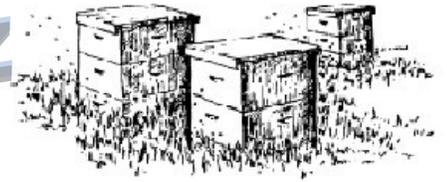




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping



October, 2018

The October 9, 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. Dues are a real bargain, but since there is no meeting in December, they get to be more expensive (by the meeting) as the year goes on. The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments if someone will volunteer to make it and clean up afterwards. It is important that we leave the Community Center the way we found it! Please lend a hand in straightening up the tables and chairs and cleaning up the refreshment area. We will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time. Don't forget about the *letgo* table in the back of the room. You may find just what you need or get rid of stuff (beekeeping treasures) that needs a new home.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: I've had bees for a couple of years now: two Langstroth hives in the back yard. Everyone advised me that I need two hives in order to compare and contrast colonies as well as having far more beekeeping options. So far so good. The hives are much alike except one keeps everything all stuck together with propolis. It almost takes a crowbar to pull frames. What can I do?

An A: This is a great question because it touches on both beekeeping practices and honey bee biology and behavior.

In the 1800's, Rev. L. L. Langstroth (inventor of your hive design) observed that even though natural comb is usually not straight (hanging more like curtains) the distance between the combs was consistent (actually this had been observed by ancient Egyptians). Langstroth determined that the open space between combs was 1/4" to 3/8" and named it "beespace", intended for use as passageways in the hive. Smaller openings were sealed with propolis while comb filled the larger ones. Most significantly, Langstroth put his observations to practical use: "beespace" formed the basis for making removable frame hives that revolutionized beekeeping. Removable frames allowed the beekeeper to carefully

and completely inspect the combs, easily move standardized frames between hives, and harvest honey (and return the comb) without destroying the hive.

In your problem hive, the bees have an exaggerated propensity for dealing with gaps less than 1/4". You probably figured out that using nine frames in a ten frame box would be a really bad idea for them. In fact, you should use your hive tool as a lever to jam the frames to one side in order to tightly close any gap between the frame side bars.

As you have observed, not all bees have this trait. In fact, over many years breeders have selected stocks for their limited and judicious use of propolis. Our *Apis mellifera* (the Western or European honey bee) is native to western Europe. There are several subspecies that were once confined by natural barriers. These species have been hybridized a zillion different ways by humans so pure subspecies are unlikely. Reality is that honey bees are mutts, impossible to trace to their European origins. Bee breeders often claim "Italian" or "Carnolian" stock based pretty much on only their color or temperament. In fact, hives of once popular Caucasian bee stock (with lots of other good traits but prone to propolize everything) are essentially nonexistent. Requeening with different stock should help with your problem since breeders

see excess propolis to be detrimental.

Propolis is an important construction material for honey bees, usually made from plant resins. When resins are in short supply, they have been known to gather old propolis, road tar, drying or soft paint, caulking, and other similar material. Bees are not known to alter the material in any way. Today, medical claims for propolis are common, but it is apparent that it can be almost anything found suitable by the bees. It hardly passes any "smell test" (does it make sense?) since road tar or soft paint doesn't seem too medicinal. Rather than extolling propolis, plant resins should be identified and evaluated.

Besides chinking cracks, bees use propolis to protect and water proof the hive's walls and sometimes use it to entomb objects in the hive that are too big for them to remove. A creepy discovery in a hive is an entombed mouse. It is too big to remove so the workers strip the fur and coat the carcass with propolis to control the odor of rotting rodent.

Long ago humans did use propolis for medicinal purposes. They also made varnish by dissolving it in alcohol. There are claims that Stradivarius' revered violins are coated with propolis varnish. Of course, that says very little since the hive was a stop on the way and the resinous source is unknown.

