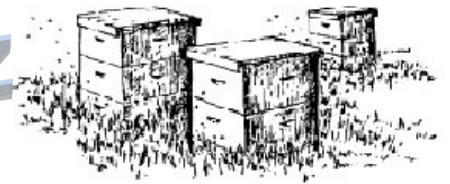




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



June, 2015

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, June 9. The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks. Thanks to Diane McConnon for volunteering to get the coffee and lemonade set up for us. Thanks too to Wendy Chopin for volunteering to bring salty treats and Dona Tomplait (something sweet) for our June meeting. We still need volunteers for a couple of vacant spots on our refreshments sign-up sheet. After 30 minutes of social time, the meeting will be called to order with an opening invocation by Steve Mims.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: I think I really screwed up again! I was out of honey and used a fume board to remove a really heavy super from one of my hives. As it turns out, only about half of the honey was capped. I dreaded putting the super back in the stack since the hive had gotten to be pretty mean over the last few months. I decided to just extract it anyway. Now I have a half pail of "honey" to deal with. How bad of a mistake did I make?

An A: Honey is a concentrated solution of sugars. It begins as floral nectar (or other sugary liquids) gathered by foraging workers. Nectar's water content can be as high as 50% and it can quickly ferment. In the process of making honey, bees ventilate the hive to evaporate much of the water. When the water content is about 18% or less, honey will not ferment. At this low moisture level, honey is "hygroscopic" which means it is screaming for moisture. Somehow honey bees have all this figured out, and at this point, cap the honey with beeswax to prevent it from reabsorbing moisture from the air.

Your first advice was to take a sample over to a fellow beekeeper who had a honey refractometer. It determines water content by measuring an optical property, the honey's refractive index. Unfortunately, the

number came in at 19.3% so, as you suspected, the honey may ferment.

We decided not to buy a refractometer for our club's extractor setup since they have to be calibrated from time to time. We figured that bad numbers are probably worse than no numbers and we didn't want folks bottling honey that may ferment. The best advice is to not extract any uncapped honey; return it to the hive along with extracted frames for the bees to finish their work. You can buy a refractometer on the internet but make sure that it is made for use with honey and is temperature-compensated. Don't forget that it must be calibrated from time to time.

The exceptionally wet weather we have been having seems to have made it really difficult for the bees to get the honey moisture content low enough for capping. You aren't alone. Other beekeepers are also seeing supers full of runny uncured honey. You could try storing some of your wet honey in the refrigerator to temporarily restock your supply, but you will be disappointed with its weak taste and runny nature. There is really little choice but to feed it back to the bees, but do it carefully since "free honey" may stimulate robbing. Open feeding is definitely a bad idea. An internal (division board) feeder or hive top feeding is your best choice to discourage robbing.

It is common knowledge that the sugars in honey can crystallize due to the low moisture content, especially honey that has not been filtered to remove

tiny particles of pollen, wax, sugar crystals, etc. Water content in the remaining liquid goes up when honey crystallizes. It can ferment and gases from fermenting honey can escape a mason jar lid or even explode a plastic bear (a real mess in the pantry).

Crystallized honey is safe to eat or it can be easily reliquified by warming it in hot (not boiling) water. Many beekeepers don't know that honey stored in the freezer won't crystallize (but it will crystallize almost overnight in the 'fridge). Put the honey that you'll eat over a week or two in a cute honey container and leave it on the breakfast table. "Frozen" honey is really really thick. When it is time for a refill, heat the big bottle from the freezer for a few seconds in the microwave until it is just thin enough to refill your cute container. Put your stash right back in the freezer until its time for another refill.

Experience is a difficult teacher. The test comes before the lesson.

Honey Container Order

Eight members participated in our 2015 honey container order. The bulk cartons should arrive in time for our June meeting. These members saved almost \$300 in shipping costs. For squeeze jars with flip lids, their all-in cost is about 46¢ each versus 74¢ if ordered by the dozen from a bee supply store.

