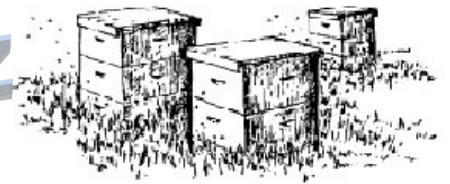




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



May, 2017

The May 9, 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 Arthur Reuter who volunteered to bring sweet treats in May. 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 May will be "Top Bar Hive Beekeeping".

Spring Cleaning

If you did not receive this newsletter in the mail, it is because you have not yet paid your dues for 2017 and your name is no longer on the mailing list. Our current dues-paid membership is at 143!!

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: The topic of varroa mites comes up at every meeting. I don't treat for mites, mostly because I just don't know why or how. Is that really all that bad?

An A: In a word: absolutely, and here is why.

Our organization exists to foster safe, responsible, successful beekeeping. It is hardly "success" if some (or maybe even all) of your colonies are dying out year after year.

It is important to understand that wax moths and small hive beetles are opportunist pests that infest weak hives. And weak hives are almost always the result of varroa mite infestation! Deadouts are costly and disappointing and often the reason beekeepers give it up. Small hive beetles make an awful mess and wax worms can actually destroy frames and boxes.

Few of our members actually manage their hives for this destructive pest. Few hands go up when we ask "who treats for varroa"? A better question to ask would be "who

manages for varroa?" since just treating with miticides is no closer to "managing" bee hives than doing nothing at all. Also too, we must understand that deadouts are not responsible beekeeping. When a colony fails due to varroa, the mites don't die. A weak, failing colony cannot defend its hive and robbers soon take advantage of the "free honey". Varroa catch a ride to their next victims, maybe next door in your beeyard, by getting on board robbers.

Managing for varroa begins with monitoring for infestation. The least intrusive monitoring is to check how many mites are falling out of the hive through our screened bottom boards. A plastic sign coated with cooking spray will catch falling mites. Large numbers mean heavy infestation, but it is a rough measure so we need to do it often and look for change. Increasing mite drop means increasing mite numbers.

It is better to dislodge and count mites feeding on adult bees. Understand though that for every mite on an adult bee, there may be five or more maturing in capped brood. Doing a "sugar roll" dislodges varroa using powdered sugar. The mites can be counted, but we need a measure of how many bees they were on. We usually use a level 1/2 cup of young bees (nurse bees tending brood). After shaking them into a container, just scoop up a level measuring cup. If you don't shake them down, there will be

about 300 bees. If you spot six mites in the powdered sugar, the hive has 6/300 or 2% infestation. 5% is an absolute call to action!

A better mite measure is obtained from an "alcohol wash". With the sugar roll, the white sugar-dusted bees are returned to their hive where their co-workers quickly clean up the sugar. With an alcohol wash we can count exactly how many bees we have sampled since they are killed by the alcohol. It is critically important that the queen is isolated during sampling since we don't want her to end up dead from our varroa monitoring experiment. Even still, while counting dead bees we should be on the lookout for a queen with a death wish.

Varroa reproduce in capped brood. They prefer drone brood because it takes an extra day to develop. Drone brood is often located on the bottom of brood frames and any drone pupae that are uncovered in your hive inspections should be routinely examined for varroa. Mahogany-colored mites (a little bigger than the period at the end of this sentence) are easily seen on the white drone larva.

Drone foundation is sold to help manage mite numbers. Drone frames are placed on each side of the brood nest and left in the hive for 26 - 30 days. The frame of capped drone brood is then removed and frozen. After an overnight stay in the freezer, the frozen pupae can be removed and examined after uncapping them with a

cappings fork to get a measure of how many pupae were infested. Frozen frames can be returned to the hive for the bees to clean up and start the process again. Be mindful when using drone brood since if it is left in the hive and drones emerge, they will cause a deadly “varroa population explosion”.

It is irresponsible to allow a colony to fail due to varroa moving on to infest other bees. The best strategy is to treat for mites when we see high numbers then by requeening with varroa resistant stock.

