Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

June, 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, June 10. 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 Daryl and Toni Scott (something salty) and Rosie McCusker (something sweet) for volunteering to bring treats for our June meeting. We still need a few volunteers for a few 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: I've had my bees for several months now and I'm beginning to feel like a real beekeeper. I bought a second hive and as soon as I get it put together and painted, I want to try capturing a swarm. We've talked about capturing swarms at Association meetings, but it all goes by me pretty quickly. What tricks and tips do I need to know before attempting to capture a swarm?

An A: The easiest way to capture a swarm is to have them move into an empty hive on their own. If you provide some old comb and use a few drops of lemongrass oil as an attractant, you may get lucky and have bees move in on their own. It is difficult to relocate a hive a short distance (like across the yard) so it is a good idea to put your bait hive where you would want it to stay when it is full of bees. Get on the Association's swarm call list while waiting for bees to move into your hive.

Make sure that when you leave on a swarm capture mission you have everything that you might need, more than just your veil or bee jacket and a box for the bees. Always have Off! or another insect repellant, a bee brush and plastic dust pan, paper towels, hand pruners and loppers, a sprayer full of sugar syrup with essential oils (see the recipe that follows), etc. Bees find a frame or two of old comb almost irresistible so bring some along if you have it. A few drops of lemongrass oil add to the attraction. A step ladder may be necessary or check out the BEE JUG video on YouTube as an option for swarms high up in tree. Don't forget a strap to secure the hive and some way to close up the entrance.

Step one is to spray the swarm cluster with sugar syrup with essential oils. The bees are likely to be hungry and appreciate the treat. The essential oils establish a strong scent identity and sticky bees help contain the cluster.

If the bees are on a small limb, trim away others that are in the way then carefully cut the limb with one hand while you hold it still with the other. You should have your box on the ground below the swarm and ready for the bees with a frame or two of foundation or drawn comb. You can shake the bees directly into the box or shake the bees at the entrance (some think that the bees are more likely to stay if you let them walk into the entrance on their own). Then carefully return the other frames to the box. Leave the top open for a few minutes and observe for bees fanning scent to attract others. You can close the cover when most of the bees appear to be inside.

If the swarm is clustered on a big limb, fence or wall, a light cardboard nuc makes capture easier. You can hold the nuc below the bees and sweep them inside with a bee brush. It may take two or more attempts since many of the bees will return to where the cluster had been. At some point you can brush all the bees away and discourage their return with a liberal spray of Off! (or cover the area with a paper towel soaked with the repellant).

When you get the bees home, beware of overheating. A frame of brood from your established hive will increase the colony strength and encourage them to stay.

Sugar Syrup + Essential Oils

In a blender, emulsify 30 drops each of lemongrass oil and spearmint oil with 1/8 tsp of lecithin granules in one cup of cold tap water.

Make sugar syrup with 6 cups of sugar and 4 cups boiling water (microwaved 8 minutes in a 2 qt. measuring cup). Combine the two liquids when the sugar syrup has cooled.

Yields 8 cups (1/2 gallon). Add about 1/4 cup of essential oils mixture to each gallon of syrup as a feeding stimulant.

Treasurer's Report

Our May, 2014 balance was $3,810.84. Since that time we collected $10 in dues (2 members at $5.00 each) and got a $5.00 donations. The resulting treasury balance is $3,825.84 consisting of $30 in cash (to make change) and $3,795.84 in our Wells Fargo checking account.

May Meeting Notes

A quick head count yielded 50 members and guests at our May meeting (but only 39 names were registered on the roster at our May meetng). Please be sure to sign the attendance roster at our meetings.

Our program topic was queen rearing by member John McConnon. John first learned about bees in college courses at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, under Dr. Roger Morse. Since his college days, he has been an apiary inspector, a honey packer and a commercial beekeeper in Florida. In his Florida job, six beekeepers managed 7,000 hives.

John's very detailed talk covered the gamut of queen bee information: physiology, mating habits, behavior, colony control, and life cycle. From this base he described several approaches to raising queens, from the usual commercial operations to artificial insemination to procedures for the small beekeeper.

The Dr. C. C. Miller method is useful for raising a few queens on a non-commercial scale. It uses the natural tendency of bees to raise queens and swarm. Besides the description given in John's talk, the Miller method is described under Queen Rearing in A. I. Root's, "ABC and XYZ of Bee Culture." In the Miller method, a strong queen is selected and placed in a two-frame nucleus with plenty of workers. When it is time to raise queens, one frame of brood is removed and the bees are shaken back into the nucleus. A new frame containing two strips of foundation, 1 x 5", spaced about a third of the way in from each end, is placed in the nucleus. The bees draw out comb from the two strips until the two sides meet. When the combined comb nearly fills the frame there will be a scalloped bottom edge. In a week there will be eggs and brood in all stages. At the end of this time remove the frame, brush the bees off carefully, and with a sharp knife trim the bottom edge of the comb to the irregular line of very young larvae that have just hatched from the eggs. It is right along this scalloped edge that we desire the bees to start queen cells. Place this frame in a strong colony that has been made queenless and broodless for three days. They will build many queen cells over the day-old larvae at the bottom edge. After about nine days, the capped queen cells can be carefully cut out and moved individually to queenless nucs that have already been prepared. (Note that the cells and the unhatched queens are very fragile at this stage, and must be handled with care.) The new cells can be attached to the nucleus comb with staples, and the cells must be placed in the same downward orientation as when they were cut out.

John described the commercial grafting methods, and the detailed procedures involved in making either a wet graft or a dry graft, followed by the 2-day stop in a starter colony and a final step in a finishing colony. At the proper time, single cells are finally placed into small mating nucs. If any queen hatches before the beekeeper has transferred cells, the work will be lost, because a newly hatched queen will find and kill nearby unhatched queens.

Miscellaneous Facts from John's Talk:

Dragonflies prey on bees and eat lots of bees. Therefore, do not keep bees in swampy areas.

Queens stop laying at 98 °F because the bees cannot keep the brood cooled to 92 °F at the higher temperatures.

In artificial insemination work, the hardest job is getting semen from the drones.

A toothpick makes a good grafting tool if it is shaved into a "shovel" shape.

Grafting requires a steady hand and a good eye.

Following John's presentation, Roy Nash reported on a successful bee removal job in Pecan Grove. He gathered 23 gallons of honey and comb from a hive near the peak of the roof. Roy also reported on a Brazoria County beekeeper meeting that he attended in Angleton. It was reported there that the county housed 33,000 bee hives, with many being migratory.

Door Prizes:

Bee Pin donated by Michael Pawelek won by Bob Hentschel. Biggle Bee Book (Michael Pawelek) won by Gene DeBons. Honey Pot (Erika Almodover) won by Roy Nash. Bee Balm Plant (Elaine Jameson) won by Verosa Philipp. Golden Rain Tree (Carolyn Boyd) won by Norman Harris. US Flag (Jack Richardson) won by Nancy Hentschel. 1 Lb Dark Honey (Gene DeBons) won by Mark Clarke. Swarm Trap (Bob and Nancy Hentschel) won by Preston Pitts. Bee Trailer Hitch Cover (Kelly Morris) won by Greg Howard.

Dues Due

If you haven't paid your dues for 2014, you've been dropped from our mailing list. If you'd like to get back on the roster, you can mail your $5.00 dues to Fort Bend Beekeepers Association, c/o Jeff McMullan, 74 Hessenford St., Sugar Land, TX 77479.

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