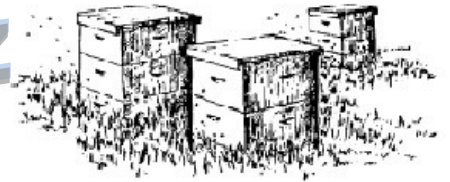




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



March, 2014

The Fort Bend Beekeepers Association meets on the second Tuesday of the month (except December) at 7:00 pm in Fort Bend County's "Bud" O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, Texas. Visitors (and new members) are always welcome (membership dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year). Our next meeting will be Tuesday, March 11. The meeting is called to order at 7:30 pm after social time. The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks. Thanks to Amber Philipp (something salty) and Verosa Philipp (something sweet) for volunteering to bring treats for our March meeting. We still need a few volunteers for a few vacant spots on our refreshments sign-up sheet.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: When is swarm season?
And what's a swarm anyway?

An A: A new member quietly asked these questions after our February meeting, wondering what it means to have their name on the "swarm call list". Certainly there were others present wondering the same thing. Comments and questions are an important part of our meeting, so don't be shy.

The term "swarm" is used different ways, including by some who refer to a colony of bees as a swarm even if they are quietly living in a managed hive. The more common use of the term is to describe bees that are in search of a new home.

There are two kinds of swarms: reproductive swarms and absconding swarms. Reproductive swarms appear most often during the spring while absconding swarms can be at almost any time. Absconding swarms have been driven from their home by overcrowding, pests or disease or some other condition that has made their home uninhabitable for them. Absconding swarms can be due to such things as overheating on hot summer afternoons or abandoning comb that has been "slimed" by small hive beetle larvae. Because it contains an entire honey bee colony, an absconding swarm is often larger than a typical reproductive swarm.

Reproductive swarms are an important part of the honey bee colony's life cycle. The survival of a honey bee colony is dependent upon the queen laying eggs and the rearing of brood. This provides the individual bees that sustain the colony. A reproductive swarm is the way new colonies are created by honey bees. In the spring when the colony is strong and nectar and pollen are plentiful, the honey bees may begin preparations for a reproductive swarm. The old queen slows down her egg laying and trims down for her upcoming flight. The colony begins feeding a number of larvae that will develop into queens. The new queen cells are usually located at the bottom of the brood comb and are referred to as "swarm cells" because one of them will be replacing the old queen who will be leaving with the reproductive swarm.

Producing a new colony is a risky process for the honey bee colony. The old queen leaves with about half the workers in search of a new home. The existing colony's population will be much smaller and they must successfully defend their home. They also must replace the departed queen with one that is accepted by the colony after she emerges from her queen cell. She must kill her rivals and successfully return to the colony from a dangerous mating flight. Only then can she begin laying eggs and emitting the scents

(pheromones) that regulate the colony unity.

The swarm is at grave risk too. Since a queen is not a strong flyer, the reproductive swarm usually settles in a cluster that is not too distant from the hive. They must find a suitable place to live and begin foraging for food and raising new bees in order to survive. Because their queen is old, they may even be faced with raising a new one within a few weeks. The new queen larvae are reared in "supercedure queen cells" that are few in number, usually just two or three but maybe more. While "swarm cells" are near the bottom of the frame, "supercedure cells" are usually in the middle of the brood nest area of comb.

As the swarm cluster waits, scout bees search for a new home. A basic beekeeping skill is to capture the cluster of bees and introduce them into a managed hive. This task seems scary, but it is really pretty easy. If the cluster is shaken so that it falls into the beekeepers box, all the bees will soon be inside. You can put the hive on the ground, snip off the branch they're on then shake the swarm at the entrance. The bees usually rush inside. Old comb and a few drops of lemongrass oil help entice the bees inside. In fact, a box with old comb or a trap with a few drops of lemongrass oil will often entice a swarm to move in, maybe a good idea for unexpected swarms from your hives so bees don't move where they wouldn't be welcome.