Beyond using drone frames, our treating options range from relatively non-toxic to in-hive pesticides. Products like Apiguard (thymol gel) or organic acids are not terribly toxic, but use them carefully and only according to label instructions. These products produce vapors to kill the mites, so high day-time temperatures can be bad since too much vapor is released. Treatment is intended to kill adult varroa with a second application after brood (and new varroa) have emerged. The cost for a single deep’s two treatments with single foil packs of Apiguard is about \$8 (the cost drops by half when the product is purchased in pails).

Another relatively non toxic product is derived from hops, the brewmaster’s ingredient. HopGuard II treatment is about \$3.50, but it is less effective and varroa can be expected to quickly develop immunity.

In-hive pesticides are viewed dimly because that may contaminate wax and impact the colony until the drawn comb is replaced. Apistan has been around for years and immunity can be a problem (the active ingredient is tau-fluvalinate, a synthetic pyrethroid). CheckMite+ by Bayer contains a more toxic active ingredient, coumaphos, an organophosphate. It is labeled for both varroa and small hive beetles, but it is no longer available. If you have a stash, you should use it wisely e.g. to treat fresh swarms (with no brood or comb) for varroa as well as small hive beetles.

The active ingredient in recently approved Apivar is amitraz. It is particularly effective against mites and (according to Sharon) is also used to treat dogs heavily infested with ticks.

If your goal is to be treatment-free, a mite infested hive should be treated and then requeened with varroa-resistant stock. It is a good idea to read up before deciding on your new queen’s genealogy. If mite levels stay low, mite treatments won’t be necessary.

April Meeting Notes

62 members and guests signed in at our April 11 meeting. After 30 minutes social time, President Nancy Henstschel called the meeting to order. Mike McLean volunteered to give an invocation and led us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Nancy next welcomed first-timers and new members to our meeting. Member Ray Smaistrila announced that he had extra Checkmite+ he would sell at his cost. Next, Darrell Scott demonstrated The Bee Squad Varroa Mite Testing Kit that is available for \$20 from the University of Minnesota book store.

Our program for May was “Maximizing Honey Production” by James and Chari Elam of the Montgomery County Beekeepers. They run Blue Ribbon Honey Co. and operate Bluebonnet Beekeeping Supplies in Willis, Tx.

Commercial beekeepers average more than 100 lbs of honey per hive. For hobby beekeepers, the number is 35 lbs. The basic premise of their presentation was that hobby beekeepers should focus their beekeeping skills on honey production. Each hive should have a young healthy queen as spring arrives. She is “programmed” to build colony numbers and is less likely to swarm. And swarming must be avoided at all costs. Be on the watch for swarm preparations like a skinny queen or backfilling the brood nest with honey. It is almost too late when you see swarm cells. The Elam’s kick start their

hives in the spring by feeding 1:1 syrup and pollen substitute. Feeding starts on Valentine’s Day and continues right up to the honey flow. As the honey flow begins, remove all meds from the hive and begin supering. Add secondary upper entrances to help boost honey production. Checkerboarding the supers with capped honey seems to really boost production. Add supers when the bees reach 70% capped and uncapped honey. When fall comes around, the bees should have 40 - 60 lbs of honey for the winter. Fall is the best time for requeening since it disrupts varroa reproduction and the colony goes into spring with a healthy young queen. Winter survival depends in large part on varroa numbers. Test/treat/test! Open feeding of 2:1 syrup and pollen substitute in winter is helpful.

Congratulations to our April door prize winners and thanks to the donors.

Treasurer’s Report

Our April treasury balance was \$2,993.82. Since then we received \$100.00 in donations, collected \$65.00 in dues (13 memberships at \$5.00 each) and spent \$140.00 (honorarium and expenses for our April program). The resulting balance is \$3,018.82 (\$2,968.82 in our Wells Fargo checking account plus \$50.00 in cash to make change).

**TEXAS A&M
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