags. Entrance feeders are useless during the colder months since the bees are unable to break from the cluster and move to the entrance.

If you’ve done your work in the bee yard, now it is time to move inside where there is plenty to be done. First of all, if you plan on extending your operation next year by ordering bee packages and queens, you better not delay ordering. Last year queen and package producers were sold out by early spring. Another task is protecting your equipment from the gnawing teeth of pesky rodents. Last year we lost hundreds of
frames due to their nasty, chewing habits. Don’t let this happen to your stored equipment. I found that placing queen excluders on the bottom and top of a stack of supers keeps the little buggers at bay. However, dark comb in which brood has been reared or pollen stored is a prime target for wax moths. Store those frames on crystals to keep them protected. Remember, you spent hours building this equipment. Don’t let all that hard work and money end up as wood chips on the floor. Not only will you need to protect your stored equipment, you must also protect the hive itself. During times of colder weather, mice love to move in and take up residence inside honey bee colonies. To keep out these unwanted intruders, place an entrance reducer or a mouse guard at the entrance of the colony. Guards that are made of metal provide better protection since the mice can’t chew through them. They also provide some protection against the cold, winter winds.

Now is the time for repairing old equipment or building new. Spring is just around the corner, so we need to be ready to hit the ground running.

Once February arrives, don’t forget to re-check colonies for honey stores and a viable queen. Colonies are gearing up for the upcoming nectar flow with increasing populations, therefore supplies will be dwindling. If pollen supplies are low it’s a good idea to put pollen supplements in the colony. Hopefully no unforeseen problems will occur and your colonies will be ready for a new year. But before that new year arrives, have a wonderful Christmas.

**Electronic Delivery of Georgia Bee Letter**

If you would like to receive *Georgia Bee Letter* via email, send me your address at jbee@uga.edu. Please put a reference to the GBL in the subject line so I know you are requesting the newsletter. Every day I receive numerous advertisements or “spam,” and I delete them immediately. If you have sent me your address and not received the GBL, please send it again. Since the last time I sent out this newsletter I was hit with a virus which wiped out all my new/old mail. Yes, this has happened before so I have changed my e-mail address which should be more secure. Also, notify me if there are changes to your club meeting times or contact persons, or any interesting information about your club.
How to Get Georgia Bee Letter

GBL can be received electronically by emailing your request to jbee@uga.edu

Regular Meetings

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<th>Location</th>
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<td>7:00 pm bimonthly, second Monday</td>
<td>Oxbow Meadows Nature Center, Columbus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cherokee Beekeepers Club</td>
<td>7:00 pm third Thursday</td>
<td>Cherokee County Justice Building, Canton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal Area Beekeepers Association</td>
<td>7:00 pm second Monday</td>
<td>Southbridge Tennis Complex, Savannah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coweta Beekeepers Association</td>
<td>7:00 pm fourth Monday, (bi-monthly)</td>
<td>Coweta Fairgrounds Conference Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Central Georgia Bee Club</td>
<td>7:00 pm first Monday</td>
<td>Burke Co. Office Park Complex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Piedmont Beekeepers Association</td>
<td>7:30 pm third Monday, February - September</td>
<td>Bishop Community Center, Bishop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foothills Beekeepers Association</td>
<td>6:30 pm third Monday</td>
<td>Banks Co. Ext Office, 413 Evans St., Homer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forsyth Beekeepers Club</td>
<td>7:00 pm second Monday</td>
<td>Forsyth County Library, Cumming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heart of Georgia Beekeepers Association</td>
<td>7:00 pm second Monday</td>
<td>GA Farm Bureau, 1620 Bass Rd., Macon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metro Atlanta Beekeepers Association</td>
<td>7:00 pm second Tuesday</td>
<td>Dunwoody Nature Center, Dunwoody</td>
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<td>Mountain Beekeepers Association</td>
<td>7:00 pm first Monday</td>
<td>Mountain Regional Library, Young Harris</td>
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<td>7:00 pm second Thursday</td>
<td>Northeast Georgia Regional Library, Clarksville</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northwest Georgia Beekeepers Association</td>
<td>7:00 pm second Monday, Jan - June &amp; Sept</td>
<td>Walker County Agric. Center, Rock Spring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southeast Georgia Beekeepers Association</td>
<td>7:00 pm fourth Tuesday, Aug-March</td>
<td>Waconia School Building, Waycross</td>
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<td>Southwest Georgia Beekeepers Association</td>
<td>7:30 pm last Tuesday, even months</td>
<td>Swords Apiaries, Moultrie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tara Beekeepers Assn (Clayton Co. area)</td>
<td>7:30 pm third Monday</td>
<td>Reynolds Nature Preservation</td>
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