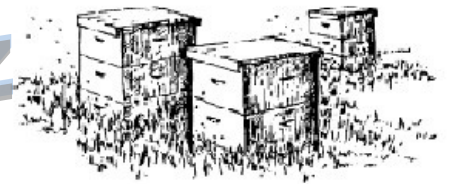




# Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the  
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



March, 2017

The March 14, 2017 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers will be held 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). The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks. The volunteer signup sheet disappeared again, so if you recall volunteering, don't forget to bring salty or sweet treats. The meeting will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time. Once again, we don't have a volunteer to give our opening invocation. If you can help with this, please see President Nancy Hentschel before the meeting. Perhaps we will need to decide if refreshments and an invocation will continue to be part of our meeting.

## Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

**Q:** Everyone says that catching swarms is "easy-peasy". I'm really new at all this so it doesn't seem that simple to me. Help!

**An A:** At this time of the year, honey bee colonies "multiply by dividing". At other times the colony may "abscond", leaving their home because it has become unsuitable. At almost any time of the year bees may vacate their nest if it was in a hollow tree that has fallen over or has become infested by hive beetles or other pests or disease.

When resources are plentiful, the colony prepares for a reproductive swarm. They begin raising queens in "swarm cells" that are usually at the bottom edges for the brood comb. Before the new queen emerges, the old queen leaves with about half the bees to start a new colony. Both the bees that depart and those that stay behind face serious challenges. The bees left queenless have a home and stored resources, but are faced with a challenge: their newly emerged queen must successfully return from one or more mating flights. And for the departing swarm, the search for a new home can be difficult.

The old honey bee queen is not a strong flyer so swarms usually settle near the original hive as scout

bees search out a new nest site. It is a good idea to look around to find where the swarm came from.

It usually takes a couple of days for the scout bees to locate a suitable new home and lead the hungry swarm to its new digs. That usually happens in mid-day so that there is plenty of remaining daylight for the swarm to gather in its new home. It is important that everyone understands that the worst honey bee swarm advice given or received is "don't worry, they'll leave" since they may decide to move into the wall of someone's house.

Capturing a swarm is pretty much the same at any time of the year, but it is important that you approach the task with a plan.

As intimidating as it looks, a honey bee swarm is usually quite docile. But if the scouts have been unable to find a suitable nesting cavity, they may set up housekeeping out in the open or an exposed site with minimum shelter. Winter can be especially rough on these bees. A cluster that appears to be a swarm may include comb with brood and food resources. If you can see comb, it is an established colony and should be approached in a completely different manner: as a removal or rescue. Be aware that it is common for these bees to aggressively defend their home. There needs to be a plan to escape bad bees and destroy the colony if necessary. It is usually a good idea to

regroup, seek advice and recruit reinforcements.

So, if in fact the cluster of bees is a swarm, the goal is to successfully introduce them into a managed hive and have them stay. It is irresponsible to capture a swarm just to have them leave and perhaps end up in a neighbor's house!

The intent is to have the colony settle into a nuc box or brood box. You never use a smoker with a swarm since a key element is having the bees communicate their new location by scent. Smoke in the air is a significant hindrance. Bees find old drawn comb in your nuc to be very attractive. Spraying the frames with sugar syrup helps attract hungry bees, especially if it contains a feeding stimulant. In fact spraying the swarm cluster itself helps too. The bees may be very hungry and the scent of the syrup helps attract stragglers. The syrup is sticky, so it also helps keep the cluster intact until we shake or brush it into a box.

A swarm gathered within easy reach presents little difficulty. If they are on a small limb, you can just use pruners to cut it and carefully shake the bees into your box. Another option is to drop the bees on the ground at the entrance to your box. The bees usually run inside quickly.

If the swarm cluster is high up in a tree, a bucket or water jug on a pole

often works, especially if the bees are on a small limb. If it proves impossible to capture the swarm, a backup plan can be to leave the box nearby and count on the bees finding it and moving in on their own.

