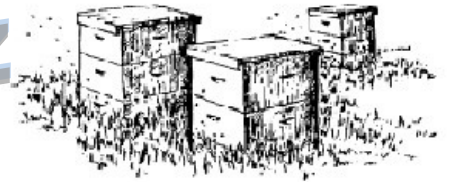




# Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



November, 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 last meeting for 2014 will be Tuesday, November 11. 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 usually volunteer to bring snacks. No one volunteered snacks for our November meeting.

## Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

**Q:** I get lots of advice about making sure that I leave enough honey for my hives to make it through the winter and get a good start in the spring. Obviously, more is better, but how much is enough?

**An A:** An oilfield rule goes something like this: *If some is good, more is better.* Often that is not very good guidance (even in the oilfield). With honey stores for overwintering bee hives, it applies well. *More* is obviously better, but how much is enough?

We are fortunate that our winters are usually mild and a nectar source may be available almost year around, especially for backyard bees scouting landscape plantings. We've all seen that beautiful mid-winter day with clear skies, temperature in the 60's and feverish activity at the hive's entrance. We know that spring is still far off, but our bees are able to replenish some of their honey supply while those in more northern areas may remain confined inside the hive for many more weeks.

In our area, 25 or 30 pounds of honey stores is usually ample to survive the winter and later nourish new brood ahead of the spring nectar flow. A hive's ability to have a full force of foragers all ready to go when the wildflowers bloom is one of the honey bee's most fascinating traits. The timing is critical: too

early and there will be too many mouths to feed, too late and a significant portion of the nectar flow will be missed.

Here are some numbers you can use to help with your decision making:

each full shallow frame holds about 2.4 lb. of honey

each full medium frame holds about 3.0 lb. of honey

each full deep frame holds about 4.5 lb. of honey

So, for example, a full 10 frame medium holds 30 pounds of honey which should be more than adequate for our typical winter. A full shallow may prove inadequate, but usually there are a couple of deep frames of honey in the brood box giving a total store of about 33 lb.

These are simply rules of thumb since there are many variables that impact the colony's need for food. Is the winter cluster the size of a grapefruit or does it nearly fill a deep brood chamber with many more mouths to feed? Is the winter abnormally harsh or mild? Are there long stretches of rainy, wet cold weather that shut down supplemental winter foraging? It is a good idea to lift the back of your hives every week or so to confirm a heavy supply of honey to make it through the remaining winter. The beekeeper needs to be observant and prepared to feed the colony if winter stores run short.

The small hive beetle adds another dimension to this question. *More is*

*better* may not be such a good idea after all. A colony "boiling over with bees" will harass these pests and prevent the female beetles from laying eggs. Too many frames of honey may leave some of it unguarded and subject to being "slimed" by small hive beetle larvae. Some beekeepers opt for minimum honey stores and lots of bees in the overwintering colony.

A limited honey supply means that winter feeding is necessary. Checking a division board feeder requires opening the hive and allowing heat to escape. The added space for baggies or bucket feeders in an empty super make it more difficult for the bees to stay warm. A conventional inner cover with the feeder over the oblong hole helps with this problem, but you still need to look inside to see if a refill is in order. An entrance feeder doesn't require opening the hive and you may even be able to check it by just looking out the kitchen window. Most entrance feeders use a quart or even smaller pint jar so frequent refills may be necessary. Check out the 5 lb. glass honey jar at [dadant.com](http://dadant.com) (and other sites). It has a standard mason jar lid that is compatible with your entrance feeder lid and holds almost a half gallon of syrup. A 3" diameter hole in the top of a migratory cover will accept the feeder jar's perforated mason jar lid. With these feeders you can easily see how the feeding is going and compare hives. If one is consuming much less than another, you should investigate the situation and understand the cause.

## October Meeting Notes

We had 43 members and guests sign the roster at our October meeting. SUCCESS: a head count came up with the same number! Thanks for signing in on our attendance list.

