



February, 2021

# Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

*fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping*

The Fort Bend Beekeepers Association was last able to meet in person on March 10, 2020. We usually meet 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 wonderful and sorely missed social time.)

Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status continues at RED or "High Risk". This has been in place since mid-December and is a dangerous condition as the number of infections soar and ICU beds fill up at unacceptable rates. Gatherings of more than 10 people is prohibited because of the public health emergency. See the announcement below for details of our online meeting in February.

Hopefully our meetings can return to normal soon, but is impossible to predict when we will be able to meet in person again.

There is some good news in all this mess: you can attend online beekeeper meetings being held almost anywhere in the world! Texas beekeeper groups have seized the opportunity to host online programs given by beekeeping experts sitting at there dining room table somewhere.

## February meeting is online

Our February meeting will again be online:

**Tues., Feb. 9, 7:00 - 9:00 pm**

**login:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85622635183>

**pwd=UFR1NFN6MWU1emhIYm JDNG1EK1UrUT09**

**Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183**

**Passcode: 275853**

To connect by telephone (audio only), call 346 248-7799, Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183 , Passcode: 275853.

An email with clickable instructions will go out ahead of the meeting. We plan to start the meeting 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:** When am I supposed to super my hive?

**An A:** "Supers" and "Supering" are really fascinating terms related solely to beekeeping. They originated with the invention of removable frame hives in the 1800's. The

familiar Langstroth hive design allows beekeepers to manipulate the boxes in a hive stack to achieve some objective. Honey "supers" are *superimposed* on top of the hive stack for honey stores or future harvest (that is the way people talked 150 years ago).

So, the basic, and really quite simple, question is "what are we trying to achieve?". The answer is that the beekeeper is making sure that the colony has ample room to grow and store its honey reserves. Otherwise, the colony will be honey bound and is more likely to swarm. The bees may even backfill the brood nest with honey if they have no place left to store nectar. You don't want to lose half your work force to a swarm, especially if they may decide to move into your soffit or the neighbor's shed.

The honey bee colony's drive to gather nectar and make honey knows no bounds, so long as they can find comb to store it. In answering this question, supering becomes a "Goldilocks" decision: not too soon, not too late, but just at the right time.

Unlike cold porridge, there's actually not much downside to supering too early. You need to wait if the weather is still cold since adding a

super makes it more difficult for the bees to keep warm. An added super also adds to the colony's guard duty. This is especially important when using drawn comb. If the bees aren't able to protect the comb, it is susceptible to wax moths and a mess of webbing and frass (caterpillar poop).

It is common advice that you add a super when 80% (8 out of 10 frames) are occupied by bees. Even if the bees are not quite there yet, you should super ahead of the nectar flow. In the meantime, you should have your supers all ready to go.

## HLSR

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo was shut down early last year because of COVID-19. This year it was first postponed and has now been cancelled altogether.

One of the most popular attractions at the rodeo is the AGVENTURE honey bee exhibit and many beekeepers really look forward to telling rodeo visitors all about honey bees and beekeeping. It is almost symbolic of starting an ambitious new year with our bees. Sadly, it is not happening in 2021.

## More About COVID-19

Our February meeting marks a full year since the Fort Bend Beekeepers were able to meet in person. In ways big and small, everyone's life has been upset by this worldwide pandemic. Thousands of families have suffered greatly. Experts tell us that our only exit ramp here is the passage of time and rising "herd immunity" (where sufficient numbers are vaccinated, perhaps gained immunity in surviving the disease, or are unfortunately dead). The disease is no longer a pandemic when it (or some new variant) can no longer infect potential victims (history says that that is what eventually happens to all pandemics).

The statistics in Fort Bend County are scary. There have been almost 46,000 confirmed cases. About 37,000 have recovered while some 450 have died, most likely alone in the ICU struggling to survive on a ventilator. The County reported 315 new cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday (February 3), along with 19 recoveries and 4 deaths.

Warning! Opinion ahead: There are those that worry that the COVID-19 vaccine is some kind of "roll of the dice". Get it and perhaps suffer some ill effect. Or don't, and risk dying all alone in the ICU. It is important to understand that those that choose not to be vaccinated are counting on everyone else to control this disease, chancing that if they get infected they won't necessarily suffer an awful (for them and their family) outcome. The fact is that COVID-19 outcomes for you range from fatal to no symptoms at all. Not all victims die and most suffer symptoms little worse than the flu. Some never even know that they had it.

But don't forget that in getting vaccinated you are choosing to help protect everyone that you might have infected down the road. That is the way we put this situation behind us. Consider your decisions carefully.

Your editor has had his first shot.

## February Meeting Notes

President Craig Rench opened the FBBA ZOOM meeting at 7:30 pm and welcomed the 31 who had logged in.

Vice-President Danessa Yaschuck made several announcements and then introduced our guest speakers Chari and James Elam with Texas Bee Supply.

The Elam's presentation topic was "Maximizing Honey Production". The factors in the amount of honey a colony will produce are: availability of bee forage area, weather (rain washes away nectar), queen's condition (healthy/young), colony's health (nutrition and disease-free), colony's population, and beekeeper's experience (action or reaction).

Large colonies disproportionally produce more honey than smaller colonies. A colony of 60,000 bees will produce more honey than two colonies of 30,000 each combined. To maximize your honey production, your colony needs to be at the optimal 60,000 when nectar flow starts.

To achieve this, keep your colony healthy all year, control pests, feed when needed, and keep a young queen (lays more eggs and less likely to swarm). In mid-February begin feeding 1:1 syrup and pollen to stimulate brood production. A technique called "pyramiding" can be used to encourage the queen to expand the brood nest up into the second box.

It is important to prevent swarming. A swarm results in the loss of 30-60% of your colony's bees! Keep room for the queen to lay by adding a box, reversing boxes, or reallocating resources (giving frames of capped brood or nectar/honey to another hive and replacing with drawn comb). You need to inspect every 7-10 days to check for swarm cells.

Continue feeding and letting them draw out new comb until nectar flow starts. It's better to super early rather than late. (Don't feed syrup with honey supers on.) Once they are bringing in nectar, a technique called "checkerboarding" can be used to stimulate faster drawing of comb and filling with nectar. As soon as a super is 70% full, add another one. Contin-

ue adding supers until they stop filling them. Extract the honey and return the wet frames to the hives for the bees to clean up. Remove supers if they are not refilling them.

During the July/August dearth, you may need to feed if they do not have much to forage on or adequate stores in the bottom boxes. Depending on the Fall nectar flow, you may need to feed to ensure your colony has 40-60 lbs of honey stored for the winter.

After Chari and James' presentation, Secretary-Treasurer Lynne Jones conducted the drawing for door prizes. A Perfect Pocket Hive Tool donated by Jeff McMullan was won by Bob Hentschel. A Forever Bee Hive Stand donated by John Volek (Brazos Bend Bee Farm) was won by Laura Parnell. Also donated by Dan "Bee Man Dan" Jones was a miniature smoker key chain and a pair of bumblebee socks won by Nancy Hentschel and Peg Turrentine respectively.

Craig reminded everyone of Bee-scussions on Thursday at 7:30 pm and then the meeting was adjourned.

## Treasurer's Report

Our February treasury balance was \$3,636.36. Since our last report we collected \$40.00 in dues and spent \$12.99 for the monthly website cost and \$91.03 for domain name renewal and forwarding. The resulting balance is \$3,572.34 (\$3,522.34 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash for change.

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI**LIFE  
EXTENSION

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