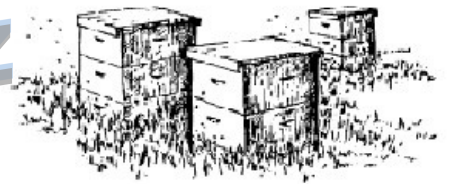




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping



August, 2017

The August 8, 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 an update from Jerzey Trybek on his top bar hive plus a quick look at oxalic acid, recently approved for in hive control of varroa mites. 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 you arrive early, please volunteer to start the coffee.) Members can also volunteer to bring snacks. The meeting will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: This afternoon the whole front of my hive is covered with bees! Are they getting ready to swarm? What should I do?

An A: It's pretty scary looking isn't it? Your bees are "bearding" and in our area it is pretty common this time of the year. They are not likely to swarm since, like all of us, they're probably just trying to cope with the hot, humid weather.

It's called bearding because it looks like the "bee bearding" demonstration that is pretty scary looking too. It is not for everyone since a beekeeper wears a caged queen under their chin and allows bees to gather on their face until it looks like a beard. In your case, the beard is on the front of your hive. You'd probably rather have it there!

This behavior has to do with the temperature inside the hive, colony numbers and hive ventilation. The bees will usually begin gathering at mid-day and often spend the night outside in large numbers. Sometimes the "beard" is there all day. It is just too hot and crowded for them inside. Another factor is that nectar and pollen resources are beginning to dwindle, so the foragers that would be out and about are just hanging out at the hive, but it is just too hot inside.

Honey bees keep the hive at about 92°F for successful brood rearing.

In cold weather they flex their flight muscles to generate heat. When it gets hot, they regulate the temperature by ventilating the hive and bringing in water. As the water droplets evaporate, it soaks up heat. A colony may bring in up to a quart of water every day, so make sure that they have a reliable source nearby. High humidity hampers this cooling a lot: they use "swamp coolers" in Midland, not Houston.

We need to make sure that the bees have enough room and adequate ventilation. You may need to add another super just to give the bees room to gather inside the hive. Screened bottom boards for varroa mites help increase ventilation. Many beekeepers use a screened inner cover as well. Propping up the hive cover helps hot air escape too, but don't open it up to rainfall. If you have a conventional inner cover under a telescoping cover you should check that the bees haven't propolized the hole shut. If they have, open it back up. Some inner covers have a notch in them for air flow that requires the telescoping cover to be positioned forward or back to control air movement. Make sure it is open. If there is a solid bottom board and entrance reducer, removing the reducer allows for more air flow too, but beware of robbing, especially during a dearth.

Shading the hive from the afternoon sun helps. The metal top on some telescoping covers gets incredibly hot and a plastic sign on top (with a

brick to keep it from blowing away) helps a lot. Dark colored paint soaks up heat too, so most hives are painted white.

Beware! Bearding is sometimes a symptom of a coming disaster! Bearding behavior and an unpleasant smell (like rotting fruit) can be symptoms of small hive beetle larvae beginning to feed on honey and brood. It is unpleasant, so the bees just stay outside. Late summer is prime hive beetle time in our area and an infestation can cause the bees to eventually abscond, leaving the pests and their slime behind.

Fields of yellow blooms are right around the corner and don't confuse the smell of ripening goldenrod honey for the rotten smell of fermenting honey caused by beetle maggots. The odor has been described as like a junior high locker room! If you walk among hives in late summer, it will be apparent which ones have started to bring in goldenrod nectar.

Bees swarm to form new colonies. Reproductive swarms usually happen in the spring when resources are plentiful. At any time of the year they may flee an unsuitable nest site, so you are correct in being concerned. Sometimes absconding happens when the bees have chosen a home in the spring that proves to be too hot for them in summer. Hive beetle maggots are a pretty good reason to leave too. The whole colony is taking flight, so swarms this time of the year can be huge.

July Meeting Notes

Be sure that you register at the back table at our meetings since the sign in sheets are an important club record that supports our use of County facilities. We had 68 members and guests that signed in on July 11.

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

It is hotter than blue blazes and Tracey Grimme presented ways to keep cool. The following list of tips were shared with the group:

1. Wear a bike bladder filled with ice under your bee suit.
2. Put frozen water bottles in your pockets.
3. Wear an "instant cooling shirt" designed to evaporate sweat more efficiently.
4. Wet towel around your neck.
5. Buy a breathable bee suit--more expensive, but well worth it if you have a lot of hives.
6. Use a cooling vest which stays cool about two hours after taking out of freezer and putting it on.

Of course you should always plan your beeyard chores with an early morning start so you can finish up ahead of the worst of the heat.

Tracey also reported that we have a webmaster! Arthur Reuter has volunteered to update and maintain the club's website. The past several months he has been working with the officers to choose a new format. The goal of the FBBA website is to be user friendly and provide information for the public and club members. A sneak preview was given at the July meeting. The updated website should be ready within the next couple months.

It is harvest time and Jim Lynch brought in the club's honey extraction equipment that can be borrowed at a cost of \$20. We also require a \$500 deposit check as hostage. The check is returned when the equipment comes back (we have over \$600 invested!)

Our setup includes uncapping tools, an uncapping tray and an extractor. It is a tangential design and is a little slow since it handles just two frames at the time. "Tangential" means that the frames are parallel to the sides of the drum. It is important to extract in steps since only the honey toward the outside is removed (the weight of the honey trapped to the inside can destroy the comb and make an awful mess). After uncapping, extract about half of the honey from one side before reversing it to empty the other side. Then reverse it again to finish the job.

The setup includes a two-stage honey sieve that fits in your five gallon bucket (members need to have a pail for their honey). They sell white food grade buckets and lids at Lowe's. You should pick up a bucket opener at the same time to make removing the lid easy. It is a good idea to buy a "honey gate" too; it is a valve you install in your bucket to make bottling easy. You'll need to drill a hole for the honey gate. It is a good idea to soften the plastic with a heat gun or hair drier before installation. Buckets of honey should set in a warm place for a day or two to let all the bubbles, bits of wax, etc. rise to the top. When bottled, it should be crystal clear.

We bought the setup in 2011 after much discussion. The club owned an extractor many years ago and it quickly disappeared. We didn't want that to happen again, so an important consideration was to have a member responsible for the setup along with a hostage to make sure it gets back. Many thanks to Jim Lynch for stepping up for this important role.

The two-frame manual extractor has limitations, but it will fit in the back seat of a Camry. Larger extractors are "radial", meaning the frames are radially aligned from the basket axle so all the frame swapping is not necessary. The drum of a radial extractor is much larger which presents a problem for equipment intended to be moved around.

A recent addition is a honey refractometer so you can measure the moisture content of your honey. To prevent fermentation, the moisture in nectar is removed by air movement through the hive. When the bees have the moisture content low enough, the honey is capped. You should only extract capped honey since the bees are the best judge of moisture. Before extracting, check the moisture content and be sure that it doesn't increase as you extract.

The July meeting included an open discussion of small hive beetle control. Various trapping devices were reviewed. Everyone is reminded that essential oils used in hives can be toxic to bees and any pesticides must be used in accordance with label directions.

Thanks to our July door prize donors and congratulations to the lucky winners.

Treasurer's Report

Our July treasury balance was \$3,096.98. Since then we received \$40.00 for the use of the club's extractor setup and collected \$15.00 in dues (3 memberships at \$5.00 each). The resulting balance is \$3,151.98 consisting of \$3,101.98 in our Wells Fargo checking account plus \$50.00 in cash to make change.

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