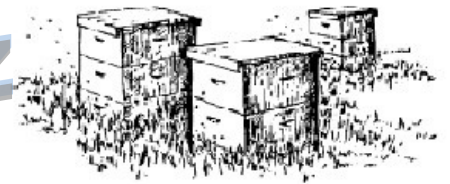




# Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the  
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



February, 2015

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 10. The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks. Thanks to Sharon Moore (something salty) and Dona Tomplait (something sweet) for volunteering to bring treats for our February meeting. We still need volunteers for vacant spots 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:** Swarm season will be here soon and I'm worried about my back yard hive swarming. I don't want bees in my house, or worse yet, my neighbor's house. What should I do to prevent a swarm?

### **An A:**

Dealing with swarms is an important part of being a responsible beekeeper. Whole books have been written on honey bee swarms, so our newsletter is hardly long enough to address all the details of swarm management. Instead, we'll list and describe a few options for you to research on your own.

Reproductive swarms are how honey bees create new colonies. They happen in the spring when resources are plentiful (many believe that colonies actually start swarm preparations in the fall as they accumulate honey and pollen for spring buildup). Be aware, though, that an entire colony will vacate their home at almost any time of the year in response to pests (or pest treatments), disease or an unsuitable nest site. In our area, late summer swarms are often due to the colony having chosen a home in the spring that is too hot when August rolls around. "Absconding" swarms are sometimes really large.

To manage the natural swarming process we have to convince the bees to stay (or that it is not yet

time to leave). One simple practice is to rearrange your hive boxes in early spring. Over the winter the bees have moved upward in the hive as they consumed their honey stores. Moving the vacated boxes of empty comb up to the top of the hive stack fools the bees into thinking that there is still work to be done refilling the empty comb before it is time to swarm. Supering the stack with properly stored drawn comb also assures that the bees find plenty of room for stores.

An over-crowded hive is a good indicator of an impending swarm especially if you see queen cells along the bottom of comb. They are referred to as "swarm cells" since swarming is now imminent. Some beekeepers destroy these cells in an effort to stop swarming, but if the bees have already swarmed you will leave the colony without a queen. Not good. Swarm cells can easily be removed and used to rescue queenless colonies or for splits, but leave a couple behind in case the hive has swarmed. Capped swarm cells are a certain warning that swarming is only days away (or the swarm has already left).

Splitting a hive in the spring serves the same purpose for the bees as a reproductive swarm. Splits are not difficult to do and are almost always successful when they include a new queen. If you really don't want or need an additional hive, one of your fellow beekeepers would probably welcome it.

The "Demaree Method", "nectar management", "Checker-boarding", and the "Snelgrove Method" are other hive manipulations intended to convince the bees that it is not time to swarm.

Regardless of whatever swarm prevention steps you take, it is important to have a backup plan. Should one of your hives swarm, it is a good idea to offer them a place to live (better than in the soffit of someone's house). A vacant hive in your bee yard, especially with drawn comb and a few drops of lemongrass oil, can entice swarming bees to stay next door (or maybe catch a swarm that is passing through). Swarm traps are another good option. It is certain that the scouts will find the empty hive or trap and it is better if it is some distance away from the hive. Check traps often so the bees can be moved into a hive quickly.

And your last line of defense is having equipment available and the ability to have a wayward swarm.

## January Meeting Notes

We had 41 members and guests sign in at our January meeting. We welcomed first-timers Matt Pfitzinger, Pat Kainer, Santos Reyes, and Roland and Patricia Torres. Each of them are what we call wanna bee keepers and attended the meeting to learn more about what is involved.

Jack Richardson reminded everyone about the Super Decorating Contest

that will be judged at our March meeting (see the related article on the this page). Johnny Stratman also added that he had donated a flower pot for a swarm trap and he had extras if any one was interested.

Gene deBons had been assigned the task of nominations for our officer elections to be held at the January meeting. Both President and Vice-President incumbents will be leaving their posts. Gene reported that he was unable to recruit members interested in an officer slot. It was decided the current officers will continue serving until Gene comes up with a slate of nominees. Hopefully, that will happen at our February meeting.

Gene also presented a fascinating historic review of relationships between honey bees and people from the book Bees and the Human World by Bee Wilson (2004). Everyone seems to know that pollination services by beekeepers are critical to today's agriculture. Hive rental for this purpose dates back to 1909 (apples in New Jersey, "The Garden State"). In earlier times, honey was used as currency for tax payment in both the Old and New World. In ancient Wales, each village had to pay one vat of mead each year as tribute to the king. And in 1980's Afghanistan, the mujahidin demanded payment of 10% of all honey produced.

Honey bees have been viewed as "domesticated" for over 8,000 years, but they are unlike livestock. Bees have never worked for humans. "They are industrious, not industrialized." Property law dating back to the Romans has been confused by this strange relationship with insects. Wild colonies in bee trees were first viewed as the property of the owner of the tree: the bees were like birds on a limb. Later, the issue was more or less settled by the Roman Iuventius Celsus who declared that bees were property on the economic basis that the beekeeper profited from the hive and was liable for stings. Nonetheless, humans may claim the prod-

ucts of the hive, but the bees don't produce it to gratify us!

Door prize winners in January included Carolyn Boyd and Matt Pfitzinger (handmade soap donated by Joey Tuttle), Santos Reyes (Margaret Smaistrila's pecans), Norman Harris (flower pot for a swarm trap donated by Johnny Stratman), Preston Pitts (champagne leftover from New Years donated by Vina Burns) and Jerry Tomplait and Herman Hoot (Save the Bees posters donated by Marilyn Pawelek).

### **Super Decorating Contest**

Our Second Annual Super Decorating Contest will 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). Last year's winners have a few more weeks of glory. In KIDS, Emily Dunbar won first, followed by the second-place entry of Emily and Sam Skidmore and Danielle King third. Sarah Wicks won the TEENS, followed by Reba Talafuse and Carolyn Perkison. In ADULT, Daryl Scott's super won first place. Bill Windrow was second. Rosie McCusker's entry took third.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Our January, 2015 balance was \$2,983.34. At our January meeting we collected \$5.00 in 2015 dues from 57 new and renewing members (\$285.00) and received \$15.00 in donations. Our treasury balance is now \$3,283.34, consisting of \$60.00 in cash (to make change), a \$5.00 dues check to be deposited, and our Wells Fargo checking account with a balance of \$3,218.34.

### **Dues Are Due**

Our membership dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year. Check out the address label on this newsletter. If your name is in *italics*, you need to get your dues paid at our February meeting.

### **Elections**

At our January meeting, Gene deBons reported that he had been unable to recruit nominees for our planned officer elections. He again called for volunteers to stand for election at our February meeting. We will be voting after additional nominations from the floor.

### **2015 Swarm Season Project**

Our 2015 swarm season project continues moving forward. Nancy Hentschel had 18 extra pulp pots we bought from her for \$3 each. The lumber guy at the Sugar Land Home Depot cut up a sheet of plywood into 16" x 16" squares for us and Daryl Scott painted them with some miscolored paint from Lowe's. Jeff McMullan labeled the squares with the Extension office phone number and picked up some mounting screws, hanging wire and lemongrass oil. Extension Agent Boone Holladay has prepared a press release announcing the program, so you should see it in local papers in the coming weeks.

The plan is for the Extension office to lend a trap to folks that have had consistent bee problems every spring. When bees move into the trap, the homeowner will notify the Extension Office and we'll find a member to pick up the trap and give the bees inside a suitable home.

**TEXAS A&M  
AGRI LIFE  
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