



Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

Our November 9 meeting will be our last meeting for 2021 (we don't meet in December). We will be sharing food and fellowship. Members are asked to bring finger foods or sweets (with serving utensils if needed). Bottled water, plates and napkins will be provided.

Our 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've been meeting for the last few months) We plan for our meetings to return to the Bud O'Sheiles Community Center on Band Rd. in Rosenberg in January. ZOOM contact information is the same as before (an email with clickable links will go out soon). Members that have not been fully vaccinated are strongly advised to attend our meetings online. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of socially distanced social time.

The potential for exposure to the virus remains high, but on October 14 the Fort Bend County COVID-19 risk was scaled back to MODERATE/SIGNIFICANT COMMUNITY RISK. The number of cases reported each day has declined significantly. Our health care system has adequate capacity, but it could be exceeded if multiple outbreaks occur. We should avoid contact with unvaccinated people and those with high risk for severe disease (older folks and those with compromised immune systems). In any case, masking and social distancing remains a good plan and every one should get vaccinated, including a booster shot after six months.

November meeting

The November 9 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will again be online and "in person". We plan to be ZOOMing from our in-person meeting at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469. A clickable ZOOM link will go out by email. The LAR gate will be open until 8 pm. If you arrive after the gate has closed, the keypad code is 2337 ("bees" on your cell phone keypad). This code will only work during our meeting. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of signup and social time.

If you haven't been vaccinated, don't feel well or have a medical condition that concerns you, please join the ZOOM meeting rather than attending in person.

October Meeting Notes

Due to some technology issues, the meeting started a little late, but eventually President Craig Rench opened the meeting and greeted everyone around 7:35.

Tracy Grimme announced that Hepplewhite Farm is now taking orders for 2022 Bees with a March/April pickup in Brookshire. The cost of a 5-frame nuc is \$245.00 with a

\$100.00 deposit required on each one ordered.

Danessa introduced our guest speakers, James and Chari Elam, exclusive speakers for Texas Bee Supply, who joined us via Zoom. They discussed what everyone should be doing with their hives as we move into the fall months and what a hive that is ready to go into winter should look like at this point. In our area, there will continue to be sources of nectar and pollen until the first frost, but going into winter each colony should have at least 30 pounds of honey (5 full deep frame or 7.5 medium frames). Start feeding 2:1 if any of your hives are 'light'. If one hive has an abundance of capped honey, you can give some of the frames to a colony that is lacking. If bees are bringing in pollen, but it's all the same color, give them a dry pollen substitute fed outside the hive. If the bees need it, they will take it and store it. Pollen patties in the hive can give bees in the hive nutrition to boost brood and increase the number of bees that are going to winter over and be the bees that start foraging before new brood emerges in the spring. A colony with less than four frames of bees probably won't be strong enough to survive winter. It

is better to combine them with another colony now. (Don't just pinch the queen. There's probably a beekeeper nearby with a queenless colony who will be very appreciative of a mated queen.) Varroa mite treatments should have been finished before October, but you can still treat into November. Drones are being kicked out of the hives. After mid-November, it is very unlikely any queens will be mated.

The Elam's emphasized that a healthy colony of 8-16 frames of bees (that has been successfully treated for mites) should easily over-winter. But for healthy bees at this time of year, it means fat bees and the key to fat bees is pollen. Syrup provides carbohydrates, or energy, but pollen provides protein. The worker bees that emerge in the fall are called Winter bees or diutinus bees (latin for long lasting) and have been fed a different diet than workers receive the rest of the year. Besides living six months plus (instead of only about six weeks) their primary purpose is to generate heat to keep the colony warm, not to forage. Chari explained that vitellogenin is an important molecule in storing the protein. Bees can fend for themselves, but as beekeepers, our job is to make sure they have

the resources available to them, (especially when things like an arctic freeze or day after day of rain during nectar flow cause a disruption of resources) to give them the best opportunity to be healthy bees.

The honey bee winter cluster is unique, other types of bees do not cluster, they hibernate over the winter. The temperature in the center of the cluster can be 90-100 degrees F, while the outside of the cluster might be in the 50s. The cluster is a rotating mass with the bees taking turns going from the outside to the inside. In our relatively mild winters, it is often warm enough for the bees to break cluster. But when it is very cold, and stays cold for an extended period, as it did last February, the bees won't break cluster. If there isn't honey available right where they are clustered they can starve. So not only is it important for the colony to have enough honey, but as the winter progresses, moving the frames with the remaining honey more towards the center may be needed.

Make sure the hive's boxes are lined up with the seams straight and the cover on right and secured. Bees use propolis to reduce openings, and seal up cracks, crevices, and the seams between boxes. In cold weather, propolis is very brittle. When you open the hive, you break the cover's propolis seal. If you break boxes apart, you break the seal between the boxes. The bees will not be able to re-seal the propolis when it's cold. (Use blue painter's tape over box seams.)

After taking questions, the Elams signed off from the zoom meeting. Danessa and Lynne then conducted the door prize drawings. Thanks to the donors and congratulations to all the winners.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: I'm a first year beekeeper and I'm concerned about my hive making it through the winter. What do I need to be worrying about?

A: Worrying is not a very productive activity so let's take a shot at what else you need to know so you can have a plan (instead of worries). Our October meeting program with James and Shari Elam should have gone a long way toward answering your question.

The western (or European) honey bee is not native to the New World. They originated in western Europe and were brought to the Western Hemisphere by the first European settlers. Honey was an important food source for the new arrivals, but probably more important to survival was beeswax used to make candles, waterproofing fabrics, etc. Having to use oil lamps as an alternative to candles was a poor use of the calories in edible oils.

The mountain ranges of Europe were barriers for the different subspecies of honey bee. Our bees are usually of Italian origin (south of the Alps) and are adapted to harsher winters than we usually see. Southeast Texas seldom has extremely cold weather lasting more than a day or two and, fortunately, winter losses are usually uncommon. But it is important that the hive has an adequate and accessible store of honey.

Bees don't hibernate. They stay active in their cluster during cold weather. Gathering nectar and storing honey is the hive's way of preparing for winter. We can harvest excess honey because honey bees just don't know when to quit. If they have mild temperatures and comb and forage is available, the bees will continue gathering nectar even if they have far more stores than will be needed for winter.

Honey bee eggs and brood are very sensitive to cool temperature and will die if the brood nest is not kept between about 91°F and 97°F. There is not much brood rearing over winter, but it is important that the colony replace workers that have reached their life span (overwintering "diutinus bees" live longer than hard worked summer foragers). Fewer mouths to feed when resources become scarce is better for

the colony. That is why drones are ejected from the hive as winter approaches since their services aren't likely to be needed.

Albert Smaistrila 1936 - 2021

Albert Smaistrila, past President of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association, passed away on Saturday, October 30. He was a lifelong resident of East Bernard, TX and a long time beekeeper. His wife Margaret, also a club member, had passed away a year ago. They had been married over 60 years and were the proud parents of daughters Rita and Renee and sons Ray and Ron.

Treasurer's Report

Our October treasury balance was \$3,836.61. Since our last report we collected \$85.00 in dues (of which \$25 is for 2022), one \$25 mentoring registration, and received a \$10.00 donation from a member. The expenses totaled \$354.65 including the \$12.99 monthly email cost, \$159.80 annual Zoom subscription, \$31.86 for a TBA annual meeting table centerpiece and memorial contributions to M. D. Anderson (\$100.00 in memory of Wes Carew) and the Texas Honey Bee Education Association (\$50.00).

The resulting balance is \$3,601.96 (\$3,551.96 in our checking account, plus \$50.00 in cash).

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
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