



Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

Our June 8 meeting will again be both in-person and online. In-person will be at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469 (where we met last month, not far from the Community Center where we used to meet). ZOOM contact information is the same as before (an email with clickable links will go out soon). We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of socially distanced social time.

Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status is still at YELLOW or "Low/Moderate Community Risk" as the number of vaccinations continues to grow and infections, hospitalizations and deaths show weekly declines. There have been almost 213,000 vaccinations at Fort Bend County sites and the number is growing every day! The County also reports that we have had 59,032 cases with 58,142 recoveries. Sadly there have been 652 COVID-19 deaths in Fort Bend. "Low/Moderate Risk" allows us to resume careful contact with others as we look forward to being able to resume normal contacts. (Perhaps GREEN is in sight!)

The scariest part of this disease is its easy transmission and huge uncertainty of outcome. You may have few symptoms. Or you can end up in the ICU or even worse. And a few days in ICU can wipe out your bank account even if you have good health insurance. We hope that everyone has decided that getting vaccinated is a good idea.

June meeting

The June 8 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will again be both online and "in-person" beginning at 7:00 pm. The ZOOM setup instructions remain the same. We plan to be ZOOMing from our in-person meeting at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469. The LAR gate will be open until 8 pm. If you arrive after the gate has closed, the keypad code is 2337 (bees). This code will only work during our meeting. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of social time.

While there are no longer any special COVID-19 precautions, reasonable caution is probably still a good idea. Please "mask-up" for the in-person meeting and practice social distancing as well. If you don't feel well or have a medical condition that concerns you, we ask that you join the ZOOM meeting rather than attending in person.

If you haven't ante'd up yet, be sure to bring a \$5.00 bill to pay your dues for 2021.

We are grateful to the Fort Bend County AgriLife Extension office and the LAR staff for arranging the Long Acres Ranch meeting.

May Meeting Notes

After 30 minutes of social time, President Craig Rench opened the FBBA in-person and ZOOM meeting at 7:30 pm by leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance. He then welcomed the members and visitors. 24 attended in person and an additional 9 attended via Zoom (33 total).

October Smith, the manager at Long Acres Ranch, was introduced and she shared with us a little on the background of The Ranch and what its mission is in the Fort Bend community.

Vice-President Danessa Yaschuk made several announcements regarding upcoming events:

May 29: Buzz Fest at Bee Weaver in Navasota 11:00 am - 3:00 pm, \$5 per person, 3 and under are free. Attendance will be limited to 1500 and tickets are required. Purchase tickets online at beeweaver.com

June 19: Texas Beekeepers Association Virtual Summer Clinic. Dr. Tom Seely will be the special guest speaker. Tickets will be available at texasbeekeepers.org

TBA has also announced that this year's Fall Convention will be in-person and held at Moody Gardens in Galveston. Mark your calendar

for Friday November 5th through Sunday November 7th.

June 5: Honey Bee Jubilee in New Ulm. 8:30 am - 3:00 pm. Admission is free. If you want to be an exhibitor or vendor, go to: www.NewUlmTexas.com

Danessa then went over *In the Bee-yard* for May and June.

Now: Continue to check for signs of swarming. Add another box when bees are working on 6-8 frames. Check honey supers weekly. Do not wait until one is full to add another. Or, swap out capped frames for empty ones. If bees are making honey, leave the brood box alone. No medications while honey supers are on unless the product specifically says it is okay. Check swarm traps. Plan ahead for the supplies and containers you will need for extracting and bottling honey.

Get Ready: (Normally) The main nectar flow will end in June or the first part of July. (But who knows this year.) The honey harvest can begin in June as soon as you have frames of honey that are at least 3/4 capped. Plan to harvest honey when the weather is dry and warm. New colonies can still be started in the month of June, but they will need to be fed more than those started in

April because the major nectar flow is normally over.

