



September, 2019

# Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

*fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping*

The September 10, 2019 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association 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. It is important that we leave the Community Center the way we found it! Please lend a hand in straightening up the tables and chairs and cleaning up the refreshment area. We will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time. Don't forget about the *letgo* table in the back of the room. You may find just what you need or you can seize the opportunity to get rid of stuff (beekeeping treasures) that needs a new home.

## Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

**Q:** I was setting up a new beeyard and moved two hives to their new location. Admittedly, they weren't real strong (single deeps were easier to move). When I checked them a week or two later, the bees were gone and the hives were overrun with "crazy ants". What do I do now?

**An A:** As you know, you aren't the first victim of tawny (Rasberry) crazy ants (*Nylanderia fulva*). When discovered near Houston in 2002, crazy ants became the subject of widespread media attention because of their fascinating natural history and incredible scientific difficulty in identifying the pest's origin. This invading ant was depicted as a very significant agricultural pest after commercial colonies absconded following hive invasion by large numbers of the ants.

More than fifteen years after their discovery, it appears that crazy ants aren't the apocalyptic hive pest portrayed in the media. Nonetheless, as you have learned, they do present another hive management challenge for the beekeeper. An understanding of crazy ant ecology and foraging preferences have led to apiary management recommendations to help minimize the potential impact of this pest. Crazy ants are prone to

boom-bust cycles and expand their range slowly. Unlike fire ants, crazy ant reproductives don't fly so they spread only a few hundred yards each year (unless aided by us!).

Beekeeping practices are important in managing crazy ants:

1. Monitor for crazy ants, especially when moving hives. A hot dog slice is powerfully attractive to both crazy ants and its fire ant cousin. Existing beeyards and potential new sites can be easily screened for these two species. They will not likely be present at the same time unless the crazy ants are new arrivals. In fact, fire ants are a good indicator that crazy ants are not likely to be around (foraging fire ants are likely helpful in controlling hive pests, especially beetles).

2. Avoidance and prevention. A new site with crazy ants present should be avoided since their colonies are often widespread and large areas would need to be treated. Movement from an infested site is ill advised unless effective control measures can be employed before hives are moved. This can prove difficult, but County Extension Agents and Extension IPM Specialists can assist with current control recommendations for baits and contact pesticides. Pesticide use in beeyards should be undertaken very carefully and only in accordance with the product label. GuardStar (permethrin) soil drenches labeled

for small hive beetles seem to give short term control of crazy ants as well.

3. Apiary practices. Like other hive pests, crazy ants don't like full sun. They prefer shady areas with debris they can get under to nest. Hives should be located where they receive full sun, at least in the morning. Keep the ground bare with glyphosate herbicides. Mulch or a cloth plant barrier is not a good idea since they create an excellent home for crazy ants. The ground should be kept clear. Hive stands are preferred to pallets since crazy ants find refuge and nest sites underneath them. Moats have apparently been used successfully to deter other ant species, but crazy ants are known for traversing across their dead kin when committed to reaching a destination.

4. Feed syrup carefully. Beekeepers know to feed syrup carefully since it may encourage robbing. Crazy ants have a strong foraging preference for sugar syrup, so we have another dimension added to feeding bees. Take care to avoid splashes or spills. Open feeding syrup when these pests are present will attract them in huge numbers.

5. Migratory Hive Inspection. Texas Apiary Inspection Service hive inspections focus exclusively on honey bee health. They do not inspect for pests like crazy ants, so temporary locations along the Gulf Coast should be chosen carefully.

## July Meeting Notes

Our head count at the meeting was the same as last month: 47 and we got 47 names on the sign-in sheets. Bingo two months in a row! Don't overlook registering at our meetings since the sign-in sheets are an important record of our use of county facilities.

President Jack Richardson opened the meeting at 7:30 pm, gave an invocation and lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Two first time attendees introduced themselves. Jack cautioned everyone about working out in the heat. Take breaks and stay hydrated to avoid heat exhaustion.