After 30 minutes of social time and our customary opening, President Albert Smaistrila had a few announcements. He reminded everyone about the Texas Beekeepers Association Annual Meeting to be held November 7 - 9 at the Crowne Plaza Reliant Hotel in Houston. He also noted that the goldenrod and ragweed nectar flow will end soon and that empty supers shouldn't be left on our hives. The bees won't be needing room for more honey and a compact hive stack makes it easier for the bees to stay warm over winter. With our mild weather, most beekeepers leave their screened bottom boards in place while restricting top ventilation a bit to help preserve heat. It is also a good idea to combine weak hives to help them make it through the winter (they can be split back in early spring). Be sure to locate and remove the queen from the weaker hive before the combine. Albert also announced a program committee consisting of Gene deBons, Jack Richardson and Jeff McMullan to look into improving our meeting programs to better meet our members' needs. Kelly Morris noted that the open questions, answers and comments were an important part of our meetings that we don't want to overlook.

Jeff McMullan reported that he was working with the Texas Beekeepers Association and the Texas Apiary Inspection Service to review and update Texas beekeeping law. New Chief Apiary Inspector Mark Dykes put this project at the top of his TO DO list since accepting this job a few months back. Jeff also asked for a volunteer to paint backs for our swarm traps. Daryl Scott quickly accepted and headed home after the meeting with panels and a gallon of paint. Thanks Daryl.

Jack Richardson reviewed our Super Decorating Contest held last year and asked if there was interest in doing it again. "Absolutely!" was the unanimous response; it will be held at our March meeting. Jack also brought in a bunch of rain tree seedlings for those that wanted one or two (he has plenty more).

Rosie McCusker has been selling honey at the Saturday morning farmer's market in Fulshear. If anyone else wants to participate contact Rosie.

George Rodriguez announced major changes in the honey bee exhibit at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. All of the old exhibit has been given away and a first-class replacement is in the works. The plan will be for each area beekeeping group to be assigned a week of the rodeo and be responsible for staffing the exhibit.

Door prize winners in October were :

Alan L'Roy (cut comb honey donated by Kelly Morris), Bill Windrow and Sharon Moore (Fort Bend Beekeepers ball caps donated by Bill Busch), Vina Burns (mayhaw jelly donated by Jerry and Dona Tomplait), Katy Garcia (a Mann Lake carry bag and a rain gauge donated by Albert Smaistrila), Joey Tuttle and Paul Kinghorn (rain gauges donated by Albert Smaistrila), and Greg Pendley (Larry Connor's book "Swarm Essentials" donated by Albert Smaistrila).

## Treasurer's Report

Our October, 2014 treasury balance was \$3,569.62. Since that time we collected \$5.00 in dues (one new member) and received a donation of \$5.00. We bought materials for 18 swarm traps for a total of \$140.46 that we will make available to the public through the Fort Bend County AgriLife Extension office in the spring. The resulting balance is \$3,439.46: \$50 in cash for change and \$3,389.86 in our Wells Fargo checking account.

## 2015 Swarm Season Project

Our 2015 swarm season project is moving forward. Nancy Hentschel reluctantly parted with 18 pulp pots for \$3 each (less than she paid for them after claiming that Bob was the one responsible for buying way too many of them last spring). The lumber guy at Home Depot cut up a sheet of plywood into 16" x 16" squares for us and Daryl Scott volunteered to paint them with some miscolored paint from Lowe's. (Jeff McMullan was able to talk the guy in the paint department to adding more tint to bring the color from "raspberry sherbet" to kinda "pulp pot brown".)

The plan is for County Extension Agent Boone Holladay to issue a press release in February to alert the public about honey bee swarms. The Extension office will offer the use of these traps 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.

We're expecting something of a WIN-WIN-WIN. The bees aren't poisoned, the Association avoids a frantic call about bees in the wall and a member gets bees for the hive that didn't make it through the winter.

TEXAS A&M  
AGRI LIFE  
EXTENSION



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Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status. Persons with disabilities who plan to attend this meeting and who may need auxiliary aid or services are required to contact Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 281 342-3034 five working days prior to the meeting so appropriate arrangements can be made. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating.