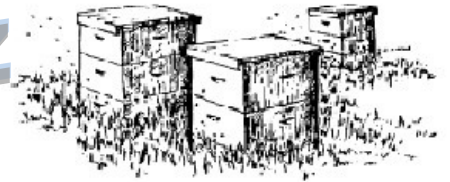




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



August, 2014

The Fort Bend Beekeepers Association meets on the second Tuesday of the month (except December) at 7:00 pm in Fort Bend County's "Bud" O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, Texas. Visitors (and new members) are always welcome (membership dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year). Our next meeting will be Tuesday, August 12. The meeting is called to order at 7:30 pm after a half hour of social time. The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks. Thanks to B. Bohus (something salty) and Carol Gubbells and Herman Hoot (something sweet) for volunteering to bring treats for our August meeting. We still need a few volunteers for a few vacant spots (including September!) on our refreshments sign-up sheet.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

Here is this month's Q (from one of our members) and an A:

Q: My bees were doing great then I discovered a whole bunch of dead ones on the ground in front of my hive. When I checked inside I found only a few bees left. What has happened?

An A: Sometimes we find dead bees outside the hive as evidence of a robbing episode, victims of a battle over stores of honey. Most often this occurs when there is little forage available and the robbed out comb is obvious. It doesn't sound like your situation fits this description, leaving us with two possibilities: disease or pesticide poisoning. Sick honey bees usually leave the hive and fly off to die so as not to attract predators to the colony. Workers remove any bees that die inside the hive and try to carry them away. It appears that your dead bees were insecticide victims.

Honey bees are very susceptible to all broad spectrum insecticides. Crop protection chemicals are necessary for modern agriculture to feed the world's population. The good news (despite what you read and hear) is that pesticides in use today are far less dangerous to people and the environment. Many of them are narrowly targeted to a specific family of pests. Nonetheless, non-target species like honey bees can be pesticide victims when broad spectrum products are used by the farmer, homeowner or government agency. In addition, bee-

keepers use miticides inside the hive to "kill a bug (a Varroa mite) on a bug (a honey bee)".

Hardly a day goes by that we don't read or hear of a coming honey bee apocalypse. Like most things, truth lies between the poles, but the loudest noise seems to be coming from those dedicated to banning neonicotinoid pesticides ("neonics"). It is a fact that these products are the safest alternative for vertebrate species (like me and you). Neonics are broad spectrum insecticides and honey bees can be victims, but "scientific studies" tend to cite honey bee poisoning at concentrations far beyond any real use in the field or some obscure chronic low level effects. Crop protection is necessary for farming to be a viable business and outlawing modern products often means going back to older pesticides that are far more damaging to humans and our environment. Proper and appropriate use of crop protection chemicals protects our environment and keeps us all fed.

There is quite a variety of pesticides in the home improvement stores. Many of the labels clearly state their honey bee toxicity. Unfortunately, those products that aren't harmful to bees don't carry that notification on the label. This is especially meaningful when dealing with caterpillars. While many products are labeled for caterpillars, there are several choices that do not kill bees. Read the label and encourage your neighbors to read them too.

In the summer months, mosquito control efforts can be damaging to our hives. Some homeowners install permanent misting systems to spray for mosquitos without understanding the effect on honey bees and other desirable insects. Pesticide mist during foraging hours is fatal to honey bees.

Mosquitoes are much more than just a nuisance. They transmit diseases like West Nile Virus and encephalitis, even malaria and Dengue fever. West Nile infects humans, but it also kills songbirds. The heart worms that can kill a family pet are transmitted by mosquitoes.

It is important that the beekeeper considers potential pesticide losses when picking a beeyard location. Avoid proximity to row crop agriculture and roadside mosquito sprays. Contemplate prevailing winds that can carry a killing mist to your hives. Make your beeyard location known to pesticide applicators. Contact neighbors and remind them of your bees and their susceptibility to insecticides.

Treasurer's Report

Our July, 2014 balance was \$3,567.55. Since that time we spent \$155.00 to restock supplies of cups, plates, napkins, etc. We collected \$15 in dues (3 new members at \$5.00 each) and received donations that totalled \$60.00. The resulting treasury balance is \$3,487.55 consisting of \$25 in cash (to make change) and \$3,457.55 in our Wells Fargo checking account.