Gene DeBons gave a short presentation about beekeepers being such a cheap lot. Scraping all the honey clinging to the walls of the extractor can add 2 lbs. to the crop!

Vice President Danessa Yaschuk reported that the July 20 Brazoria County Beekeepers' Honey Expo at the Brazoria County Fairgrounds was a good event. There were raffles and silent auctions. Danessa also reminded everyone of the FBBA hive decorating and photo contest to be held at next month's meeting. The Brazos Valley Beekeepers Association's annual bee school will take place on Saturday, September 7th in College Station. The cost is \$70 individual / \$125 couple and \$15 for kids (with parent or guardian) Lunch (beef and chicken fajitas) is included. Registration is limited to 450 and a sellout is expected. The Texas Beekeepers Association Annual Conference will be November 8 and 9 in San Antonio at the Hilton San Antonio Airport. Registration will be starting soon.

Danessa also went over the beekeeping tasks for August and September:

Now: In August there is little for bees to forage on and colonies can be very cranky and bad tempered during the nectar dearth. Take care when opening hives that bees do not become overly excited. Be careful to not induce robbing. Check hives

to be sure bees have at least two full frames of honey in the brood box. Bees can starve in August! If needed, start feeding sugar syrup. This is the time to treat for varroa. You need strong brood to go through the winter. Varroa mite indication can be from using sticky boards, powdered sugar roll, or checking drone larvae. For an accurate count use an alcohol wash - if the varroa count is 5 per 100 bees, treat immediately. Consider re-queening in the fall for a healthy hive entering the winter. If you plan to purchase a queen, make arrangements with a seller in advance.

Get Ready: We will usually have a short fall honey flow from goldenrod, ragweed and asters. Strong hives will store a surplus. Nucs to be overwintered can be started. A good 5 frame nuc made during the first week of September will overwinter nicely and probably make a crop of honey in the spring. Examine hives carefully and replace failing queens. Weak hives can be combined with strong ones. Continue to supply water and feed colonies or nucs if needed.

Danessa introduced our guest speaker, Les Crowder. Les has devoted his entire adult life to the study and care of honeybees. Dedicated to finding organic and natural solutions for problems commonly treated with chemicals, he designed his own top-bar hives and set about discovering how to treat disease and genetic weaknesses through plant medicine and selective breeding. Les has always looked for ways to eliminate toxic inputs in the hive, starting with antibiotics and now miticides. He has been keeping bees in Langstroth and top bar hives for about 50 years, both as a hobby and as a business.

Earlier in his career, he worked for a business with 4,000 hives in New Mexico. He was the President of New Mexico Beekeepers Association multiple times. He was a honeybee inspector in New Mexico for 5 years. He has been teaching highly popular beekeeping classes do-

mestically and abroad for over 35 years (both in English and Spanish). Les moved to Austin, Texas in 2017. His passion for the bees continues and he regularly teaches beekeeping classes and helps people with their bees as a consultant.

Les Crowder's book, "Top-Bar Beekeeping: Organic Practices for Honeybee Health," is a very popular book which has sold and continues to be sold all over the world. It is available on Amazon.

Les' top bar hive design can be made for under \$30. The body of the hive is constructed from a single 14 foot long 1 x 10 plank with very little to discard. It can contain up to 30 top bars with a follower board to add bars as the hive increases. For proper bee space, his top bars width must be 1-3/8". He uses 1/2" quarter round molding on the bottom of the top bar to guide comb construction.

After drawing for donated door prizes, the meeting was adjourned.

## Treasurer's Report

Our July treasury balance was \$3,970.52. Since our last report we collected \$15.00 in dues. Expenses were a \$200.00 speaker fee, \$86.85 for award ribbons, and \$6.38 monthly website fee. The resulting balance is \$3,692.29 (\$3,627.29 in our checking account plus \$65 in cash to make change).

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