



*Let's Meet  
Our Augusta  
Beekeeper!*

# Let's Meet Our Augusta Beekeeper!

By Carolyn Brenneman, Columnist

COVER: Beauty of the classical pianist!

**F**or nearly two decades, Deborah Sasser has dedicated her life to beekeeping as the owner of Sasser-frass Hill Bee Farms in Augusta. What began as a charming hobby quickly grew into a deep passion and a mission. Today, Deborah not only harvests honey, makes unique products such as beeswax lotions and lip balms; but, also serves as a devoted advocate for what she lovingly calls “nature’s tiny unsung heroes,” the honeybees.

Deborah now has 20 active hives under her care, and she spends much of her time tending to her colonies, observing their behavior, and ensuring their health. Honey production typically peaks in May or June, though the timing depends on weather conditions. Good weather means abundant blooms, which means strong nectar flow and ultimately, jars of golden honey.

Working closely with thousands of bees requires proper protective gear. Deborah wears a beekeeper’s jacket and veil to shield her face and neck. She also relies on surgical-style gloves, which bees cannot sting through. Contrary to popular myths, honey will not cause harm if it touches your skin or even gets near your eyes but a bee sting can be painful, which is why protection matters.



Caricature of Deborah, *The Joyful Beekeeper!*  
Created by ChatGpt!



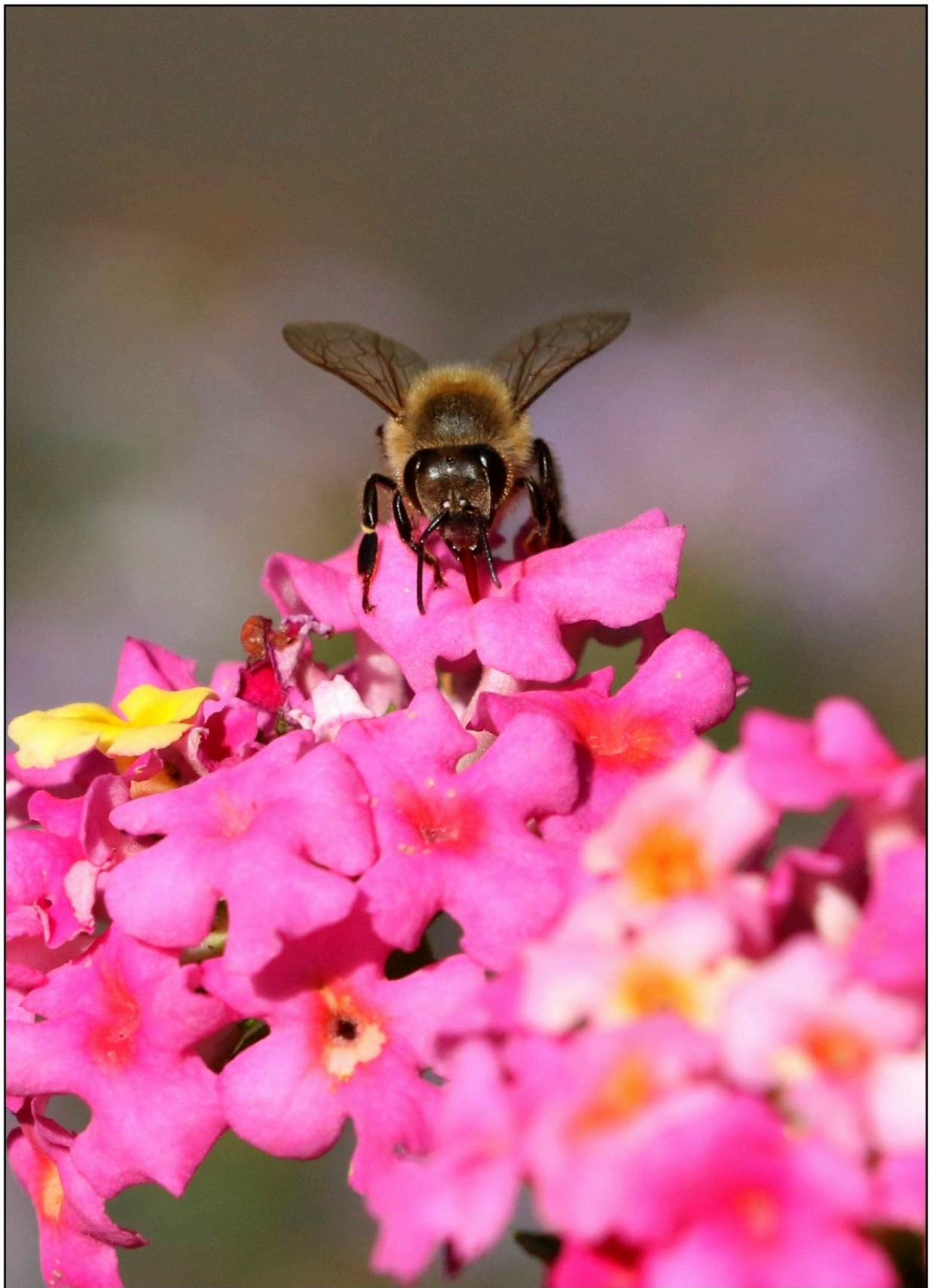
A Close Up View of the Honeybee!