Sometimes a large number of bees insist on returning to their cluster site. A great trick, attributable to Herman Hoot, is to use insect repellent like Off!. Don't spray bees; just brush them away and spray the spot where they were gathering.

Once you get a number of bees (and hopefully the queen) in your box, you will notice workers near the entrance with their tails in the air fanning their wings. They are sending out scent signals to attract other colony members. When most of the bees are inside, you can secure the entrance and take the box to your beeyard. Stragglers usually go back to where they came from in a day or two. If you leave the box until dark, all the bees usually go inside.

It is very important that the bees don't leave! Feeding them encourages them to stay and a frame of capped brood from another hive (no bees) helps a lot.

Being able to capture swarms is an important beekeeping skill. If you have a hive you must be able to retrieve an errant swarm.

## **February Meeting Notes**

64 members and guests signed in at our February meeting. The head count came up with 70 so a few folks failed to register. Be sure to sign in at the meetings since it is an important club record.

After social time, President Nancy Henstschel called the meeting to order and asked Vice President Tracey Grimme to give an invocation and lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance. We expect volunteers to help with this role, but again we had no one willing to step up for this important part of our meeting.

Tracey had a few announcements including farmer's market honey sales opportunities at the Harvest

Green neighborhood and in Fulshear. She also asked for member help at the Sugar Land Earth Day event on April 1 as well as volunteers to do meeting programs for local community groups. Secretary-Treasurer Jeff McMullan reminded members of upcoming beekeeping schools, including the Feb. 25 classes he will be giving in Angleton. The Central Texas Beekeepers annual school will be held in Brenham on March 25. Registration is limited to 550 and it fills up fast!

Harrison Rogers, our area Director for the Texas Beekeepers Association and Gary Parks, President of the Harris County Beekeepers Association, outlined plans for the upcoming AGVENTURE Honey Bee Exhibit at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. The rodeo runs from March 7 - 26 and the honey bees are one of the most popular stops in the NRG Center. The rodeo expects 2.2 million visitors and 61,000 kids in school groups have registered for an AGVENTURE. Members of area beekeeper clubs volunteer to greet visitors at the honey bee exhibit in shifts from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm and 3:00 pm to 9:00 pm. The day shifts help rodeo guides with kids groups while the evening shift greet families wanting to learn more about honey bees. 160 volunteer shifts need to be filled and members can sign up at the Harris County Beekeepers web site.

Harrison also updated the club on H. B. 1293, a bill filed in the Texas House of Representatives that would amend Texas honey bee law found in Section 131 of the Texas Agriculture Code. He expected the bill to be assigned to the Agriculture and Livestock Committee since the bill was filed by the Committee Chair. A similar effort in 2015 failed to gain any traction due to widespread opposition. The Texas Beekeepers Association says that this year's effort tried to address the concerns from two years ago. Nonetheless, there has been some pretty loud pushback on the bill as it was filed and it will likely be

amended. Probably the most significant opposition to H. B. 1293's wording has come from Bee Weaver Apiaries who've made public their opposition in large part because of the way the bill was drafted without any widespread input or a vote of the Texas Beekeepers Directors who are supposed to represent the membership. When the bill wording is finalized it will be subject to up-or-down votes in committee and before the Texas House and Senate. If it gets that far, it will go to Gov. Abbot and, if he signs it, becomes law. There is almost universal agreement that the current law is poor. Whether H. B. 1293 improves things is subject to considerable debate.

Again we have run out of room to announce our door prize winners. Thanks to the donors and congratulations to the lucky winners.

## **Treasurer's Report**

Our February treasury balance had a typo. The correct figure was \$2,833.82, consisting of \$50.00 in cash for change and \$2,783.82 in our Wells Fargo checking account (reported correctly). Since then we collected \$115.00 in dues (23 memberships at \$5.00 each) and paid our \$50.00 club dues to the Texas Beekeepers Association. The resulting balance is \$2,898.82 (\$2,848.82 in our checking account plus \$50.00 cash to make change).

**TEXAS A&M  
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