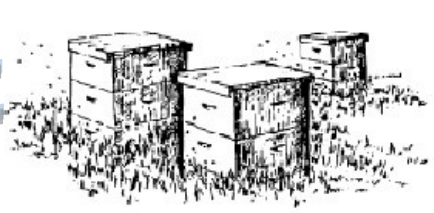
Fort Bend Buzz



newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

September, 2016

The September 13, 2016 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. We still need some help getting the coffee and lemonade set up for us. We also have empty spots on our sign-up sheets for snacks and the opening invocation. Thanks to Milton Woods who volunteered to bring salty treats and Bethany Madrid (something sweet) in September. The meeting will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time. No one volunteered to give our opening invocation this month. If you can help with this, please see President Daryl Scott before the meeting.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: The Zika virus is big news and the mosquito control efforts that I see on TV look like bad news for honey bees. It is awful to have to choose between our bees as unintended bykill and human health (especially pregnant women and their unborn children!). How can our organization get out in front on this?

An A: Actually, Fort Bend County Health & Human Services has already contacted our organization for input into their planning efforts and mosquito control will be on our September meeting agenda. A key part of this planning is knowing the location of hives in Fort Bend County.

We all know that honey bees are really easy to kill. In fact, soapy water is quite effective in destroying bad bees.

The list of pesticide products that are toxic to bees is really long. Agricultural pesticides have come a long way from the first products that could kill people as well as bugs. Today many pests are controlled with insecticides that are very specifically targeted and are only used when losses would be unacceptable if the fields were left untreated. It is amazing to think that in our area farming practices, monitoring with pheromone traps and the judicious use of pesticides has virtually eliminated the cotton boll weevil and all of the pesticide use that was needed for this damaging pest.

While many would see agricultural pesticides as demonic, a walk through a garden center or down the pesticide aisle at Lowe's or Home Depot can give another perspective. Will all of those products be used by homeowners as carefully and judiciously as farmers? What about misting systems on a timer that spritzes insecticide in the backyard to kill mosquitoes if they are there or not? And when all the beneficial insects like ladybugs, assassin bugs, wheelbugs, lacewings, etc. are dead, how much more back yard pesticides are then dosed out to kill aphids and caterpillars?

Unfortunately, it appears that protecting human health and honey bees are at opposing odds. The Zika virus is the latest villain in this drama (there are several tropical diseases that can be spread by mosquitoes). In fact, songbird populations in our area seem to be finally recovering from the West Nile Virus that showed up (from Egypt I guess) a few years ago.

The Zika virus is spread by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito (from Egypt too?). This mosquito is common along the Gulf Coast and transmits the virus after feeding on an infected person. *Aedes aegypti* actually did originate in Africa and over thousands of years has adapted to a life of parasitizing humans. Its common name is the "yellow fever mosquito" and it is known to spread several human diseases.

The Zika virus is thought to have originated in monkeys in central Africa. It and other evil organisms have adapted to human victims as well as to this mosquito species as a way to spread about. A mosquito is far more than a "miniature flying syringe" buzzing about injecting infected blood into its victims. When the yellow fever mosquito feeds on an infected human, the virus is able to grow and reproduce in the insect's stomach, forming a unique partnership. The virus has been successful since this particular mosquito has feeding habits that favor rapidly spreading disease. In most mosquito species, the females feed on blood in order to reproduce. After a blood meal from a single victim, the females go about laying eggs. *Aedes aegypti* is different: the female feeds on many people so disease is spread to multiple victims in its two to four week lifetime.

According to the U. S. Centers for Disease Control, only one in five Zika infected victims actually gets sick: malaise, fever, rash, muscle pain, conjunctivitis ("pinkeye"), etc. Symptoms appear within a few days (up to a week) after infection. Zika's link to tragic human birth defects was discovered in April (the virus attacks developing brain cells in the fetus).

