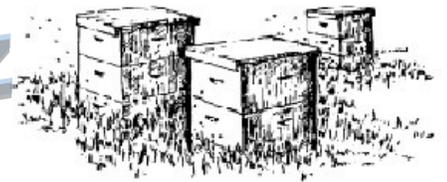




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



November, 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, November 10 (it is our last meeting for 2015). The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks. Thanks to Diane McConnon for volunteering to get the coffee and lemonade set up for us. Thanks to Rocky Ybarra who volunteered to bring salty treats and Dona Tomplait (something sweet) for our November meeting. After 30 minutes of social time, our meeting will be called to order with an opening invocation by Steve Mims..

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: Last month's Q and A as well as the meeting program was about winter preparations. What about varroa treatments?

An A: This is a great "ask a dozen beekeepers" question. There is little doubt about the debilitating impact of varroa mite parasites on honey bee colonies. Colonies heavily burdened by these pests are likely to die out over the winter if the population falls and the survivors cannot keep warm. Dealing with varroa can range from doing nothing ("let the strong survive") to aggressive use of hive treatments.

Varroa have been compared to fleas on our pets: some level of infestation is probably sustainable since zero is difficult or impossible to achieve. Varroa mites transmit honey bee diseases and, to carry the flea analogy along, bubonic plague would introduce a new perspective to a flea problem.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a strategy for managing pests while avoiding problems with excessive pesticide use or pests becoming resistant to our treatments. IPM means to use the least toxic means to control an identified pest that is causing or likely to cause significant damage.

Some basic beekeeping practices have no toxicity concerns and

should be followed. Varroa mites reproduce in capped brood. There are various honey bee strains that can identify and remove infected brood to control mite populations.

Screened bottom boards make sense since falling mites end up outside of the hive to die a slow death. Most beekeepers in our area leave the screened bottom board open year around. If extremely cold weather is expected, a plastic sign can be used as a temporary closure.

Another beekeeping practice intended to control varroa is the use of small cell foundation (varroa prefer larger brood). Drone foundation is another alternative that attracts reproducing mites. Larger drone brood can better withstand mite feeding and the longer brood cycle benefits mite reproduction. Capped drone brood (and reproducing mites) is killed in the freezer. It can be returned to the hive for the bees to clean up, but it is a good idea to check a sample of the frozen white pupae for evidence of mahogany colored mites. Uncap the drone brood with a cappings fork and shake the frozen pupae into a tray for close examination. Percent infested pupae is a good measure.

Besides examining frozen drone brood, there are several other sampling methods to help identify the level of mite infestation. Sifting powdered sugar between frames causes mites to lose their grip and fall off their host. A tray below the

screened bottom board can be examined for mite "drop", with or without the sugar dusting. You can also catch a sample of bees in a jar then add powdered sugar to dislodge any mites. Dump the sugar and bees in a tray and allow the sugar coated "bee ghosts" to return to their hive. Examine the remaining sugar for mites. For the mite count to be meaningful, the sample size should be the same: about 1/2 cup is recommended (about 300 bees). For a more precise number, the bee sample can be sacrificed by killing them with alcohol or engine starting fluid. Dividing the number of dead mites by the number of dead bees gives a measure of percent infestation. You'll need to read up a bit to decide what threshold value is appropriate. But if you see bees with deformed wings, they are victims of deformed wing virus, known to be spread by varroa mites.

When our IPM efforts indicate that hive treatment for varroa is in order, this is the season to take action. The least toxic in hive treatment is sugar dusting to dislodge mites. "Soft" treatments include organic acids or thymol or other essential oils. It is very important to know that these products can be very detrimental if the weather is too hot!! Read up first!

Hard pesticides for hive use can often lead to pesticide resistance as we try to "kill a bug on a bug", so, once again, read up and choose your hive treatments carefully.

Clean Out The Garage

Cooler weather means that it is time to clean out the garage. As we discussed at our October meeting, everyone is encouraged to bring those beekeeping supplies that you want to sell, trade or give away at our November 10th meeting. If you have extra hive components or beekeeper gear, bring it along. (We'll probably make this a frequent event if there is enough interest.)

