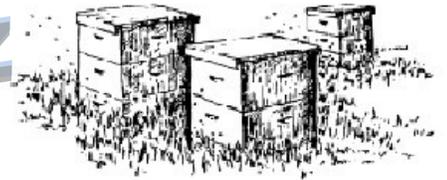




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping



February, 2018

The February 13, 2018 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, so don't forget to stash a five dollar bill in your wallet and get your dues paid. The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments if someone will volunteer to make it and clean up afterwards. Thanks to Margaret Wrzesinski who volunteered to bring salty treats and Glenda McGaughey (something sweet) for our February meeting. The meeting will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

Even if you are new to our newsletter, you probably already know that if you ask a dozen beekeepers a question, you need to expect at least 14 answers! Here is this month's Q (from one of our members) and an A or two:

Q: I'm a relatively new beekeeper and it looks like I've lost a couple of hives over the winter. What are my options for replacements (I'm already in to this for more than I had intended to spend!)?

An A: Beekeeping is almost addictive and we all probably spend more than we expected to. You could elect to just not replace your losses, but there will likely be some next year too, so "doing nothing" about your deadouts won't prove to be a long term answer for you.

It is important to learn from your experience this winter. Colonies that went into winter weakened by varroa mites can dwindle to the point of being unable to maintain necessary warmth. Our winters are usually mild and long periods of really cold weather are uncommon. Nonetheless, weak colonies may not survive, especially if they go into winter with inadequate stores of honey. The really bad news is that if any unguarded honey remains when the colony fails, it will attract robbers on the first mild day. Varroa mites wait in the empty hive for a robbing worker to come by, then hop aboard to go infest another colony. Not good for your beeyard.

The colony must have adequate stores of honey for winter survival. It is the beekeepers job to make sure that they do. A minimum of 30 lbs. of honey (a full medium super or six full deep frames) is usually adequate in our area.

There is very little nectar forage available in the weeks between the first frost and spring's first blooms. It is usually recommended that we not open hives before March 1 but it is a good idea to lift the rear of the hive from time to time to get a sense of its weight as the bees consume their stores (honey provides the energy to flex flight muscles to generate heat and keep their home warm). Fisher's Nectar Detector is a clever tool for weighing hives if your credit card is getting itchy.

A starved colony of bees is a sad sight. The undeniable evidence is dead workers with their heads down inside cells to get to the last remaining honey. Other dead bees will have fallen down on the bottom board.

You can save yourself some trouble and \$\$ if you salvage the frames in your empty hives before wax worms or small hive beetles trash the place (unless you suspect the colony was diseased). A few days in the freezer will kill any pests or eggs on the comb.

Now, how to go about replacing the losses? Costs for bees can vary a lot, but the most expensive options are to buy a complete hive or a "nuc" (nucleus hive) with a laying

queen and four or five frames of bees and brood. They may cost \$300 or more each. A "package" is usually 3 lbs of bees (about 10,000 workers) and a caged, mated, unrelated queen (maybe \$175).

"Splitting" one of your existing hives is far less expensive. A new queen for the queenless half of the split will cost about \$35. Or both halves can be requeened if you want to improve your stock. Sometimes there are queen cells available (maybe \$10). The virgin queen will emerge in a few days and must successfully complete mating flights before beginning to lay eggs. Or you can do a "walkaway split" where the queenless half raises their own queen from a day-old larva. The split will usually have several queen cells that you can use in other splits.

Splitting hives takes a bit of planning, but is not difficult. Success is most likely when the splits can be moved away since returning workers will want to go back to the original location of the hive. Another beeyard that is several miles distant solves this problem. After a week or so in the new location, the splits can come home. A less desirable solution is to observe the splits and reverse locations when drifting is apparent.

The cheapest replacement colony is a captured swarm. It isn't difficult, but if you get word that a swarm is available, you should get there right away since the bees may locate a new home before you show up.

