



Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

The Fort Bend Beekeepers Association usually meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00 pm in Fort Bend County's "Bud" O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, Texas. (We are called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time.)

In the midst of a public health emergency, the County has closed the Community Center and prohibited meetings of more than ten people, so there was no April meeting. County facilities remain closed to the public, so our May meeting has been cancelled as well.

May meeting cancelled

State and local orders require the cancellation of our May 12 meeting. At this time we are hopeful that our June meeting will be held as scheduled.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: Every time I ask a question it seems like I'm learning some kind of "beekeeper's secret". Can we just put some of them in the newsletter?

A whole bunch of A's: "Fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping" is the reason that our club exists, so we don't have any secrets. But it may not always seem that way, especially for new beekeepers. This month we'll try to scour our brains for the tidbits that every beekeeper should know.

Probably the most bewildering thing new beekeepers encounter is the "lingo". There is a good reason that so many beekeeping terms seem to be so foreign. Langstroth's discovery of "beespace" and the invention of removable frame hives ushered in widespread beekeeping in the late 1800's. No longer did you have to destroy a hive to harvest honey from a straw skep or bee gum (oops...lingo rears its head). Actually, the mysterious beekeeper lingo is remnant of 19th century vocabulary. For example, "super" shows up from its meaning "superior to" (i.e. a supercedure

cell) or "above" (i.e. the honey super).

Complete metamorphosis in insects is no mystery; we all understand where butterflies come from. The life cycle from egg to larva to pupa to adult is well known for each of the honey bee castes (worker, drone and queen). Each caste starts with an egg that hatches in three days. The larva is fed for six days before it is capped to pupate inside the cell. The quickest adult to emerge is the queen (16 days total from egg laying). A worker emerges in 21 days; a drone in 24. A meaningful hive inspection requires an understanding of this life cycle and brood development. Honey bee brood development and brood pattern tell a lot about what is going on in the hive. At hatching, the larvae is very small. Over six days it grows to fill the bottom of the cell until it is ready to be capped. Be alert while inspecting frames for emerging brood in the hive. It is fascinating to watch a baby worker chew its way out, knowing the queen laid an egg 21 days ago.

Pop quiz: if you split a hive today and expect them to raise their own queen, when would she emerge?

The answer is from 12 to 16 days. Queens are reared from larvae that is at least a day old. If they start feeding a day old larva, she would emerge in 12 more days; if they start with a recently laid fertilized egg, it will be the full 16 days before she emerges. It may take a week or more for her to complete her mating

flight(s) and begin laying eggs, so long as she does not fall victim to a lizard, spider, dragonfly, etc. Mating flights are perilous and a young queen that failed to return is the usual reason that hives become queenless after swarming.

Varroa mites reproduce in capped brood. Drone pupae are more robust and have a longer development time. Drone brood is often exposed as frames are removed for inspection. It should be examined for mahogany colored mites as a measure of the hives mite infestation.

The Darwinian view of chemical-free beekeeping is that only the fittest survive. Unfortunately when a colony fails, varroa mites don't die. They just hop on robbers for a ride to another hive. You wouldn't want your dog or cat to be infested with fleas, ticks and worms. Why not treat for varroa?

Most of the various subspecies of honey bee are native to Europe, separated from one another by high mountains. They've all been hybridized to the point that there probably are no true "Italian bees" in Italy. Honey bees are originally woodland creatures, so the smell of smoke triggers action since the woods may be on fire. Anticipating the loss of their home, honey bees gorge on honey expecting their next meal to be days away if their home is destroyed. Ancient humans learned how to use smoke to calm honey bees with a full belly. Another important aspect is that honey bees use scent to communi-

cate and smoke-filled air covers any alarm signals that may be released. If you do get stung, remove the stinger quickly by scraping it off. Give the area a few quick puffs of smoke to hide the alarm scent to prevent more stings.

The ubiquitous smoker and beekeeper PPE may seem mysterious (everybody knows what PPE means nowadays). The beekeeper's smoker is an ingenious device. Its invention is attributed to Moses Quinby in 1873. Almost anything that burns slowly can be used for fuel, whether it's leaves, dry grass, wood shavings, burlap or an old tee shirt (buying smoker fuel seems silly). When it is standing upright, the smoker drafts naturally and keeps the fuel burning slowly. A few quick pumps on the bellows delivers puffs of cool calming smoke to the hive. When you're done in the beeyard, you can extinguish the fire with a stopper or just lay the smoker on its side to shut off the draft of air. Leftover fuel can be relit next time.

Always light your smoker before opening a hive in case the situation threatens to get out of hand. A propane torch makes short work of getting your smoker lit and can be used to burn off the soot that accumulates. Another trick: wax and propolis on your hive tool wipes off easily after heating it for a few seconds with your torch.

While a simple veil and helmet may suffice, you may well be money ahead in buying a quality ventilated bee jacket in the first place. Gloves aren't always needed since bees seldom sting you on the hands. Rubber gloves (like dishwashing gloves) afford a better sense of touch than heavier leather gloves.

Hive boxes will last a whole lot longer when primed and painted with a couple of coats of premium house paint. Mistinted latex house paint is often available at a bargain price if you aren't too persnickety about the color. Caulk all cracks before painting and always paint the top and bottom of each side to pre-

vent rotting. Stain and varnish may look nice at first, but in a few years it will be peeling off and ugly. Never pry at the corners with your hive tool when separating boxes since it can damage the box and lead to rotten wood. Replacing rotten hive components is a real pain.

Hives do best in full sun since the bees don't care and pests hate it. A brick on top will keep your hive cover from blowing off in high wind. You can put a plastic campaign sign under the brick in summer to make cooling the hive a little easier for the bees. When selecting a site for your hive, consider the flight path of foraging bees and avoid conflict by encouraging them to go up and away.

The choice of foundation for your Langstroth hive is perplexing. In fact you don't need foundation at all (at the risk the bees deciding to build comb crossways in the box). Foundation can be of milled beeswax or various plastic designs. The milled beeswax should be "crimp wired", which means it has wire support. This support is very important if the honey will be extracted. The embossed plastic foundation is available in black, yellow and white. The black is generally preferred because it makes seeing eggs down in the cells easier (it's dark in the hive and bees don't care about what color it is). Not all bees take well to plastic foundation. It is much easier for the beekeeper to work with though.

We've run out of room so we'll have to tell you about the secret handshake some other time.

April Meeting Notes

County facilities were closed to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so our April meeting was cancelled.

If we have your email address, you should have received a link to our April newsletter. All newsletters going back to January, 2014 are available on the FBBA website: www.fortbendbeekeepers.org.

Dues are due

Our dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year. If you haven't yet paid for 2020 there is a sad bee on your address label. You can pay your dues at our June meeting or mail a check to:

Fort Bend Beekeepers
Lynne Jones, Secretary-Treasurer
19747 Coppervine Lane
Houston, TX 77084

It's gotta be true...

'cause I read it on the internet.

Some recent honey bee advice seen on the internet has inspired an occasional feature for our newsletter.

It seems that someone posted on a neighborhood web site that she had a swarm of bees in her yard. A helpful neighbor posted that she shouldn't be worried, they'll soon be gone. At this time of the year they are just migrating through on their way back north for the summer.

Treasurer's Report

Our April treasury balance was \$3,866.03. We've had no income since then. Expenses were \$6.49 for the monthly email cost and \$37.99 for our domain name renewal. The resulting balance is \$3,821.55 (\$3,771.55 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash).

TEXAS A&M
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