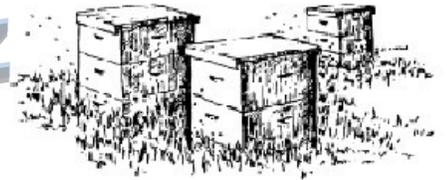




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



February, 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, February 11. The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks. Thanks to Gerard and Lisa Howard (something salty) and Sharon Moore (something sweet) for volunteering to bring treats for our February meeting.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: Why does honey crystallize?

An A: Honey is a concentrated solution of sugars (mainly glucose and fructose) that honey bees make from the nectar of flowers (or sometimes other sweet liquids). Worker bees gather nectar on foraging trips and carry it back to the hive in their "honey stomach", an organ that is akin to a bird's crop. In the hive, it is transferred from bee to bee as it is partially digested before being stored in the comb cells, first near the brood nest for easy access and later in our supers.

Hive ventilation reduces the water content of the stored nectar to about 18% or less at which point the bees seal the cell with a cap of beeswax. This is an important step since honey is "hygroscopic" which means it can absorb moisture from the air. If left open (either in the hive or on your kitchen counter), the moisture content increases as it removes moisture from the air. At its low moisture content, honey will fatally desiccate (dry out) living organisms so it cannot spoil. When properly stored in a sealed container, honey will last indefinitely (there was honey in King Tut's tomb!). If the moisture content increases very much, it can ferment. (We always extract only capped honey to assure the moisture content is low.)

Freshly extracted honey that had been stored in the warm hive can be

crystal clear, but, eventually, all honey will likely crystallize.

Crystallization begins with an increasingly cloudy appearance. A layer of sugar crystals may accumulate at the bottom of the jar or the whole thing can become solid. The time that this takes to happen is determined by the relative concentration of the different sugars (i.e. the floral source of the nectar), its storage temperature and the presence of bits of solids. Some honey crystallizes quickly while others may stay liquid for months and months. In fact, grocery store honey has been heated so that it can be pumped through filters to remove any solids that might initiate crystallization.

Some people prefer crystallized honey, spreading it like peanut butter on a piece of toast. While it tastes fine, the sugar crystals are usually very coarse, crunchy and not very palatable. Crystallized honey is well suited for cooking or sweetening tea. "Creamed honey" is honey that has been deliberately crystallized, but its texture is managed to create very fine crystals.

Honey stored in the refrigerator will crystallize quickly, so it is best stored in the pantry or on the kitchen table. On the other hand, honey stored in the freezer doesn't crystallize. It gets incredibly thick, but not frozen. It is best to defrost "frozen" honey quickly in warm water so that it spends little time at 55° or so, the optimum temperature for crystallization.

To liquefy crystallized honey, we need to get the temperature up so the sugars go back into solution. Setting the honey jar in a bowl of hot water from the tap is the safest way to do this. Microwaving honey risks making a terrible mess in the microwave oven. We've heard other ways that we would not recommend, like all day in the car with the windows rolled up or in the attic on a warm fall day. In either of those situations, the honey jar should probably be in a plastic pail or something.

Another characteristic of honey crystallization is important to know! As sugar crystals form, the moisture content of the remaining liquid honey goes up. If it goes up enough, (and living yeast is present) it can ferment. Gases formed during fermentation can burst a closed container, making an even bigger mess than the microwave depending on where it has been stored).

January Meeting Notes

A head count revealed sixty members and guests at our first meeting of 2014. There were sixty names on our sign-in sheet...amazing! B. Bohus was accompanied by her friend A. Gendes from Hungary who was in Houston visiting her daughter. She received a hardy beekeeper welcome.

At our November meeting, Jack Richardson was appointed to head a nominating committee for the election of officers. Jack reported that he managed to brow beat the current

officers to stand for re-election. There were no nominations from the floor and the election was unanimous.

PhD student Jason Graham was in our area on business and offered us a presentation on honey bee research and research activity at the University of Florida.

Many different organizations are involved in honey bee research or help fund research efforts. Ongoing work at the University of Florida includes honey bee husbandry, pesticide effects, Africanized honey bees and honey bee ecology. They are also working on the ecology and conservation of native pollinators. Companies like Bayer, Monsanto and Syngenta have honey bee research programs while other companies, organizations and foundations provide financial support. The USDA has been doing honey bee research for many decades. The Department of Defense is researching how to take advantage of the honey bee's extraordinary sense of smell to locate land mines!

Jason likened research efforts to a "scientific conversation" where researchers collaborate through published works as simple as notes and ideas to peer-reviewed scholarly papers published in academic journals. When a researcher is considering a subject, the first step is a literature search to join the "scientific conversation" about the topic. Researchers today have access to Scholar.google.com, a freely accessible search site that indexes the full text of scholarly literature across many disciplines.

Jeff McMullan entertained us with a fascinating tale with an unexpected outcome. He had long wondered why most hive tools were just paint scrapers that were painted orange to help find them in the grass. Even hooked-end tools, which seemed to have been intended as a hive tool from the get-go, didn't work well. Jeff was convinced that he kept losing them because they were really too big; a hive tool

should fit and stay in your pocket.

Jeff was politely told by beekeeping supply houses that it sounded great but it wasn't available. He knew that, but no one was the least bit interested in making his hive tool ideas happen. Undaunted, he eventually had THE PERFECT POCKET HIVE TOOL manufactured himself! It will be in the Dandant catalogue due in your mailbox in a few days. Or...he had a few with him if you wanted one from the guy that made it all happen: \$5 each.

We had 51 new and renewing members pay their dues at our first meeting for 2014. Dues of \$5.00 for 2014 are due if your name is in italics on our roster.

Door prize winners this month:

A bee pin (donated by Michael Pawelek) - won by Albert Smaistrla

A queen catcher (Albert Smaistrla) - won by Benny Phillipp

Coozies (Bill Busch) - won by Denise Billings and Verosa Phillipp

THE PERFECT POCKET HIVE TOOL (donated by Jeff McMullan) - A. Gendes

Grapefruit from the King's garden - Cinda deBons

FBBA ball cap (Bill Busch) - won by Gene deBons

A honey bee pen and honey candy (George Rodriguez) - won by Margaret Smaistrla and Bill Busch

An entrance feeder and honey candy (Bill Busch) - Herman Hoot and George Rodriguez

Treasurer's Report

Our January 2013 balance was \$3,411.62. Since that time we collected \$255.00 in dues (51 members at \$5.00 each) and got a \$5.00 donation. We spent \$10.00 on a Fort Bend Beepepers ball cap for Jason Graham. Our treasury balance has increased \$250.00 to \$3,661.62.

Super Painting Contest

At our January meeting, Jack Richardson presented the rules for our Super Painting Contest to be judged at our March meeting. Decorated shallow or medium supers (8 or 10 frame) can be entered in one of three categories: KIDS (through 12 years), TEENS (age 13 to 19), and ADULTS (20 and older). Winners will be determined by member ballot and announced at the March meeting. In addition to awards and prizes, winners get bragging rights for a whole year.

A New Year's Resolution

We are making a few changes to improve our meetings: We will be called to order at 7:30 pm so that we have thirty minutes to enjoy our snacks and get our visiting done. We will plan a 30 minute program that is appropriate for our beekeeping calendar while leaving plenty of time for questions and comments.

We meet in a large room to accommodate the number of folks that attend. We are going to improve on the PA system for the meeting and expect every speaker to use it. Everyone is encouraged to sit near the front of the room. Please be courteous to others during the meetings and refrain from any conversations that aren't addressed to the whole group. Thank you for your cooperation.

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EXTENSION

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