



March, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

It has been a full year since 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 sorely missed social time.)

Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status is at ORANGE or "Moderate or Significant Risk". It was reduced from the red "High Risk" category on February 23 as the number of infections, hospitalizations and deaths have shown declines. And at press time, Gov. Abbott has announced the end of his mask order and plans to allow full reopening of businesses in Texas. COVID-19 vaccinations are becoming more available and hopefully the end of this mess is now in sight. (In the meantime, see the announcement below for details of our online meeting in March.)

Be aware that 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 their dining room table somewhere.

March meeting is online

Our March meeting will again be online:

Tues., March 9, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

login: [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85622635183?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85622635183?pwd=UFR1NFN6MWU1emh1YmJDNG1EK1UrUT09)

pwd=UFR1NFN6MWU1emh1YmJDNG1EK1UrUT09

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: It's that time of the year again. How about an update on swarming, catching swarms, etc.? (I look forward to this every year: reading about it in our newsletter fires me up about going out after swarms.)

An A: I guess you are asking for a "dump" all about swarms. That's good because managing swarming is probably the beekeeper's most

important job. It goes a long way toward "safe, responsible, successful beekeeping". Bees that have moved into the neighbor's birdhouse or their soffit is the sort of thing that result in beekeeping bans, either by local government or homeowners' associations. In fact, no one, even a beekeeper, wants to have to deal with a colony occupying anything other than a stack of hive boxes!

A honey bee colony is much like a single organism and it "multiplies by dividing", swarming to produce a new colony. The old queen departs with about half of the bees in search of a new home. The bees left behind complete the process of raising a new queen. New queen bees mate in flight and it is a perilous trip. If she does not return successfully mated, the old colony will dwindle and die. In fact, this is often the cause of colony failure.

Make sure that your hives have plenty of room and are not over crowded. At this time of the year you may be surprised at how many bees are in your hive. Preventing overcrowding helps convince the bees that their colony needs to get busy and just stay put.

Colonies that are preparing to swarm begin raising new queens while the old queen slows or stops laying eggs and slims down for her

upcoming departure. Even with these preparations, the old queen is not a strong flyer and the swarm usually clusters nearby while scout bees search out a new home.

Always be on the lookout for queen cells. Those on the bottom of frames near the entrance are called "swarm cells" for a reason and there are usually quite a few of them. On the other hand, there are usually only a few "supercedure cells" in the middle of a frame when the colony is replacing a dead, old, or failing queen.

It is a bad idea to destroy swarm cells to stop swarming. You can't always tell if the hive has already swarmed or they may swarm anyway. Without a new queen, the hive is doomed. The best way to deal with swarm cells is to split the hive. If you are unable to find the old queen, just make sure that both splits have queen cells. After a few weeks you should see new brood in both splits. If you don't, give them a little more time before combining the splits back into a single hive. If you really don't want or need another colony, there are always other members that will take them.

A few drops of lemongrass oil in a swarm trap really helps lure bees inside. It is usually easy to find among the essential oils on the spices aisle at the grocery store. Keep a

close eye on your traps and move the bees into a hive right away. If the swarm gets well established in your swarm trap, it becomes a chore to get them in a hive. An unoccupied hive with old comb will often attract a new colony, making a swarm capture really easy.

There is an adage that you “move a bee hive less than three feet or more than three miles”. This is all about the foragers returning to the old site and becoming completely disoriented. If when exiting the hive they recognize that it has been moved, the bees will reorient to its new location before continuing their flight. It is usually pretty easy to find a temporary site at another member’s beeyard. Close up the hive after dark when everyone is inside. If there are stragglers outside, a few puffs of smoke is all that it takes to get them in. Move the hive to its temporary site and after a week or so away from home you can move them back to where you want them.

Our club owns a number of swarm traps that are lent out to homeowners with bee problems from the Extension office in Rosenberg. When bees move in, a member comes after them. Sign up if you want to be on the list to retrieve a swarm trap or capture a swarm.

Swarms will cluster almost anywhere. They don’t hang around very long, so they should be captured ASAP. Old comb and a few drops of lemongrass oil make your box a welcome home for a captured swarm.

Other than those that have occupied an empty hive, the easiest swarms to catch are those on a low limb that can be carefully cut off and then shaken into a nuc or hive body with at least a frame or two of drawn comb. This is HUGE: a spray of insect repellent (like Off!) prevents the bees from returning to where they were clustered. A small spray (avoiding any bees) speeds thing up a lot. You can leave the swarm until nightfall if you want, but stragglers just return to where they came from.

February Meeting Notes

President Craig Rench opened the FBBA ZOOM meeting at 7:30 pm and welcomed the 33 members and visitors who had logged in.

There were no announcements, so Vice President Danessa Yaschuk introduced our guest speaker, her husband, partner-in-crime, and fellow FBBA member, Brent Yaschuk.

SweetNes Honey Beetique is now a preferred partner of Premier Bee Products. Brent gave a presentation on Premier’s plastic foundation and why it is superior to other plastic foundation available. Premier developed their foundation based on the cell size and mimics what the bees build naturally. By making Premier’s cell walls as close to that of natural comb, they have up to 10% more cells per sheet than what’s found on other foundation. Additionally, their cells are deeper which results in more honey production per frame. Premier only uses cappings wax to coat their foundation. (Cappings wax is the top layer of wax that’s removed so honey can be spun out in an extractor.) Premier waxed foundation is drawn out by the bees as much as 36% faster than other foundation, it’s easier to install because it is more flexible, it works with all uncapping and extraction methods, and it costs less. You can learn more about Premier foundation at their website: <https://www.premierbeeproducts.com/>. If you are interested in buying Premier foundation, go to Danessa and Brent’s website: <https://shop.sweetneshoney.com/collections/premier-bee-products>.

This year Brent and Danessa sent hives to California for almond pollination for the first time. Brent shared his experience in preparing 40 hives for transport and answered questions about the process. Prior to departure, the Texas Apiary Inspection Service must inspect the hives and give them a clean bill of health. The hives are double-deeps and each needs to have 6-8 frames full of bees in either the top or bottom box. It took them about four days where, during the day they would ‘grade’ the hives and in the evening Brent would take the chosen hives and move to cleaned pallets that are raised off the ground to keep

bugs from them. The pallets don’t touch the ground until they are placed in the almond orchard because insects can be cause for refusing to let them into California. Their 40 hives were piggy-backed with another commercial beekeeper’s hives. Each semi-truck carries 408 hives. Though beekeepers and orchard owners could deal directly, most use brokers that arrange the contracts. California instituted a 6% sales tax on the pollination fees this year. Additionally, a permit is required.

After the presentation, Secretary-Treasurer Lynne Jones conducted the drawing for door prizes. A Perfect Pocket Hive Tool™ donated by its inventor, Jeff McMullan was won by Kaleena Fisher. A yellow hive tool, donated by “Bee Man Dan” Jones was won by Ben Keel. Danessa donated one of her amazing beeswax candles which was won by Norm Harris. Lastly, Jeff McMullan won a You’re the Bee’s Knees plaque also donated by Dan.

After a show of hands, Craig announced that Bee-scussions would be the following week on Wed. Feb. 18th. The meeting was then adjourned.

Treasurer’s Report

Our February treasury balance was \$3,572.34. Since our last report we spent \$12.99 for the monthly email cost. The resulting balance is \$3,559.35 (\$3,509.35 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash).

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION



Boone Holladay

County Extension Agent– Horticulture
Fort Bend County
jb.holladay@ag.tamu.edu
281 342-3034 ext. 7034
1402 Band Road, Suite 100
Rosenberg, TX 77471

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