For our Ask a Bunch of Beeks: a Question and Answer Session, we had three Beeks on the panel. Craig Rench, Steve Brackmann and Jeff McMullan answered all questions with the ease that comes from years of successful beekeeping.

After the Question and Answer Session, Craig and Lynne conducted the door prize drawings. "Bee Man Dan" Jones donated a Bee brush, 2 queen clips, and a Bee-theme bracelet. Lynne Jones donated Swarm Lures; and "SweetNes" Nes Yaschuk donated a 12 Volt Jump Starter. If you previously won a door prize at a Zoom meeting and have not received it, you can pick it up at the in-person meeting.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: The smoker defines a beekeeper. There is certainly more to it than I probably realize.

A: You have discovered that smokers are indeed ingenious!

Honey bees are woodland creatures. The scent of smoke in the air may mean the forest is on fire so the bees prepare to leave their home by engorging on honey (it may be a while before they can eat again). They are calmed by a full belly and smoke-filled air covers the scent of alarm pheromones. Beekeepers can then go about their business with little objection from the bees. (There are cave paintings of primitive humans using smoke while robbing honey.)

Our familiar cone-topped smoker came along with the "golden age of beekeeping" that followed Langstroth's invention of removable frame hives. Its function is to burn fuel with little oxygen until a puff from the bellows sends a smoke cloud into the air. Large volumes of smoke aren't necessary. The bees get the message from only a few light puffs at the hive entrance and below the cover. Try not to get

in a hurry, give the smoke a minute or two to work.

A smoker functions somewhat like a chimney. Air (and smoke) heated by the fire rises to exit the funnel shaped top. A small amount of fresh air is drawn into the small hole in the bottom of the can to keep the fire going. A grate keeps the fuel from settling to shut off the air hole (some designs include a perforated internal can that serves the same purpose). The size of the hole is important since we only want just enough air to keep it lit.

A puff from the bellows blows extra air into the hole in the smoker can and out comes a cloud of smoke to calm the bees.

If a smoker falls on its side, the drafting action stops and the fire goes out. That can be a good thing if you are finished working bees and you want to save any remaining fuel for next time. A stopper (maybe a wine cork or a stick or a traditional corn cob) can also be used to put out the fire.

Traditionally, smokers were made of copper which really didn't work all that well since it doesn't like being repeatedly heated and cooled. It gets soft and is then prone to damage. Copper was replaced by tinned steel, but the fire inside caused the rust-preventing tin to fail and the steel to corrode. Every beekeeper's treasure collection should include a copper heirloom and an ugly rusted tin smoker.

Most smokers today are made from stainless steel sheet that stands up well in this service. The smoker gets really hot and a heat guard is an important design feature. In fact, it should be a rule that every smoker should have heat guard(s). Even with a shield, be especially careful if you use dishwashing gloves. They are easy to clean and prevent stings well, but will melt a hole if they contact the hot smoker can.

The bellows has a spring inside that pushes it back open after each puff. Some smokers have leather bellows

but "naugahyde" works well. In fact, sometimes bad bees have been known to attack leather bellows and cover it with stings! Some bellows are made entirely of plastic and they seem to work just fine. It is a good idea to see if replacement bellows are available when deciding which smoker to buy.

Almost anything can work as smoker fuel. Cotton lint from the roadside near Needville is favored by some. Leaves, dry grass or pine needles are good. Wood shavings or hamster bedding, burlap or old rags, whatever.

Lighting a smoker can be a chore. A propane torch makes it easy. Start with an inch or so of fuel then top it off once it starts to burn. Hold the smoker away from you when puffing the bellows so a wayward spark doesn't burn a hole in your veil. One great trick (attributed to Ed Veiseh) is to aim the torch at the outside of the can with the lid closed and puff when you see smoke. Voila!

Treasurer's Report

Our May treasury balance was \$3,480.38. Since then we collected \$105.00. Our only expense was \$12.99 for the monthly email cost. The resulting balance is \$3,572.39 (\$3,522.39 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash to make change).

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