September Meeting Notes

We had 45 members and guests sign in at our September meeting. The head count was 46 so someone didn't sign in. Thanks to those that did. (Our sign-in sheets are an important record of our use of county facilities.)

After 30 minutes of social time, President Jack Richardson opened the meeting with an invocation and then led us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Next, Sharon Moore informed everyone of two charitable programs that provide livestock and supplies in economically disadvantaged countries. Your donation to Heifer International and/or World Vision can provide a beehive.

Gene DeBons read from the 1871 edition of Langstroth's Hive and the Honey-Bee regarding the anger of bees. The sting of the bee is painful, and for some it is dangerous. Langstroth believed bees seemed to prefer to sting those who are most affected and wondered if secretions attracted the bees. He found bees to be disturbed by the peculiar odor of some persons (regardless of cleanliness), breath from human lungs and sweaty horses. Even back in the 1860s, honey bees had been known to kill horses and cows, well before the Africanized Honey Bee showed up in the Americas.

Jeff Murray gave a Mead 101 presentation. With an abundance of honey, making mead is an option for beekeepers. Mead is an agricultural wine made from water, honey, and yeast. Mead does not have to be sweet, nor does it have to taste like honey. Mead is easy to make, but making good mead is hard. The more honey in the recipe, the higher the alcohol content will be. Typically, recipes call for about 1.5 pounds of honey to a gallon of water. Fruits and spices can be added during or after fermentation depending on how distinguishable you want the flavor to be. As a home mead maker, you can make 200 gallons per year, per adult in the household which can be



Hive Painting Contest Winners:

- 1st Sylvia* (center)
- 2nd Danessa Yaschuk (left)
- 3rd Annabelle* and Avery* (right)

* last names were lost in the shuffle

consumed or given as gifts, but cannot be sold without a license (which is very hard to get). The Texas Mead Fest is in Seguin on October 27th.

We then held the viewing and judging for the Hive Painting and Photo contests. There were seven hives and 22 photos entered.

While votes were being tabulated (everyone was a judge), Jeff McMullan gave a quick presentation on the swarm traps that the Association makes available to the public. Brandy Rader at the AgriLife Extension Service keeps up with where the traps are. When bees move into a trap, she lets us know so that one of our members can recover the trap and bring the bees to their beeyard to put in a hive. If you are interested in one of these colonies, you should add your name to the "Swarm List" in the back of the room at our meeting. It is best to collect the trap at dusk so all the bees are inside and no stragglers get left behind. Bees can't see the color red, so a red headlamp is helpful (Harbor Freight). First you should check for "leaks" and close them up; pieces of steel wool work good. A few puffs from your smoker will get them all inside then close them up with a plastic bucket. The next morning you can introduce them to their new home. It is usually not a good idea to try to salvage any comb. Giving them a frame of brood from another hive usually assures that they stay around.



Photography Contest Winners:

- 1st Jerzy Trybek (right)
- 2nd Herman Hoot (left)
- 3rd Danessa Yaschuk (center)

We also watched a Honey Bee Heath Coalition video on Varroa Mites. Managing mites is crucial to being a successful beekeeper. Not treating does not result in varroa resistant bees.

Thanks to the donors and congrats to the winners of our door prize drawings at the end of the meeting.

Treasurer's Report

The treasury balance reported last month was \$3,512.35. Since our last report we collected \$5.00 in dues, \$60.00 for the use of our extractor and \$65.00 in donations. There were no expenses, so the resulting balance is \$3,642.35, consisting of \$3,592.35 in our Wells Fargo checking account plus \$50.00 in cash to make change.

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

Boone Holladay

County Extension Agent- Horticulture
Fort Bend County
jb.holladay@ag.tamu.edu
281 342-3034 ext. 7034
1402 Band Road, Suite 100
Rosenberg, TX 77471

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating. Persons with disabilities who plan to attend this meeting and who may need auxiliary aid or services are required to contact Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 281-342-3034 five working days prior to the meeting so appropriate arrangements can be made.