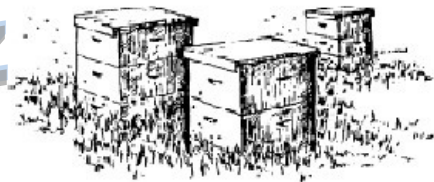




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



September, 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, September 9. 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 Cynda deBons for volunteering to bring "something sweet" for our September meeting. No one volunteered for a salty treat in September; in fact, no one has volunteered at all for our October and November meetings. The volunteer signup sheet will be on our registration table.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: I have two hives. I hope to expand by two next year but I had a slow start. One of my queens was not successful so I had to supplement brood to keep population up until I received a new queen. All is doing well now and they are finished one deep and 1/4 through the next one (lots of wildflowers are blooming now). They look healthy but I have not done any detailed tests looking for mites at this point. What type of inspection should I do to determine if there are enough mites to require treatment? Do you do the sugar shake test, another method, or do you try to look at your bees closely?

An A: You are a great example of why new beekeepers are advised to start with two hives. You were able to discern that one of your colonies was having problems and then give them brood to boost their numbers. If you had only one hive, you may not have even realized what was happening before the colony failed. Having detected the problem, brood from your second strong hive was able to help the weak colony along until your new queen arrived. Well done!

Now, to your **Q**. No one can logically disagree with the concept of integrated pest management (IPM): *Using the least toxic means to control an identified pest that is causing or likely to cause signifi-*

cant damage.

Your question goes to the heart of beekeeping IPM: how do you determine if varroa infestation is *causing or likely to cause significant damage?* I treatment is needed, there will be more decisions to be made; a whole new topic for discussion. For anyone with lots of hives, IPM is just a dream when dealing with varroa. They must treat every hive the same way since it is not practical to inspect and prescribe treatment for individual boxes of bees. But losses due to varroa can be intolerably significant. Unfortunately, the result is bees that are dependent on pesticides for their survival, a very difficult cycle to break.

It is safe to say that most hobby beekeepers prefer not to use pesticides inside their hives, i.e. "least toxic" is doing little or nothing to deal with varroa mites. A common outcome of this approach is the beekeeper that cites small hive beetles or wax worms as the cause of a lost hive. The fact is that every hive is under beetle and wax moth pressure. The bees in strong healthy hives are able to cope with these pests; a hive weakened by varroa is unable to defend itself. Waxworms and beetle larvae don't kill hives: think of them as delivering the coup de grâce (a French phrase meaning "blow of mercy" to end the suffering).

Doing nothing about varroa mites is not a good plan. The "least toxic" way to deal with varroa is to main-

tain strong healthy colonies that are genetically predisposed to coping with the mites. "Russian bees" were developed by the USDA since they came from an area of east Asia where varroa is native. On their own, "Russians" had 150+ years to develop a survival strategy to deal with the pest: varroa susceptible colonies long ago reached a Darwinian dead end.

The USDA also developed mite resistant bees selected from colonies in the U. S. The program got started by selecting bees with low mite numbers that seemed to be "varroa mite resistant", first referred to as VMR bees. It was soon learned that they somehow limited mite reproduction, so they became known as SMR bees (suppressed mite reproduction). Later they were referred to as having "varroa sensitive hygiene" (VSH bees). Varroa reproduce on honey bee larvae and it was learned that these bees could detect infected larvae and "hygienically" remove it from the hive. In fact, these bees aggressively manage all types of brood disease. Most importantly, this trait is inheritable and has actually been identified in the honey bee genome.

Feral colonies of bees also carry mite resistant traits since only "survivors" are still around. These bees have long adapted to our climate, forage, pests and disease and have survived the arrival of varroa mites as well. That is the good news. Unfortunately in Texas sometimes these survivors are mean as s**t.

August Meeting Notes

We had 57 members and guests sign the roster at our August meeting. A rough head count came up with about that same number (a good thing). It is important that you sign the attendance roster at our meetings to help us track attendance. Detailed contact information is only needed for guests and those attending for the first time. Otherwise, a quick sign-in is all we need.