Super Painting Contest

Don't forget to bring your entry in our Super Painting Contest at the March meeting. Decorated shallow or medium supers (8 or 10 frame and deeps are ok too) can be entered in one of three categories: KIDS (through 12 years), TEENS (age 13 to 19), and ADULTS (20 and older). Winners will be determined by member votes and announced at the meeting as part of our program for the night. In addition to great awards and prizes, winners get bragging rights for a whole year.

February Meeting Notes

There were 43 members and guests that signed in at our February meeting. Special guests included Tom Keith (Roy Nash's brother-in-law) and Greg Pendley's little brother, Rev. Jim Pendley from Jacksonville, Tx.

We had 19 more new and renewing members pay their dues for 2014, making our roster stand at 70 paid members. Secretary-Treasurer Jeff McMullan showed the Association's roster from February, 2010, just four years ago. There were only 18 names on it! Most were at the night's meeting.

Our program was "*Feeding Bees...soup to nuts*" by Jeff McMullan. It addressed the "When", "What" and "How" we feed bees.

"When" do we feed bees? sometimes never. But, when establishing a new colony or when stores are low, feeding can make the difference in whether the bees survive. It is important to understand that feeding bees may stimulate behavior in response to the artificial flow of nectar. The unexpected food source may prompt vigorous brood rearing that will quickly exhaust stores if the feeding stops, It is good advice to continue feeding until ample nectar is available.

Bees can be fed carbohydrates (honey, sugar syrup, dry sugar or sugar candy), protein (pollen substitutes) and supplements or meds

(feeding stimulant, amino acids, antibiotics, etc.). Carbs can be in the form of liquid feed (sugar syrup, corn syrup or honey) or dry sugar or sugar candy. Honey can be in the form of a frame from a more successful hive. Sugar syrup for spring feeding should mimic the water content of nectar (50% water by weight). Fall or winter feeding should be 2:1 sugar (two parts sugar to one part water). Feeding dry sugar or sugar candy is less likely to stimulate egg laying.

There are many choices in liquid feeding individual hives including entrance feeders, hive top feeders and internal feeders. The simplest feeder is a zip lock bag of syrup on top of the frames in an empty super. Razor cuts or pin holes allow workers access to the feed. Each feeding option has it's pluses and minuses.

Open feeding bees needs to be approached with caution to avoid drowning the inevitable cloud in search of free food. Chicken waterers make good bee feeders if proper cautions are taken. Drowning can be a problem when feeding individual hives as well.

While adult bees subsist mostly on carbohydrates, protein is needed to raise young. Bees can be fed dry pollen substitute or patties made of pollen substitute and syrup. Most "store bought" patties include supplements like feeding stimulants, vitamins and amino acids. Pollen patties are usually fed inside the hive. The quantity should be kept small since small hive beetles enjoy the patties as well. Bees don't seem to recognize dry pollen substitute fed inside the hive, so it works best to open feed it in a tray sheltered from the wind and rain.

Bee supply catalogues feature many feeding supplements as well as antibiotics for bacterial diseases delivered to the "patients" in syrup.

Door prize winners this month:

A rosemary plant (donated by Jerry Emerson) - won by guest Gordon Heflin

Honey bee rubber stamps (donor unknown) - won by Gerard Howard and Harrison Rogers

A Czech cookbook (Albert Smaistrla) - won by Roy Nash

A pint of Herman Hoot's Brazos Bend Honey - won by guest Carolyn Boyd

Honey bee dish towels (donor unknown) - won by Lisa Howard and Jack Richardson

Treasurer's Report

Our February 2014 balance was \$3,661.62. Since that time we collected \$90.00 in dues (18 members at \$5.00 each) and got a \$1.00 donation. We spent \$50.00 on the Association's share of printing costs for flyers for the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. The resulting treasury balance is \$3,702.62 consisting of \$40.00 in cash and \$3,662.62 in our Wells Fargo checking account.

A Few Changes

We have made a few changes to improve our meetings: We will be called to order at 7:30 pm so that we have thirty minutes to enjoy our snacks and get our visiting done. We will plan a 30 minute program that is appropriate for our beekeeping calendar while leaving plenty of time for questions, comments and updates.

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EXTENSION

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Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socio-economic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin. The Texas A&M System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating. If you have special needs in order to participate in this program, please contact Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service of Fort Bend County at (281) 342-3034.