



Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

The Fort Bend Beekeepers Association usually meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00 pm in Fort Bend County's "Bud" O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, Texas. (We are called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time.)

In the midst of a public health emergency, the County has closed the Community Center and prohibited meetings of more than ten people, so there will be no April meeting. It is very likely that our May meeting will be cancelled as well. County offices and services are also limited, so our newsletter this month will have to be distributed electronically.

We should all be limiting contact with others as COVID-19 runs its course, especially those considered most susceptible to fatal outcomes. Limiting the spread of the virus is key to not overwhelming our health care system. Thoroughly wash your hands frequently, especially after being out in public. (Hand sanitizer may be hard to come by; you may be able to trade a bottle of honey or a few rolls of toilet paper to replenish your supply.) It is usually pretty easy to avoid public contact while working your hives and beekeeping is an "essential activity" since it is an "agricultural" pursuit. (A veil is not an acceptable substitute for a N95 mask.) It's a good time to be making repairs and assembling new equipment when you get tired of cowering in the closet, snacking or watching TV.

April meeting cancelled

State and local orders have forced the cancellation of our April 14 meeting. The May meeting is likely to be cancelled too.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: At our March meeting, "swarm management" was stressed as an important beekeeping task. It went by pretty fast. Can you give some more detailed instructions for us new guys?

An A: "Fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping" is the reason that our club exists. With so many members that are backyard beekeepers in neighborhoods, it is very important that our bees don't become a nuisance to our neighbors. We always stress the availability of a water source to keep our bees out of the hot tub next door. It is much more important though to manage the hives natural instinct to swarm and produce a new colony that may move in to a neighbor's house.

In our March meeting notes that follow, there is a short summary of swarm management techniques. In our Q-A we will try to elaborate on swarm prevention techniques.

Let's start with plan B (the ingrates swarmed anyway). Swarming usually occurs at midday in the spring when the weather is nice and resources (and drones) are plentiful. The swarm usually hangs around (pun intended) for a few days as the scout bees search for a new home. If we've had a few days of ugly weather, swarming dramatically increases when it clears. The old queen is not a strong flier, so the swarm usually lights near the colony they just left (you should always look around for the original colony of any swarm). Always look up in your beeyard for swarms congregated near your hives and have equipment ready if you should see one. If you can't deal with a swarm, get some help through fortbendbeekeepers.org.

Hang swarm traps near your beeyard (but not too close by since the new colony wants to "spread out"). Swarms usually move to their new digs in mid-afternoon (any stragglers will return to the hive).

If you notice a sudden drop in entrance activity or your hive's population, they may have swarmed. Queen cells along the bottom of frames are referred to as "swarm cells" and are a harbinger of swarming. Never destroy swarm cells since you will doom the colo-

ny if the old queen has already departed. Any hive that has swarmed may become queenless since mating flights are perilous.

If the bees have moved into somewhere like your neighbor's soffit, sometimes you can use Off! to get them to leave if they just moved in. Off! also works to discourage scout bees from selecting a new home (in your neighbor's soffit).

Plan A is always to prevent swarming, the honey bee's natural instinct to produce a new colony.

Fall requeening should help prevent swarming since the young queen is less likely to leave, especially if you have taken other swarm prevention measures. Requeening in the spring is less likely to help since new queens aren't readily available until swarm season is already upon us.

Over the winter months the brood nest moves upward in the hive as the bees consume their winter honey reserves. This leaves the bottom box empty since the colony is unlikely to move back down. This honey bee behavior is why it is a good idea to have two boxes for the brood nest. Moving the vacated box to above the brood nest in the stack serves to relieve over crowding and gives the queen lots of lay-

ing room. You can do the same thing by adding a second brood box; adding a super helps too.

Another trick is to swap positions of strong and weak hives that are close together. The strong hive loses foragers to the weak one (a good thing) and is discouraged from swarming.

Splitting a strong hive increases your hive count and discourages swarming. The split is just like a swarm, except you have control of the situation. In fact, a frame with swarm cells has a jump start toward a new queen.

Perhaps another option is a slatted rack from the bee supply catalogue. (\$20 or so) They are claimed to allow the queen to lay lower in the comb and while providing space for clustering at night to help with overcrowding.

March Meeting Notes

Our March sign in sheet had 53 in attendance; head count was 54. After 30 minutes of social time, President Craig Rench opened the meeting at 7:30 pm and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

We had five first-time visitors that introduced themselves and shared their interest in beekeeping.

Vice President Danessa Yaschuk announcements on the Central Texas Beekeepers Association's Beekeeping School on March 21 and of two events which will need volunteers: Sugar Land Earth Day Celebration on April 18 and Fort Bend County Master Gardeners' Nature Festival April 25. *(Each of these events have since been cancelled.)*

Gene DeBons discussed how the club's Swarm Call program works. Our website link, "HELP! I HAVE BEES", includes a Swarm Removal Request form to provide details. Gene then uses our Swarm Call List to find a beekeeper to respond. If you are on the list, you must be ready to go; have your beekeeper gear and, most importantly, an empty hive to put the swarm in. Swarms do not stick around long,

so getting a beekeeper to the swarm ASAP is important. If you don't answer or call back promptly, Gene calls someone else.

Danessa went over In the Bee-yard Now for March and April. Expect the major nectar flow to kick into gear. Swarms are more frequent in April. To prevent swarms, make sure the queen has empty cells to lay eggs. If you have a strong colony, you can split them in early April. This is also the month to receive queens and package bees. If you have new bees, feed them 1:1 sugar syrup until all frames have drawn comb, then add another brood box and continue to feed until that box is also full. Watch honey supers closely during April. If bees are working on 6-8 frames it will be time to add another super. Empty supers may be added either above or below full supers. Bees need plenty of room to make honey so that nectar does not get stored in the brood nest. 3 to 4 supers per hive is generally enough for a season.

Jeff McMullan's presentation on Catching Swarms was very informative. Swarming is a natural process - bees multiply by dividing. There are three types of swarms: Reproductive (the queen and about half the bees leave); Absconding (all the bees leave); and After-swarms (a newly hatched queen, usually still a virgin, leaves with about half the bees that remained after the original swarm). To prevent your hives from swarming there are three main techniques: Add boxes to prevent overcrowding, swap boxes (if the bottom brood box does not have brood, swap it with the brood box above it, and splits (which divides the bees before they decide to do it themselves).

Scout bees locate a site for the swarm's new home. Once the new site has been agreed upon, the entire swarm will take off for their new home, often within 48 hours of leaving their original hive.

If you have set up swarm traps,

swarm lures or an attractant (lemongrass oil) helps. Retrieve the swarm trap because they will build comb quickly.

Regardless of whether you are collecting a swarm from a trap or from a tree limb, you can spray them with a mixture of sugar-water and Honey-B-Healthy. A spray insect repellent, like Off!, sprayed on a rag can be used to encourage the bees to move. Any bees that are left behind will return home.

Put the swarm in a box with frames of foundation and frames of drawn comb if you have it. A frame of capped-brood will encourage them to stay in their new home. A queen excluder between the box and the bottom board, or an entrance queen excluder is recommended until the queen is laying. (Don't leave it on too long though because drones can't get through an excluder and dead ones will block the entrance.)

Following Jeff's presentation, the drawing was held for several donated door prizes.

Treasurer's Report

Our March treasury balance was \$3,812.52. Since then we collected \$60.00 in dues (12 memberships). The only expense was \$6.49 for the monthly email cost. The resulting balance is \$3,866.03 (\$3,816.03 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash to make change).

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