



# Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the  
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

*fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping*



July, 2017

The July 11, 2017 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers will be held at 7:00 pm in Fort Bend County's "Bud" O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, Texas. Our meeting program topic will be "staying cool at harvest time". Visitors (and new members) are always welcome (membership dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year). The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments (if a volunteer will make it and clean up afterwards). Members can also volunteer to bring snacks. The meeting will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time. If you would like to be part of the FBBA Swarm Call List, Honey Product For Sale List, Community Outreach Committee and the Hospitality Committee, please complete this survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/5FMYLWT>.

## Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

**Q:** Ok, I get the message. Just ignoring varroa mites in my hives is a bad idea. I've been reading up on treatment options and want to know more about oxalic acid for varroa mites.

**An A:** Let's work our way to an answer for you: the most powerful measure of successful beekeeping is colony survival. At every turn we are told to keep "strong, healthy hives". In our area, two things play an important role here. This time of the year our swarm management effort is put to the test. If your bees swarm, there is a significant chance that the hive's new queen won't return successfully from her mating flight. If a new queen has to make multiple mating flights for some reason, the odds favor her being eaten somewhere along the way by a purple martin, or a dragonfly, or a spider, or a green lizard, etc. etc.

Summer hive inspection for queenlessness (if that is a word) is important. If it appears that there is no queen, you can buy a new queen or give them a frame with eggs or very tiny brood so that they can raise their own new queen. You may be unsure, but the bees know if they need to raise a new queen!

What does all that have to do with varroa mites and oxalic acid? Actually, a lot. Varroa mites reproduce in capped brood. They are hidden

from mite treatments in the capped cells, so most mite treatment options are intended to first kill the mites feeding on adult bees (called their phoretic stage). An extended treatment period or second treatment is aimed at killing the new mites that emerge with new adult bees. This is important because for each for each phoretic mite there may be four or more mites in their "reproductive stage" (protected with capped brood).

Like a newly captured swarm, a queenless (and broodless) hive is a perfect target for really successful mite treatment. Most treatments require that you remove the honey supers. If there are still a lot of bees, you may need to give them an empty super (with foundation or drawn comb) to use. If you have room for them, the honey supers can be safely stored in the freezer and returned to the hive stack after a day or so to warm back up. The problem is that our weather may be too hot for mite treatments, especially products that vaporize in the hive. The bees work hard to manage the temperature inside the hive and hot days and high humidity obviously make that job more difficult. And conditions that make mite treatment vaporize too quickly aren't good. If your hive is queenless (perhaps due to swarming), it is decision time for dealing with mites. Should I do it now or wait for cooler weather? It all depends on your treatment selection.

If you got this far, you're definitely still "reading up". Oxalic acid is a relatively strong organic acid that is found in many plants and vegetables. It is in honey as well. Its principle consumer use is as "wood bleach" found in paint stores.

The EPA approved oxalic acid for varroa treatment under an expedited application made by the USDA Agricultural Research Service. OA had been used in Europe and Canada for many years. It was approved for in-hive varroa treatment in Canada in 2010 and the EPA relied in part on the prior Canadian approval for their expedited ok. Oxalic acid is corrosive to the eyes and skin, so it carries the EPA "Danger" label. Long sleeved pants and shirt, gloves, a respirator and goggles are required for its use. It can be acutely toxic to bees if used improperly. However, if used properly at correct treatment rates it has minimal adverse effect on adult bees.

Oxalic acid is approved in a sugar solution as a spray for package bees or for a measured trickle between frames in the hive. It can also be used as a vapor. It is sublimated (heated up to go from solid crystals to a vapor) by a vaporizer available at bee supply stores or on the internet. It is not likely that miticide products using oxalic acid will be available to beekeepers since it is cheap and relatively available and product registration is costly. Scientificbeekeeping.com is a great resource for you....keep reading!!