Controlling the spread of disease by *Aedes aegypti* is an important public health issue. Strategies include using insect repellants and avoiding mosquito bites, eliminating standing water where mosquito larvae mature, and the application of pesticides. "Larvacides" include products that contain the bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis* (or Bt). It is commonly used as a biological pesticide that infects and kills the larvae of specific insect species.

The "adulticides" kill the adult mosquitoes. The most desirable (though more costly) products are characterized by their rapid breakdown in the environment after doing their job on the mosquito menace. They are sprayed at night from trucks and have broken down to harmlessness overnight.

Honey bee pesticide toxicity is carefully studied. It varies with different colony stock and older bees are more susceptible. Foraging is the older bees' role, so their mortality is important to colony survival. Mosquito control pesticides are available with minimum honey bee mortality even when used properly.

Most beekeepers understand that they should maintain a safe distance from adjacent row crops or roadside ditches.

At our September meeting we will devote our program to a better understanding of what beekeepers can do to help minimize the impact of the battle with Zika on our hives.

August Meeting Notes

45 members and guests signed in at our August meeting. A quick head count was a bigger number so it looks like its time for another reminder for everyone to sign in at the meeting so we have an accurate head count.

After 30 minutes of social time, President Daryl Scott opened our meeting with an invocation and led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. He then thanked Herman Hoot for getting the coffee set up for us and Carol Gubbels and Glenda McGaughey who brought treats for the meeting. We still have empty spots on our sign-up sheets for snacks and the opening invocation.

With the Olympics underway in Brazil, Daryl looked for something interesting related to Rio, the Olympics, and honey or honey bees. The best he could do was an Australian rugby player named Nick Cummins whose nickname is "honey badger". He failed to make Australia's Olympic team. Oh well.

For his August "fun facts" Daryl reported on the Fairmont luxury hotel chain that has more than 40 apiaries and mason bee nests on hotel properties around the world, including 6 rooftop hives in Austin. The chain also features on property herb and vegetable gardens whose crops, along with honey, are used by the hotel chefs.

Daryl recognized that many of our members produce cotton honey from rural areas. Honey bees collect nectar from the pale yellow cotton flowers on the first day of their bloom. After one day, the flowers change to a pink color and no longer yield nectar. The bees then visit other "nectaries" on the cotton plant at the base of the flower as well as on the under side of the leaves. Cotton yields a lot of honey, but it is known to crystallize relatively quickly. The cotton bloom does not require a pollinator, but it has been reported that cotton fields frequented by honey bees yield additional crop value of $108 per acre.

Daryl reviewed the late summer beekeeper's calendar which usually includes a dearth ahead of the goldenrod and ragweed bloom. To be on the safe side, each hive should have about 60 pounds of winter stores after the flow stops. You can estimate the honey amount by using 4.5 lbs for each full deep frame, 3.0 lbs for each full medium frame and 2.4 lbs for shallow frames. Some beekeepers do fall splits and requeening. Varroa treatment may be in order after the last honey crop.

Jeff McMullan gave a quick walk-through of recent changes to fortbendbeekeepers.org, mostly aimed at helping people deal with bee problems. Web surfers seek out our web site expecting our organization or the Extension office to remove bees. While we are often able to capture swarms, bee removal from inside a wall is not on our menu. While discussing swarms, Jeff added that late summer often brings an uptick in swarm calls when bees abscond from nest sites selected in the spring that now prove to be just too hot. Speaking of hot, Nancy Hentschel and Jack Richardson advised everyone to get an early start in the beeyard and drink plenty of water!

Door prize winners in August included Jack Richardson (homemade grape jelly donated by Glenda McGaughey). Lilly Tanksley and Bill Windrow won mustang grape jelly made by the Reuter Family. Kyle Reuter scored a basil plant donated by Stephanie Kinghorn.

Treasurer's Report

Our August treasury balance was $2,468.26. Since then we collected $25.00 for a new mentee plus dues from one new member ($5.00). The resulting treasury balance is $2,498.26, consisting of $40.00 in cash and $2,458.26 in our Wells Fargo checking account.

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