January Meeting Notes

We had 43 members and guests that signed in at our January meeting, but the head count looked more like 56. 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. 2018 dues are due and Lynne Jones and Albert Smaistrila were busy collecting five dollar bills before the meeting.

After 30 minutes of social time, President Jack Richardson called the meeting to order, giving an opening invocation and leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Jack recognized and welcomed visitors to our meeting. We had four new members join in February: Dayna Druke, Susan Garner, Buff Hildreth, and Fernando Martinez

At the beginning of our meeting, Stephanie Kinghorn presented the Texas DAR Conservation Award to Jeff McMullan. Jeff was her beekeeping mentor and she had nominated him in recognition of all of his volunteering efforts.

Gene deBons has been researching the history and origins of the Fort Bend Beekeepers. He discovered a letter dated June 26, 1978 from County Extension Agent Bouche Mickey that listed 40 or so members, including 21 "charter members". The Association's first President was John A. Riley (1909 - 1989). He sold honey in drums to the Federal government. With our humid weather, he sometimes had difficulty achieving their 18½% maximum moisture content specification and wrote of a honey drying room he set up to dry his honey. The club's first Vice President was Ted Kopycinski (1913 - 2008). Gene said that he was "blessed to know them" and learned a lot from their obituaries.

President Jack Richardson announced that he had begun his 52nd year as a beekeeper in April. This is his first time as a club officer and he led an open forum on what he hopes we can do in 2018. He began

with a "Pot of Gold Award" presented to Michael McLean and Albert Smaistrila for their efforts to successfully keep bees and earn a few bucks in the process (but hardly a "pot of gold").

We all know that beekeeping is not always easy and Jack sees mentoring new beekeepers as an important step in achieving our goal of "fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping". The club's formal mentoring program has been neglected and he hopes to get some help getting it back on track.

Setting meeting agendas is another important job. He hopes that members will join in with "show and tell" at our meetings. No special preparation is necessary, just be there and be ready to "show and tell" about tips, tricks, tools, gadgets, gizmos or whatever.

Jack polled the group for meeting topics. Demonstrations for new beekeepers were suggested. There was also interest in producing candles and making soap and cosmetics from beeswax. Small scale queen rearing, capturing swarms, and swarm traps were also suggested.

Jack plans to reinstate the "what's happening in the beeyard now" topic to our meetings. In January he suggested that we should be getting equipment ready for spring and leave the hives alone for a few more weeks.

Member Harrison Rogers is also our District Director for the Texas Beekeepers Association (he's Vice President of the Harris County Beekeepers as well). He reported on the successful beekeeping school held in Austin on January 27. He also reminded everyone that he will be signing up volunteers for the honey bee exhibit at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo AGVENTURE. It runs February 27 through March 18.

Secretary-Treasurer Lynne Jones reminded every one that dues are due and volunteers are needed to bring snacks for the meeting.

Door prize winners in February

were Carson Bryant (a honey sign donated by Jack Richardson) and Annette Gonzales (a frame lifter donated by Dan Jones).

DAR Conservation Award

Stephanie Kinghorn can't make it to many of our meetings because they conflict with her Daughters of the American Revolution chapter meetings. Several months back she decided that her beekeeping mentor, Jeff McMullan, should be nominated for the DAR state organization's Conservation Award. Dedicated to the preservation of natural resources, this award recognizes outstanding achievement in environmental awareness. Armed with recommendations by our own Nancy Hentschel and Gene deBons, Vince Mannino, Fort Bend County's Extension Director, and Master Naturalist Karl Baumgartner, Stephanie cited not just one thing that Jeff has done but everything he has done. At our January meeting, Stephanie presented the award to Jeff in recognition of all of his volunteering efforts over many years.

Treasurer's Report

Our January treasury balance was \$3,197.99. At our January meeting we collected \$235.00 in dues (47 new and renewing members). The resulting balance is \$3,432.99 consisting of \$3,377.99 in our checking account plus \$55.00 in cash.

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