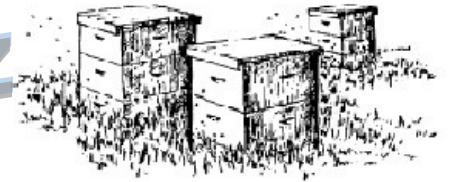




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



April, 2017

The April 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. 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 while members volunteer to bring snacks. Thanks to Stephanie Kinghorn who volunteered to bring salty treats and Glenda McGaughey (something sweet) in April. The meeting will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time (once again, we don't have a volunteer to give our opening invocation). The program for April will be "Maximizing Honey Production" by James and Chari Elam of the Montgomery County Beekeepers Association.

Spring Cleaning

It is time to clean up our address list, so please check your address label. If your name is in *italics*, you have not yet paid your dues for 2017 and this is your last Fort Bend Buzz until you do. If you can't make the April meeting, you can mail your \$5.00 check to:

Fort Bend Beekeepers
c/o Jeff McMullan
74 Hessenford St.
Sugar land, TX 77479

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: I understand that the legislature is changing Texas honey bee laws. Is that something that I should be concerned about?

An A: The simple answer to your question is probably "not for the time being". But the old laws haven't gone away.

As you recall from high school civics, a bill is filed by a State Senator or Representative and must be passed by majority vote in both the Senate and House of Representatives in order to go to the governor to be signed. If the governor decides to sign it, the bill becomes the law of the land.

A bill is usually originated by interested parties that must convince a legislator (an elected Representative or a Senator) to sponsor their

desired legislation. If the content of a proposed bill gains a sponsor, it is sent off to the Texas Legislative Council, an agency of the legislature that crafts the words and ideas into a potential law. That process can get complicated because any new bill must be consistent with the pages and pages of existing law, and, of course, it must achieve its intent in its new "legalese" form. If the sponsoring legislator is satisfied with the bill, it is filed and referred to a committee (of the House or Senate) whose job it is to finalize the bill and, if passed by the committee, send it to the full body (House or Senate) for consideration.

Texas beekeeping law can be found in Section 131 of the Texas Agriculture Code. The Texas Beekeepers Association and Texas beekeeping law both got their start in 1901 in response to the threat of American Foulbrood. AFB is an extremely contagious and deadly brood disease of honey bees. It is caused by a spore-forming bacteria that was first described in 1907. The disease is found worldwide and its geographic origin is unknown. The Texas Apiary Inspection Service was organized in 1920 (prior to that time there were both state and local "foulbrood inspectors" in Texas).

AFB control efforts established by Texas law were harsh, focusing on quarantines and burning infected hives to control the disease. Those efforts (perhaps with the help of bees adapting resistance to the disease) have made American Foulbrood a rare problem today.

Beekeeping law in Texas saw its last significant amendments in 1983. Thirty four years later, it remains focused on American Foulbrood and TAIS hive inspections that are required for hives leaving Texas to enter other states.

Today's pest and disease threats to honey bees and beekeeping are far greater than just AFB. Nonetheless, every beekeeper should understand Texas honey bee law in Section 131 of the Agriculture Code even though there is little dispute that it is seriously out of date, largely unenforced and largely unenforceable.

During the 2015 legislative session, the Texas Beekeepers Association drafted provisions to amend Section 131. There was quite an outcry from beekeepers across the state, mostly aimed at existing law that TBA was seeking to fix. There was little time to address all of the concerns, no sponsor was found and the proposed bill went nowhere.

Again in 2017 a group of TBA members drafted changes to Texas beekeeping law and this time a sponsor was found. Rep. Tracy King of Uvalde accepted TBA's proposal and referred it to Legislative Council. When Rep. King filed the bill (HB 1293), beekeepers across the state complained loudly and proposed structural and wording changes could not be made in a timely manner with the legislature in session. TBA withdrew its support for the bill and it is not at all

likely that the bill will leave the House Agriculture and Livestock Committee (chaired by Rep. King). "Not for the time being" is therefore the likely answer to your question.