## June Meeting Notes

We had 81 members and guests that signed in at our June 13 meeting. It tied the record set at last month's meeting, but a rough head count came up with 95! Everyone is reminded that the sign in sheets on the back table at our meeting are an important club record that supports our use of County facilities.

After 30 minutes of social time, President Nancy Hentschel called the meeting to order and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Our program for May was "Dealing with Bad Bees" by Jeff McMullan. Jeff opened his program by proclaiming that "Life is too short to put up with mean bees!" while showing a photo of long time member and past President, 97-year-old Elton Reynolds. Jeff asserted that Elton stands by his declaration!

It is very important to always be safe around bees. Their behavior can be far different from one day to the next. Be especially mindful of neighbors, pets and the public. Wear protective gear and light your smoker. Always have a backup plan for aggressive behavior.

Aggressive behavior is an alarm response programmed into honey bees as an organized colony defense. It is triggered by an alarm scent (pheromone) emitted by guard bees or any alerted or stinging worker. Be very careful not to crush any bees as you work your hives. If you accidentally crush a bee or get stung, quickly hide the alarm scent with smoke.

Solitary foragers or swarms seldom react defensively while the level of hive defense can depend on environmental factors and/or genetics. Gentle behavior is an important factor in beekeeping and honey bee breeding. Defensive behavior increases with colony population. During dearth (no nectar flow), there are more bees "at home" and they have greater sensitivity to disturbance since other bees may try to rob their honey stores. Quick

movements, dark colors, strong scents, vibrations or noise can all trigger a defensive response. Defensive behavior is greater at dusk and after dark. (Remember that bees can't see red colors. A red flashlight should be used when moving bees after dark.)

Beekeepers have long observed that unsettled weather can stimulate defensive behavior. Honey bee scientists have studied sting behavior too and found that weather conditions of high temperature, low wind, full sun and high barometric pressure increase stinging behavior. Select your hive location carefully. Scientists have found that European Honey Bees have a "red alert zone" within 2 meters of their hive where a defensive response to intruders should be expected. There is a "caution zone" out to 10 meters where European bees are usually ok unless they've been previously disturbed. Beyond 30 meters, no defensive behavior is expected, but BEWARE! Africanized hives may attack 10x as far away by 10x as many bees!

A hive can get mean for lots of reasons like the disturbances or environmental factors above. Queenless hives are loud and often more aggressive. A failing queen or a new queen with bad genetics can also change the hive's behavior. Africanized swarms can invade and take over a previously sweet hive.

It is very important that beekeepers address bad bee problems before there are bad outcomes. Identify the cause and remedy the situation if possible. Requeening with better, gentler stock may be a good idea even if the colony seems to calm back down. In the worst case, bad bees should be destroyed.

Requeening bad bees can be difficult. For back yard beekeepers it is usually best to temporarily relocate the hive after dark to a rural setting where risk of causing problems is lower. Expect it to take several attempts to find a bad queen since they often aggressively attack the front of your veil because of the

scents given off in your breath. They quickly make it almost impossible to see to find the queen. Enlist other beekeepers to help. Set boxes aside using plastic signs to keep those bees inside as you search other boxes. Start your search with the most likely frame in the most likely box. You can split the hive into several boxes. The split with the queen should not be as loud and agitated as the others.

When she's been found, squish the old queen and drop her down in the hive. Stack it all back up and introduce the new queen on the next day. The good news is that, once requeened, bad hives often calm down within a few days.

Thanks to the June door prize donors and congratulations to the lucky winners.

## Treasurer's Report

Our June treasury balance was \$3,153.82. Since then we received \$90.00 in donations and collected \$35.00 in dues (7 memberships at \$5.00 each). We spent \$155.88 for a new web site platform, \$11.90 for a new roll of door prize tickets and \$14.06 for spare batteries for our PA system. The resulting balance is \$3,096.98 consisting of \$3,352.86 in our Wells Fargo checking account less \$305.88 in outstanding checks plus \$50.00 in cash to make change.

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