However, Deborah emphasizes that honeybees are rarely aggressive. A honeybee will only sting if she feels threatened and when she does, she dies shortly afterward. Wasps and yellow jackets, not honeybees, are more commonly responsible for repeated stings.

It's a beautiful sight to see these hives on her property. There are 20 colorful hives on the Sasserfrass Farm and inside each hive is a highly organized society of bees. Let's take a look.

Each hive has only one queen honeybee and she is the heart of the colony. Deborah can often spot her and mark her with a small dot to make identification easier. The queen's primary role is reproduction. After mating, usually during several flights where she mates midair with up to 20 different drones, the queen can lay thousands of eggs per day. She mates only once in her lifetime but continues laying eggs daily. It takes about 21 days for a worker bee to develop and approximately 24 days for a drone. The greater the genetic diversity from multiple drones, the stronger and more resilient the hive.



**Honeybee foraging on pink Lantana flowers!**



**A view of the hives!**

The majority of bees in a hive are the female worker bees, affectionately called “the girls” by Deborah. They perform every job in the hive including cleaning cells, feeding larvae, producing wax, building comb, and foraging for nectar and pollen. These tireless workers live about six weeks during the season, literally working themselves to death. Drones, on the other hand, live about three months and have only one purpose: to mate with a virgin queen.



**Handcrafted beeswax luminary made by Deborah!**

What happens to the queen bee? Well, an old queen bee typically leaves the hive during spring when the colony becomes overcrowded, a process known as swarming. She takes with her thousands of “the girls” to establish a new colony. They cluster in a nearby tree while scout bees search for a new home. Deborah says sometimes this swarm will land on neighboring properties.

The original hive is not without a queen though. A new queen is raised by the worker bees who continually feed selected larva royal jelly to the proposed new queen. This special diet changes her hormonal and endocrine development, transforming her from a worker bee into a queen. She develops in a uniquely shaped “queen cell,” distinct from regular brood cells. This daughter queen is now the newly emerged queen of the hive.

While the sight of thousands of bees may look alarming, swarming bees are typically calm and focused on relocation. They are not defending a hive and are far less likely to sting. If you encounter a swarm, Deborah urges us to not spray them! Instead, we need to contact our local county extension office or a beekeeper who can safely remove and relocate the colony.