May Meeting Notes

We had 48 members and guests sign in at our May meeting. Thanks to all who signed in. The construction on US 59 coming in from the northeast is continuing and most of us figured out a way to avoid the rush hour freeway congestion by coming down Hwy 36 from U. S. 90A.

President Daryl Scott called the meeting to order with an invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Daryl then welcomed visitors, first-timers and new members. First-timer and new member Milton Woods announced that he has planted an acre of watermelons near Bonus, TX and was looking for some pollination help. He plans to have his own hive next season. Next, Jeff McMullan reminded everyone that the club's honey container order will be going in shortly.

Daryl's fun bee facts for May: there are 860,000 acres of almonds in California's Central Valley. California produces 82% of the world almond supply and the entire crop depends almost exclusively on pollination services from migratory beekeepers from across the nation. Another fascinating fact is that medical researchers have found that a toxin in bee venom can destroy the HIV virus while leaving nearby healthy cells unharmed.

The beekeeper's calendar for May includes swarm prevention and keeping up with supers as the bees produce honey.

Jeff McMullan gave a quick update on his VSH queen project. Terrible weather is causing real problems at R. Weaver Apiaries and it looks like it will be a few more weeks before grafting can begin.

Gene deBons rolled in the door with a four-foot section of bee tree (a "bee gum") on a dolly. It had been cut out of a fallen tree and he took it home to figure out how to get the bees into a managed hive. In his museum-quality 1940 edition of A. I. Roots' ABC & XYZ of Bee

Culture he found several pages of instructions on how to do this transfer, complete with photos showing over 100 bee gums that were all in hives by the end of a week. Gene demonstrated his successful transfer: light smoke followed by 30 minutes of rhythmic "drumming" on the log to "demoralize" the colony and get them to cluster like a swarm on a plywood cover laying on top of the "bee gum". Root suggested doing this with the log upside down with a hollowed out space to make room for the cluster. Gene's log had a ragged break at the bottom so he did his drumming right side up still strapped to the dolly. He shook the cluster into a hive to complete the project. After the transfer, Gene took a few measurements and determined that the volume of the cavity was equivalent to between 1/3 and 2/3 of a Langstroth brood box. Lots of "drumming" ideas were stimulated!

Wendy Chopin reported on progress toward our Beekeeper Mentoring Program (see the next article). We once again rearranged our seating by community so folks could meet their neighbors that are keeping bees. Volunteers signed up to mentor or be mentored when the program gets kicked off.

Our meeting ended with the customary drawing for donated door prizes. Thanks to the donors and congratulations to the winners. Fresh garden produce was a real hit.

Treasurer's Report

Our May treasury balance was \$3,565.53. Since then we reimbursed \$76.02 for super decorating contest awards. We collected dues from ten new and renewing members (\$50.00) and received \$51.00 in donations. Our treasury balance of \$4,090.51 also includes \$500.00 in pass-through deposits for honey containers. There is a \$100.00 outstanding check for our club's donation in support of the USA Apimondia Bid Team that is seeking to bring the world's largest beekeeper meeting to the USA in 2019.

Mentoring Program

A principle reason to be a beekeeper association member is to meet and learn from fellow beekeepers. There has been significant interest in our Association's development of a more structured Beekeeper Mentoring Program and the work is progressing well. We expect to roll out most of the details at our June meeting. Program coordinator Wendy Chopin is finalizing a document that describes the goals and structure of the program. Our goal is pretty simple: more knowledgeable, safe, responsible, successful beekeepers. Both parties in mentoring stand to gain on all accounts. The program will be a twelve-month commitment between beekeepers fostered by the Association. Both parties will receive a copy of The Beekeeper's Handbook as a reference and an "American Bee Journal" subscription (available at a 25% discount) will also be required. A journal will be provided to log beeyard activities, meeting program notes, future plans, etc. We also plan to put together "Weekend Workshops" as part of the mentoring program (everyone would be welcome of course). There will be an enrollment fee intended to cover the program's costs. Of course, those interested in a less structured collaboration are encouraged to carry on.

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