October Meeting Notes

We had 40 members and guests sign in at our October meeting. Nolan Donald offered an invocation and led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. President Daryl Scott welcomed our guests and new members Susan and Mark Morgan and Kenneth Doucet. They are wanting to learn about getting started keeping bees.

Jeff McMullan announced that the Brazoria County Beekeepers is ordering queens if anyone needs one. He also announced that all of the baggies of cottonseed hulls in the back of the room were donated by Nancy Hentschel for use as smoker fuel, "take some with you". Daryl Scott reminded members that the Texas Beekeepers Association's annual convention will be October 30-31 in Belton, Texas.

FUN FACTS for October were about the properties of honey. Consuming honey gives our body quick energy and it is said to counteract the effects of alcohol. Honey is an effective wound dressing since it is anti-inflammatory, stimulates tissue growth and has antimicrobial properties. Honey is quite acidic with a pH of 3.9 (about the same as ketchup). When cooking with honey, some folks add 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda to counter this acidity. Use 1 1/2 cups of honey to replace each cup of sugar and reduce the liquid in recipes by 1/4 cup per cup of honey used in place of sugar. Also reduce cooking temperature by 25°F when substituting honey.

Our October program was by Chris

Moore, Vice President of the Texas Beekeepers Association. Chris is a commercial beekeeper in Sour Lake with some 2,500 hives. He admitted to being a little "nuts" for working so hard to make a living with bees.

As a commercial beekeeper, Chris' goal is to have really strong hives ready for almond pollination by the first week in February. Going in to winter he first treats his hives for varroa. These are "blood sucking parasites that spread diseases we can't even identify". His miticide choice is ApiVar (plastic strips impregnated with the pesticide Amitraz). He also sometimes uses "softer" alternatives: Apiguard (thymol gel) or Mite Away Quick Strips (formic acid). These two products are very volatile and can be quite harmful if used when the weather is too warm!

Adequate stores are very important to overwintering success. The hive's "pantry" is the comb surrounding the brood nest that is filled with honey and pollen. Honey stored further away may not be accessible to the bees in very cold weather. He sometimes scratches off the cap of honey in supers to encourage the bees to move it down into the "pantry".

Fall forage is abundant now and Chris expects it to remain available until the first freeze. Starvation is the number one cause of winter loss, so Chris begins feeding in late winter. He usually uses 1:1 sugar syrup (plus essential oils as a feeding stimulant). 2:1 sugar syrup is used on light hives. He sometimes uses high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) but bees seem to eat sugar syrup but store the HFCS. 1/4 cup of bleach in five gallons of syrup controls algae and prevents fermentation.

Door prize winners in October were Gene deBons (a plant donated by the McConnon's), Milton Woods and Jeff McNight (a squeeze bottle of Sharon Moore's Hawk's Nest Farm honey), Daniel Boudreaux (a block of beeswax donated by Kelly Morris) and Dave Grimme (honey donated by the McConnon's).

Mentoring Program

We have six mentoring teams up and running and can use a few more mentors. We use the term "teams" very deliberately. The "mentor" isn't expected to have all the answers, only to have beekeeping experience and the willingness to lead the group along.

Treasurer's Report

Last month's treasury balance was \$2,565.04. Since then we spent \$7.55 on batteries for our speaker system, collected dues from 5 new members (\$25.00) and received a \$100.00 donation. The resulting treasury balance is \$2,682.49 (\$2,637.49 in our Wells Fargo checking account plus \$45.00 in cash to make change).

Club-Owned Equipment

The contacts for members wishing to use the club's equipment are:

Extraction Equipment

Jim Lynch
JWLTX@AOL.com
713 254-3922

Solar Wax Melter

Nancy Hentschel
Nancy6610@windstream.net
832 228-7642

Frame Assembly Gear

Nancy Hentschel
Nancy6610@windstream.net
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