**Deborah’s multiple colorful beehives!**



**Zebra Longwing butterfly!**

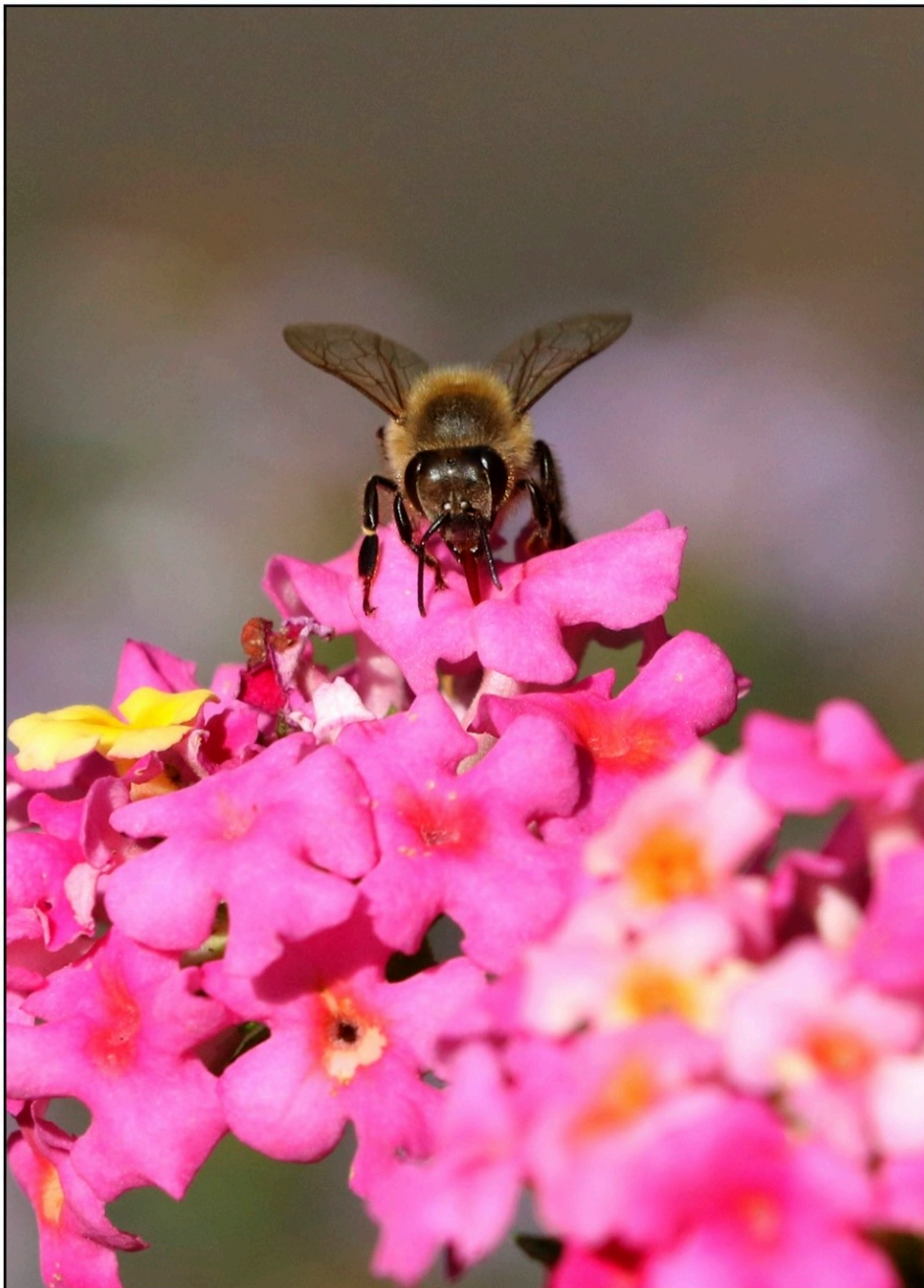
Deborah is unique. Beyond maintaining her hives, Deborah has become a respected ambassador for honeybees. She frequently speaks to clubs, community groups, and organizations about bee safety, pollination, and the challenges bees face today due to human behavior and environmental pressures. Education, she believes, is key to protecting pollinators for future generations.

Also visitors often come to her farm to learn firsthand about hive life and see the colorful hives. It is fascinating. For Deborah, beekeeping is far more than honey production. It is stewardship, science, and service rolled into one. From watching “her girls” gather different types of pollen to preparing hives for spring growth, she finds joy in every stage of the process.

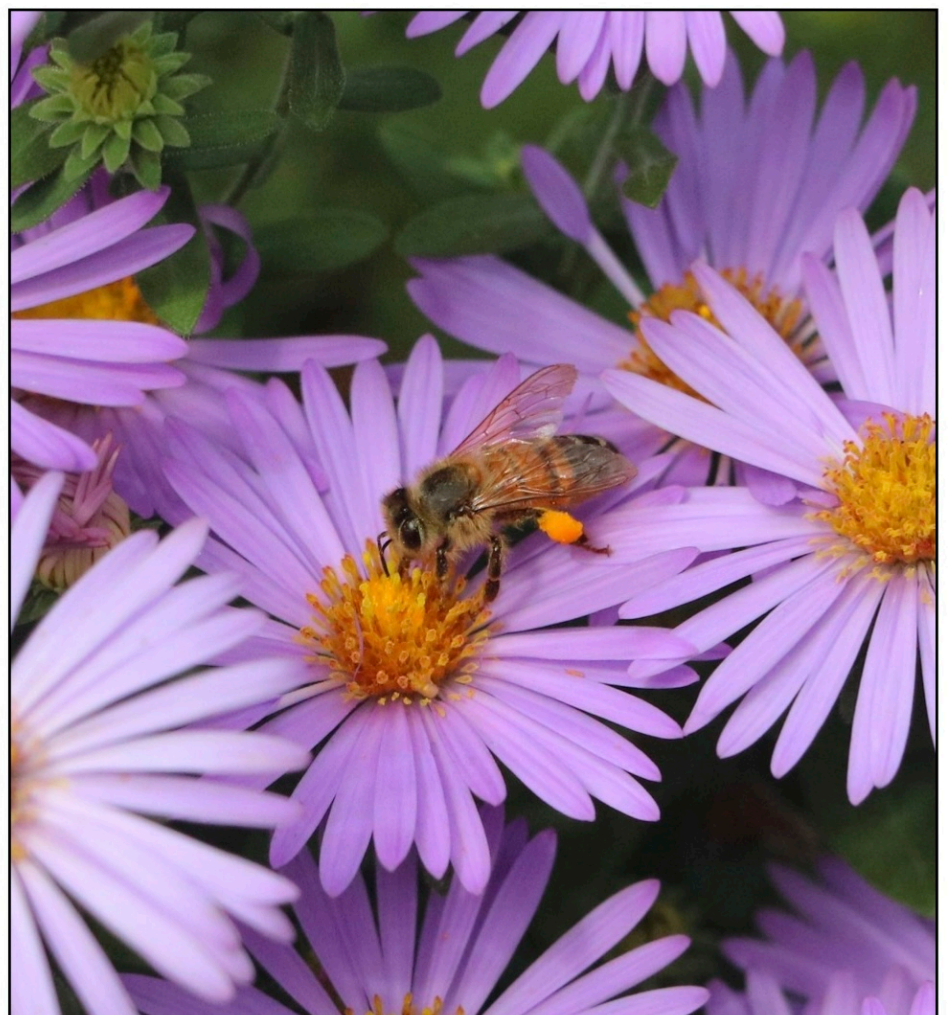
After 19 years, Deborah remains as excited as ever about “her girls” who tirelessly pollinate crops, sustain ecosystems, and produce one of nature’s sweetest gifts. Deborah hopes we all make a difference by planting wildflowers and native or heirloom plants and trees that provide nourishment for pollinators. She also urges us to eliminate the use of chemicals in our lawns and gardens as this would be a crucial step in protecting these tiny, indispensable creatures and ultimately, ourselves.

As a photographer, I have had many of my photos chosen for the cover of Bee Culture magazine. Please check it out.

Please contact Deborah at 706.855.5240 and schedule a visit. Check out her website at <https://sasserfrasshill.com>.



**Honeybee foraging on pink Lantana flowers!**



**Honeybee foraging on Aster flower!**