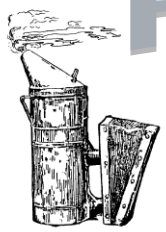
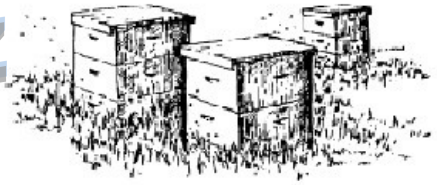
Fort Bend Buzz



newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

March, 2018

The March 13, 2018 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 if someone will volunteer to make it and clean up afterwards. Thanks to Albert Smith who volunteered to bring salty treats and Margaret Wrzesinski (something sweet) for our March meeting. The meeting will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: Swarm season is here and I'm worried about my back yard hive swarming. I don't want bees in my house, or worse yet, my neighbor's house. What should I do to prevent swarming?

An **A**: Honey bee colonies swarm to create new colonies (reproductive swarms) or to abandon an unsuitable nest site (absconding swarms). Spring swarms are usually reproductive swarms. Swarming later in the year is often to escape pests (or pest treatments), disease or a nest site that just gets too hot in late summer.

Swarm management is an important part of being a responsible beekeeper. Whole books have been written on honey bee swarms, so our newsletter is hardly long enough to address all the details of swarm management. Instead, we'll list and describe a few options for you to research on your own.

Reproductive swarms are how honey bees create new colonies. They happen in the spring when resources are plentiful (many believe that colonies actually start swarm preparations in the fall as they accumulate honey and pollen for spring buildup). Be aware, though, that an entire colony will vacate their home at almost any time of the year. In our area, late summer swarms are often due to the colony having chosen a home in the spring that is too hot when August rolls around. "Absconding" swarms are sometimes really large.

To manage the natural swarming process we have to convince the bees to stay (or that it is not yet time to leave). One simple practice is to rearrange your hive boxes in early spring. Over the winter the bees have moved upward in the hive as they consumed their honey stores. Moving the vacated boxes of empty comb up to the top of the hive stack fools the bees into thinking that there is still work to be done refilling the empty comb before it is time to swarm. Supering the stack with properly stored drawn comb also assures that the bees find plenty of room for stores.

An over-crowded hive is a good indicator of an impending swarm especially if you see queen cells along the bottom of comb. They are referred to as "swarm cells" since swarming is now imminent. Some beekeepers destroy these cells in an effort to stop swarming, but if the bees have already swarmed you will leave the colony without a queen. Not good. Swarm cells can easily be removed and used to rescue queenless colonies or for splits, but leave a couple behind in case the hive has swarmed. Capped swarm cells are a certain warning that swarming is only days away (or the swarm has already left).

Splitting a hive in the spring serves the same purpose for the bees as a reproductive swarm. Splits are not difficult to do and are almost always successful when they include a new queen. If you really don't want or need an additional hive, one of your fellow beekeepers would probably welcome it.

The "Demaree Method", "nectar management", "Checker-boarding", and the "Snelgrove Method" are other hive manipulations intended to convince the bees that it is not time to swarm.

Regardless of whatever swarm prevention steps you take, it is important to have a backup plan. Should one of your hives swarm, it is a good idea to offer them a place to live (better than in the soffit of someone's house). A vacant hive in your bee yard, especially with drawn comb and a few drops of lemongrass oil, can entice swarming bees to stay next door (or maybe catch a swarm that is passing through). Swarm traps are another good option. It is certain that the scouts will find the empty hive or trap and it is better if it is some distance away from the hive. Check traps often so the bees can be moved into a hive quickly.

And your last line of defense is having equipment available and the ability to hive a wayward swarm.

Dues Are Due

Check out the address label on this newsletter. If your name is in *italics*, you need to get your $5.00 2018 dues paid at our March meeting.

February Meeting Notes

Secretary-Treasurer Lynne Jones was busy collecting dues at the back table at our February meeting. A total of 31 paid their dues for 2018, including seven new members who joined our association.

For probably the first time ever, our head count and sign-in register came up with the same number: 63 members and guests at our February meeting! Be sure that you register at the back table at our meetings since the sign in sheets are an important club record that supports our use of County facilities.

After 30 minutes of social time, President Jack Richardson called the meeting to order and gave an opening invocation. Following the Pledge of Allegiance led by Gene deBons, Jack recognized 11 first time visitors at our meeting. Each was warmly welcomed after telling us of their plans as a beekeeper (most were brand new to beekeeping).

Lynne Jones asked for volunteers willing to bring snacks for our meetings. Her plan is to contact the list of volunteers ahead of each meeting to see who plans to attend and would be able to bring snacks for us to enjoy. Lynne also noted that there were registration folders available for members wishing to help with our mentoring program.

With spring just around the corner, beekeepers should be getting busy. Darrel Scott reviewed the beekeeping calendar for January, February and March based on info from the Montgomery County Beekeepers web site (www.mocobees.com). It's important to have your hives and equipment ready to go. Any varroa treatments need to be finished before installing supers.

Darrell also brought in his list of fun bee facts, focusing this month on bee stings. Honey bee venom is different from that of wasps and ants. Only workers sting, drones don't and queens (usually) won't. In 2006 11 U. S. deaths were attributed to bee stings compared to 90 due to lightning.

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is scheduled for February 27 - March 18. Volunteers for the rodeo's AGVENTURE honey bee exhibit are coordinated by the Harris County Beekeepers Association. Harris County's David Pineda and Harrison Rogers brought in their volunteer signup sheet, or you can volunteer online at the Harris County web site (http://www.harriscountybeekeepers.org/).

Gene deBons next gave us a historical look back gleaned from his 1855 edition of Langstroth's The Hive and the Honey Bee, contemporaneous with the battles at the Alamo and San Jacinto. Langstroth had not yet invented his removable frame hive, so there were instructions for making a straw skep. Then, as now, beekeepers were urged to be gentle and only use slow deliberate motions when working with bees.

Jerry Griffin confessed to sometimes having more money than sense when it comes to keeping bees. He brought in his Bee Cool Ventilator, a patented solar powered fan (www.beecoolventilators.com). Increased honey production is supposed to result from the bees having less work to ventilate the hive. It is also claimed to help with pests and disease.

Since we were hearing confessions, Sharon Moore offered hers as well. She brought in her Flow™ Hive super. This device got started seeking crowd source funding of $750,000. Before the dust settled, more than $12 million had been raised (Sharon included). The bees store nectar and produce honey in special plastic frames. At harvest time, a large "key" is inserted to open the cells and the honey drains out of the hive.

Ian Kjos brought in a screened bottom board he makes and has available for sale. He makes and sells other woodenware as well. His correct phone number is (713) 657-9707. Ian also passed out information on Getting the Most from your Queen Castle.

Jack Richardson finished up our potpourri of "show and tell" by demonstrating various Langstroth hive components.

Our meeting concluded with a drawing for various donated door prizes.

Beekeeping School

The Central Texas' 10th Annual Beekeeper School is March 17th in Brenham. Registration on or before the 12th is $65, after the 12th it will be $90. http://centraltexasbeekeepers.org.

Letgo

We've all seen the silly Letgo commercials on TV. It's been decided that we need a Letgo table in the back of the room each month for those getting over a case of "more money than sense." If you have beekeeper stuff that needs to find a new home, it may be time to Letgo.

Treasurer's Report

Our February treasury balance was $3,432.99. At our February meeting we collected $155.00 in dues (31 new and renewing members). The resulting balance is $3,587.99 consisting of $3,532.99 in our checking account plus $55.00 in cash to make change.

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