It has been said though, that if you don't have a seat at the table, you can expect to be on the menu. TBA is still committed to a badly needed update of bee laws in Texas, but, again, it will have to wait until a future legislative session. Hopefully any future draft of new bee law for Texas will be laser-focused on thoughtfully considered and agreed upon objectives. A valid criticism of efforts to fix Section 131 in 2015 and again in 2017 was that there were no stated objectives. Instead, HB 1293 seemed designed to apply to "everyone but me". Every beekeeper in Texas should be anxiously awaiting a clear roadmap of what a new Ag Code Section 131 is intended to accomplish and how success could be measured. It should clearly apply to all Texas beekeepers.

March Meeting Notes

61 members and guests signed in at our March 11 meeting. The head count came up with 67 so again we had a few that failed to register. Be sure to sign in at the meetings since it is an important club record. All that is needed is your name unless you need to update your contact information.

After social time, President Nancy Hentschel called the meeting to order. Dave Grimme gave an invocation and lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance. We expect volunteers to help with this role. If no one volunteers to give an invocation, we will just open our meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Nancy next welcomed first-timers to our meeting. We had nine new members that joined that night! The current dues-paid roster is 131 and there are many that haven't coughed up five bucks for 2017 yet.

Before his presentation, Gene deBons urged everyone to subscribe to beekeeping magazines. He cited

interesting articles from the January, 2017 issue of The American Bee Journal. ABJ offers a subscription discount to bee club members. See Jeff McMullan if you want to take advantage of their offer.

The title of Gene's program was "Life After Death". He described for us how he salvages hive components after a colony dies out, whether it was recently or long ago.

For recent deadouts, he puts frames infested with small hive beetle larvae out on a cement driveway in full sun. The maggots don't get very far before the heat kills them. (Nancy Hentschel also recommended feeding them to the chickens.) Gene puts the frames infested by wax moths out in the yard near a fire ant nest; the ants enjoy feeding on the worms (chickens do too).

Gene brought along a weathered 13 year old hive body from a beeyard he started in Simonton when he first joined the Fort Bend Beekeepers 35 years ago. It had recently been flooded by the Brazos, but was ready for fresh paint and bees.

Gene showed us his rig for recovering old frames: a propane burner and a small steel drum. He uses bricks to hold the frames down in very hot (not boiling) water with a bit of bleach and dishwashing soap. The hot water melts off the wax and propolis followed by a quick scrub with a wire brush and a thorough rinse. With fresh foundation, the frames are ready to go.

As is his custom, Gene cited old references from his book collection. Cyanide was recommended for sanitizing after a foulbrood outbreak. A more recent suggestion was to scorch the inside of the box with a torch after burning the infected frames.

Next, Jeff McMullan reviewed swarm prevention measures and swarm captures. It is swarm season and swarming is a natural process: bees swarm to form a new colony (reproductive swarm) or to vacate a nest site that is no longer suitable (absconding). Swarm prevention

includes adding boxes to prevent over crowding, early spring hive manipulation, and making splits.

Over the winter months the honey bee brood nest is moved up into the honey stores as the bees consume their reserves. They leave behind empty comb in the lower box and are not likely to go back down. Moving the box with vacated comb to above the brood nest gives the bees more frames to fill instead of swarming to find more room.

Splitting a hive accomplishes the same thing that bees want to do by swarming. The queenless split will need a queen, so we can introduce a caged queen, use capped queen cells or they can raise their own.

Capturing swarms is not difficult. They can be lured into traps, shook into a box or dumped on the ground to march right inside a nuc.

Again we have run out of room to announce our door prize winners. Thanks to the donors and congratulations to the lucky winners.

Treasurer's Report

Our March treasury balance was \$2,898.82. At our March meeting we collected \$95.00 in dues (19 memberships at \$5.00 each). The resulting balance is \$2,993.82 (\$2,943.82 in our Wells Fargo checking account plus \$50.00 cash to make change).

**TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION**

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