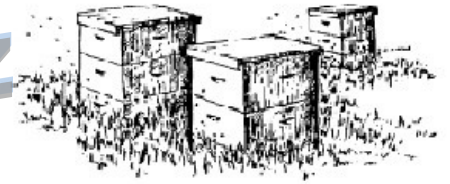




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



October, 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, October 13. 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 John McConnon who volunteered to bring salty treats and Dona Tomplait (something sweet) for our October meeting. After 30 minutes of social time, our October 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: I'm a new beekeeper and this will be my first "overwintering". So far things have gone well for my bees and I don't want to screw up. What things should I be concerned about with winter weather on its way?

An A: It is great that you have things going well and you are looking ahead to the cooler weather that is most certainly on its way.

Honey bee brood production slows in fall and the colony surrounds the brood nest area with honey and pollen stores. The bees begin to cluster in cool weather with many of them going head first into empty cells to allow a tight group that is able to stay warm. The bees on the outside of the cluster are in a chilled stupor as they insulate those in the middle. The bees at the center of the cluster exercise their flight muscles to generate warmth. The whole hive cavity is not kept heated; only the bees in the center of the cluster stay warm. From time to time the warm bees inside the cluster switch places with their chilled sisters. Staying warm requires a lot of food energy and the colony moves upward as it consumes its pollen and honey stores. Be sure to remove queen excluders so the queen is not stranded below as the colony moves upward into its food reserves.

It is apparent that honey bees are well adapted for winter survival, even in climates far colder than ours. Our mild winters often require little more of the beekeeper than keeping a watch on things as the seasons change. Successful overwintering depends on there being enough bees to cluster and stay warm, adequate food reserves for the winter and early brood production, hive ventilation, pest and disease management, and queen survival.

The most fundamental advice is to always have strong healthy hives. Weak colonies are most at risk during the winter. Weak colonies in fall may be from late season swarming, poor brood rearing or failing queens. It is good advice to combine weak colonies to improve chances of survival. (Remember that there can be only one queen!) In the spring the combined colony can be split back into two hives.

Starvation is the number one cause of winter colony losses. In our area we usually have a strong goldenrod and ragweed nectar flow this time of the year. Be sure to provide supers for this winter food supply and remove queen excluders. We often see lots of activity as our bees are able to forage on warmer days all during the winter. Don't be misled by this activity: a few weeks of cold wet weather could exhaust the hive's reserves. From time to time all winter you should lift the back of each hive for the comforting feel

of heavy remaining stores of honey. Feeding with heavy syrup in late fall may be necessary, but remember that temperatures must be above 50°F for the bees to take syrup. Division board or internal feeders are best for fall feeding.

Hive ventilation in winter is very important since the cluster gives off considerable moisture. If ventilation is inadequate, water can condense on the cold inner walls. Telescoping covers and inner covers can be arranged to allow adequate air circulation. Migratory covers may require a top entrance for adequate ventilation. Many beekeepers leave screened bottom boards open over the winter, or you can block the opening with a piece of plastic campaign sign. Entrance reducers help conserve heat and mouse guards are sometimes necessary. Insulation or covering the hive is not needed in our area. A wind break of some sort on the north side of exposed hives doesn't hurt.

Varroa mites can weaken colonies at the onset of winter. Mite treatments might be advised based on mite drop, sugar dusting or mite sampling. Treatment should be delayed until after the final harvest. Be aware that many of the mite treatments have specific temperature ranges for their use.

The biggest disease problem in winter is nosema, akin to dysentery or the like in honey bees. If weather prevents cleansing flights, infected bees poop in the hive and spread the

disease throughout the colony. Fortunately in our area we get frequent balmy days for cleansing flights, but be on the lookout for yellow-orange splatters of bee poop near the hive entrance. Antibiotic treatments are available, but work best as a preventive measure.

September Meeting Notes

We had 45 members and guests sign in at our September meeting. A quick head count came up with about 53, so someone didn't sign in.

Following an invocation and Pledge of Allegiance led by Kim Kutach, President Daryl Scott welcomed our guests, including new members Tom Barnes, Daniel Boudreaux and JayJay McGrath. They are wanting to learn about getting started keeping bees.

Daryl brought in back issues of bee magazines for anyone interested in taking some home. He also reminded everyone that our annual dues are \$5.00 and reported that he read that the Collin County Hobby Beekeepers charge that much to attend each meeting to cover the cost of the meeting facilities. This illustrates again how much our organization appreciates the cooperation and support of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Fort Bend County Commissioner's Court.

Daryl reminded members that the Texas Beekeepers Association's annual convention will be October 30-31 in Belton, Texas. The meeting will have multiple events including programs on many different topics as well as a honey and photo contest. Details and registration information can be found at <http://texasbeekeepers.org/>. Daryl also reminded everyone about the new labeling requirements for honey not produced under a Texas food manufacturer's permit. There are no facility or inspection requirements, but labeling must read: "Bottled or packaged in a facility not inspected by the Texas Department of State Health Services." The TBA plans to order a large quantity of these

labels. There are other specific labeling requirements that everyone should understand.

FUN FACTS for September were all about royal jelly, the rich substance that turns what would be an ordinary worker into a queen bee. Workers produce royal jelly from pollen and secretions from a gland in their heads. It is the diet of all larvae for two days after hatching, but a larva selected to become a queen is continuously fed royal jelly until the queen cell is capped six days after hatching. It has been reported that pigs and roosters fed royal jelly lived much longer lives. Fruit flies were bigger and chickens laid more eggs. Royal jelly also reversed menopause in women and rejuvenated older men. It was all on the internet so it must be true.

The September beekeeper's calendar included final honey harvest, overwintering medications, requeening and combining weak hives.

Nancy Hentschel gave a book report on "Feed Your Brain First", Part 3 in the Honey Revolution Series. The book praises the health benefits of eating honey, including claims its carbohydrates produce more liver glycogen for brain fuel than any other food.

Wendy Chopin reported on our Beekeeper Mentoring Program. Five mentoring teams are now up and running and plans are being made for upcoming weekend workshops. More teams will require more mentors so let Wendy know if you can help since we have mentees in waiting.

Jeff McMullan showed a fun video of how to make and use a "swarm jug" out of the five gallon plastic water bottle donated as a door prize by Daryl Scott.

John Lynch brought in the club's honey harvest setup and explained its use. Being able to borrow this (and other) club-owned equipment is a great benefit of being a member. Sharon Moore reported that she had ordered one of the "flow hives" that was viral on the internet. She'll

keep us posted.

Door prize winners were John Peter ("Feed Your Brain First" donated by Nancy Hentschel), Matt Pfitzinger (a dozen of Sharon Moore's yard eggs), and Kim Kutach and Andy Kuba (honey and pecans donated by Rosie McCusker). Norman Harris won the jug.

Treasurer's Report

Last month's treasury balance was \$2,296.73. Since then we collected dues from 5 members (\$25.00) and received \$300.00 in mentoring program registrations (12 at \$25.00). We spent \$56.69 on meeting supplies. The resulting treasury balance is \$2,565.04 (\$2,485.04 in our checking account plus \$80.00 in cash).

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
832 228-7642

TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION

Boone Holladay

Boone Holladay
County Extension Agent— Horticulture
Fort Bend County
jb.holladay@ag.tamu.edu
281 342-3034 ext. 7034
1402 Band Road, Suite 100
Rosenberg, TX 77471

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.