We welcome new member Tom Williams from Katy and welcome back renewing members Paul Hund and Bill Skidmore. These additions to our roster bring our membership to an even 100 beekeepers (or wanna be beekeepers). This milestone for our growing roster is indicative of the growing interest in honey bees and beekeeping.

Jack Richardson gave a short presentation on producing comb honey. He brought along samples of his one pound squares as well as cut comb honey. Beekeeping supply houses sell supplies to produce and package solid blocks of capped honey comb. Another option is to cut sections of honey comb and bottle it with extracted honey. For cut comb honey you use a regular frame with special very thin wax foundation. Jack reports that he got back in to producing comb honey because of customer requests.

At previous meetings we had several requests for a presentation on medical bee venom therapy (apitherapy). Long time member Gene deBons got Brandy Rader at the Extension office to help him track down an old video that the club bought in 1999. The VHS tape is titled "The Bee Lady of Waldorf". Finding the tape turned out to be the easy part; finding a working VHS player and projector was more of a challenge. Gene and County Agent Boone Holladay got it all together for our August Program.

The program was a documentary of the work of Pat Wagner of Waldorf, Maryland. Wagner was diagnosed

with multiple sclerosis in 1980. MS is a disease of the nervous system of unknown cause. Electrical signals in the nerves are disrupted and result in a wide array of symptoms. Wagner had managed to cope with the disease for many years, but in 1990 her health took a downward turn. Wagner was unable to see, hear or walk and her doctor said he couldn't help her. When she learned of bee venom therapy used for autoimmune diseases in the 1930's, Wagner decided that she had to give it a try. Her condition as she narrates her story is remarkable.

Medical science has been unable to confirm the benefits of apitherapy for MS, in large part because of the nature of the disease. Patients often go from severe symptoms to nearly complete remission and back again. Private large scale studies have not been undertaken because the treatment is available at essentially no cost. Smaller studies have been inconclusive at best.

Sharon Moore couldn't resist telling all about her great new roller uncapper that she ordered from Brushy Mountain. It is a quality tool that is something like a paint roller with pins on a drum. The pins perforate the wax caps when you roll it across a frame of honey. You can use it like a cappings scratcher behind an uncapping knife or use it by itself when you have only a few frames to extract.

Rosie McCusker is selling her honey on Saturday mornings at the Fulshear Farmer's Market. The market wants local producers and Rosie could use some help. Contact her or Tom to coordinate the effort. Sales have been brisk and it offers a great opportunity for those with only a few hives to move a lot of product in a short period of time to finance their next Dadant order. The market is on FM 1093 at Bois d'Arc Lane in Fulshear.

Door prize winners in August included Mike Matejek and guest L. D. Lewis who took home shallow supers donated by Bob and Nancy Hentschel (they are standardizing

on mediums). John and daughter Sarah McConnon each took home a papaya seedling grown by Roy Nash. Jaqueline King won an orchid tree seedling (and a page describing this fascinating plant) donated by Preston Pitts. Jack Richardson won a Bee Cool wrap donated by Sharon Moore and Gerard Howard won a rain gauge donated by Elaine Jameson. Someone left a nice livestock show rod on the head table so we gave it away too (Paul Hund was the winner).

Treasurer's Report

Our August, 2014 treasury balance was \$3,487.55. Since that time we collected \$15 in dues (3 new members at \$5.00 each), received a donation of \$100.00 and collected \$60.00 for the use of the club's extractor. We spent \$27.30 on spare batteries for our cordless microphone. The resulting balance is \$3,630.25: \$45 in cash and \$3,590.25 in our checking account.

Order's In

We had 10 takers for another order of honey containers from Sailor Plastics. A single order shipped to one address results in significant savings in shipping costs. The order that we placed in June saved our members more than \$1,000! Another order has been placed and we expect delivery soon.

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