July Meeting Notes

We had 47 members and guests sign the roster for our July meeting. It is important that you sign the attendance roster at our meetings to help us track attendance. Detailed contact information is only needed for guests and those attending for the first time. Otherwise, a quick sign-in is all we need.

This was the first meeting for Travis Feiner, Michael Franks, Jennifer Anderson, Suzanne Jackson and Janey Gosda. Michael, Suzanne and Janey already have bees, but the consensus was that “there is only so much you can learn off the internet”. Welcome. It was also welcome back to B. Bohus who is back from a trip to Hungary.

Ray Smaistrila brought in his solar wax melter for “show and tell”. We learned that beeswax melts at around 147° F and volatilizes completely from a small puddle near the wick when a beeswax candle is burned. That is quite different from paraffin wax which starts melting at about 100° F and drips down the side of a birthday candle.

Ray bought his solar melter for about \$100 from Brushy Mountain Bee Farm (the other bee supply houses carry them too). It is essentially a cypress box with a window in the top. Inside there is a tray that collects the molten wax so that it drains into a metal pan. The window is made of insulated greenhouse material that allows the sun’s radiation inside where it traps the heat to melt the wax. When placed in full sun on a hot day, the melter can reach 200° F in an hour or two. That is too hot and results in darkened wax as volatile components are lost. It is best to limit the temperature in the solar wax melter to 150° F to 170° F. Ray positions his melter so that it gets less than an hour of full sun before it is overtaken by shade to finish melting.

Beeswax cappings cleaned up by the bees is ready for the melter. Ray rolls them into a softball-sized wad and wraps it in a couple of lay-

ers of cheesecloth. The melted wax leaves debris and dead bees behind in the cheese cloth. (The used cheesecloth makes a good fireplace or barbecue starter.)

Ray usually puts about 1/2” of water in the wax collection pan. The molten wax floats on the water and heavier material (like any honey that remains on the cappings) sinks down into the water. The bottom of the wax cake usually has a coating of junk that sank in the wax, but floated on the water. He just whittles it off with a butcher knife.

Next, Jeff McMullan demonstrated how the club’s frame assembly gear is used. The club owns the equipment and it is available for members to use.

The setup includes a “Workmate” folding bench to work on. There is a jig to put together frames, five at a time. Working on the folding bench, the frame end bars go in the jig first and glue is applied. Then you set the bottom bars in place and nail them down (a pneumatic brad nailer and 1 1/4” 18 ga. brads make this job easy). Next you flip the jig over and glue and nail the top bar into place. Top quality water-cleanup wood glue is recommended so a rag in a bucket of water helps keep the mess under control. It is helpful to use a plastic sign as a work surface so that glue drips are easy to clean up. When all five frames are assembled, you pull the wooden holders out of the jig and remove the frames. Always give them a quick check and square up any that are crooked before letting the glue set. If you use plastic foundation, the frames are now ready to go.

If you are using wired wax foundation, the next step is to install the frame cross wires. Set up the wiring spool and the form board in the Workmate and prepare the frames with brads in the end bars to tie off the wire. Leave the brad head up about 1/8” to wrap the wire ends around. Drive the brads down after the wire is tightly in place. If you

cut the wire with diagonal cutters, be sure to tap the brad one more time with your hammer to embed the needle-sharp end of the wire. A good trick is to wiggle the wire back and forth until it breaks.

Next you set the wax foundation in the frame and hold it in place with the wedge top you removed from the top bar. Secure the wedge with four or five 5/8” brads (the brad nailer is great help here). Now lay the frame down in the form board and use the spur embedder to embed the cross wire into the wax foundation. You should only load as much foundation as you need since it is fragile and prone to damage. Another option is to store the super of frames with moth crystals.

Door prize winners in July included Dave Grimme (Matagorda honey donated by Sean White), Boyd Dawson (Pinot Noir wine made by Bob Hentschel), Marie Robertson (fresh tomatoes grown by Nancy Hentschel), Nancy Hentschel (grapefruit seedling grown by Stephanie Kinghorn), Elaine Jameson (queen cage donated by Daryl Scott), Daryl Scott (bird feeder donated by Bill and Elaine Jameson), Stephanie Kinghorn (candle made by Ray Smaistrila), Doug Rowell and Norman Harris (rain gauges donated by Albert Smaistrila), Eileen Lopez (hive beetle trap donated by Daryl Scott), Mike Jurek (egg plant) and Greg Pendley (figs) from Sharon Moore’s garden.

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EXTENSION

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