



June, 2020

# 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 the continuing COVID-19 public health emergency, the Community Center remains closed. There was no May meeting and our regular June 9 meeting has been cancelled as well. For details of our planned Zoom online meeting, see the announcement below. Hopefully our meeting can return to normal in July.

## June meeting is online

State and local orders require the cancellation of our regular June 9 meeting. Instead we will be hosting at Zoom online: Tuesday, June 9 at 7:30 pm. The login is at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86519722122> Meeting ID: 865 1972 2122.

To connect by telephone (audio only), call 346 248-7799, Meeting ID: 865 1972 2122. An email with instructions and "clickable" links will go out ahead of the meeting.

Our program topic will be 'Basic Hive Inspections' by James and Chari Elam with Bluebonnet Beekeeping and Texas Bee Supply. The Elam's are past leaders in the Montgomery County Beekeepers Association and past board members of Texas Beekeepers Association as well as members of the American Beekeeping Federation. We will have time at the beginning and end of the presentation for announcements and questions.

## Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

**Q:** I'm still pretty new at beekeeping and have tried my hand at capturing swarms a time or two. I can't seem to get them to stay. Help!

**A:** You've discovered that while it is often relatively easy to get bees in a box, it may be difficult to get them to stay. Dealing with swarms is an important beekeeping skill that is all about managing the bee's natural

instinct to reproduce by swarming. Eggs, larvae and pupae result in more adult bees, but producing a new colony requires the old queen and a contingent of bees to leave the hive to establish the new colony.

It is a big setback if your hive loses half its bees. Most importantly, your existing hive's new queen will emerge a few days after the colony swarms and if she doesn't survive her mating flight(s) the colony is doomed to slowly dwindle and fail. This happens often and is a frequent cause of hive failure during the summer. Hive beetles and wax moths just take advantage of the situation, and robbing happens when a weakened colony is unable to defend its stores. Good beekeeping means being on top of things before the maggots, waxworms, frass and the robbers show up.

Swarming happens when resources are plentiful and hive population is high. Be on the lookout for queen cells along the bottom of frames near the entrance. They are sometimes called "swarm cells" since they often portend a coming swarm. It is usually a bad idea to destroy swarm cells since the bees may have already swarmed or they might go ahead and swarm anyway, leaving your hive queenless. Using a queen excluder to try to stop swarming is not likely to be successful and it causes major congestion by trapping drones in the hive.

Probably the best way to discourage swarms is to split your hives. You

can put bees and frames with swarm cells in a nuc along with drawn out frames with honey and/or pollen. It's a good idea to relocate the split several miles away for a week or so to avoid losing bees back to the original hive. The bees that remain there seem to think the colony has already swarmed and they just weren't included. New queens in your swarm-cell nuc usually emerge in just a few days. If your split was successful, you should find eggs and larvae from a mated queen in a couple of weeks. If you don't, give them another week before getting them a mated queen or doing a "newspaper combine" to put the bees back in your hive. If you really don't want or need another hive, another beekeeper may even pay you for them.

You are not likely to spot every swarm leaving your bee yard. They will eventually move in somewhere and hopefully it isn't your neighbor's second story soffit.

Swarm traps are an important beekeeper tool to prevent that from happening. Use a splash of lemongrass oil to attract swarm scouts. The trap shouldn't be placed too near the beeyard since swarming's purpose is to make a new colony and the bees prefer less competition by being some distance away from its source hive. Check the swarm trap often since you don't want it to become a permanent home.

As you have found, capturing a swarm is a piece of cake if they are

readily accessible. If they are just too high up, you might try leaving them a swarm trap (or hive) to move in to.

Swarm catches at 20+ feet up can be made using a plastic pail or a plastic water jug (with the bottom cut out) and a wooden pole or joint of heavy-walled PVC pipe. Check out the video link at the bottom of the HELP! I HAVE BEES page on our web site to see how easy that can be.

Now to the part about getting the swarm to stay. Most importantly the bees need to be satisfied with their new home which usually means that it is big enough. Only small swarms should go in nucs. Frames with drawn comb are far better than just foundation, and milled beeswax foundation is far more attractive to the bees than plastic. A frame of capped brood (no bees) is strong encouragement for the bees to stay with little to do besides keeping the brood warm awaiting a big boost in their numbers from emerging workers. It is not uncommon for new swarms to start raising a new queen right away if there are eggs or tiny larvae on the brood frame. A frame with honey and pollen is helpful too, encouraging the swarm queen to get busy laying eggs since brood rearing resources are already available.

A captured swarm should be relocated several miles away. This leaves scout bees behind so they cannot lead the swarm elsewhere (they eventually go back to their original hive). You can move the hive back to your beeyard at night after a week or so.

Sometimes a queen excluder on top of the bottom board is used to keep the swarm's queen inside. This isn't usually a good plan except maybe for the first few days since (again) it causes congestion and traps drones inside. They gather on the excluder trying to get outside. Small swarms are often "afterswarms" with a virgin queens. The excluder prevents her from getting out to mate.

## Community Service

Our web site and swarm call list are the cornerstones of an important community service of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association. Whenever one of our members responds to a swarm call, it results in avoiding bees becoming someone's significant pest control problem.

Gene deBons fields help requests that come in to our web site. It is always a struggle because people really know very little about honey bees (some contacts are about wasps or hornets). Generally speaking, we only refer swarms (not cutouts) to members that have asked to be on our call list (and only if the bees have not been sprayed with insecticide). Here is some feedback we recently received:

"We would like to appreciate Mr. Tom McCusker and Fort Bend Beekeepers Association for helping us out!

Mr. Tom arrived promptly and took out the bees with utmost care. We were fascinated to see these little creatures of nature whom we feared being so calm in his presence even when they were being removed.

We appreciate his time and effort in coming forward to help us at the needed time. My family had a great lesson on Nature and these fascinating creatures from him. My boys and I were thrilled to listen to his stories.

We are happy that the bees have a new home. Thank you Mr. Tom!"

The donations in each month's treasurer's report are from grateful neighbors. They are a big part of funding our club's activities.

## Good Luck Pecos Jack

Long-time member and past President Jack Richards has moved to new digs near Caddo Lake in Jefferson, Texas. He sold his home in Sugar Land and regrettably his eclectic surroundings built up over many years will become the site of someone's new home. His cell phone number isn't changing.

## May Meeting Notes

Our May meeting was cancelled because County facilities are closed to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Be sure to log in to ZOOM IN JUNE.

## Dues are due

Our dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year. If you haven't yet paid for 2020 there is a sad bee on your address label and you're about to be scrubbed off the Buzz mailing list. It's a hassle writing and mailing a \$5.00 check so if you wish to remain a member (and pay your dues at the next meeting), send an email to [info@fortbendbeekeepers.org](mailto:info@fortbendbeekeepers.org). Lynne has even agreed to accept a \$10 check so you can pre-pay for 2021. (she won't accept more than one year in advance!) Mail your check to:

Fort Bend Beekeepers  
Lynne Jones, Secretary-Treasurer  
19747 Coppervine Lane  
Houston, TX 77084

## Treasurer's Report

Our May treasury balance was \$3,821.55. Since our last report we collected \$150.00 in donations and \$5.00 in dues. The only expense was \$6.49 for our monthly email cost. The resulting balance is \$3,970.06 (\$3,920.06 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash to make change).

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI**LIFE  
EXTENSION

*Boone Holladay*

Boone Holladay

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