



September, 2020

# 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.)

We were last able to meet in person on March 10 and the Community Center remains closed due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. It is impossible to predict when we will be able to meet in person again. For details of our planned Zoom online meeting, see the announcement below. Hopefully our meetings can return to normal soon.

## September meeting is online

Because of the continuing (and seemingly never ending) COVID-19 threat, our September meeting will again be online:

**Tues., Sept. 8, 7:30 - 9:00 pm**

**login:** [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2436305183?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2436305183?pwd=UzJTNmpLVUE4WjYrUDZvd0VfdXJXUT09)

**pwd=UzJTNmpLVUE4WjYrUDZvd0VfdXJXUT09**

**Meeting ID: 243 630 5183**

**Passcode: 690069**

To connect by telephone (audio only), call 346 248-7799, Meeting ID: 243 630 5183, Passcode: 690069.

An email with clickable instructions will go out ahead of the meeting.

Our program for September will be "My Top Ten Beekeeping Tips and Tricks" by Jeff McMullan. His list is a fun survey of time saving and helpful pointers for all beekeepers.

We'll again be having a "beescussion" on the day after our September meeting. You will be receiving an email invite.

## Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

**Q:** When should I start feeding my bees?

**An A:** In our area we see two principle nectar flows. Early in the year, Chinese tallow and spring wildflowers usually yield a surplus honey crop. A spring favorite for many beekeepers is horsemint (or

beebalm) that usually blooms from May through July.

For many beekeepers, especially those with hives in rural areas, the spring crop was pretty light. Rain gauge data revealed the likely cause. Rainfall in February (3.10") and April (3.58") was near their average of about 3 1/4". March however was significantly short with only 1.03" of rain at this crucial time for nectar production. There was rain on 21 days in March, but few rainfall events over 0.01". Only 2 days saw rainfall over 0.10".

Whenever rainfall comes up short it seems that it is "spotty" with some areas doing ok while the rest were dusty dry. There may be benefit in not keeping all your hives in one place to avoid some drought risk!

The good news is that we had above average rainfall in July (6.94", 4.36" is average) and August (4.73", 4.14" is average). It is reasonable to expect a better honey crop for the fall. In late summer and early fall, we are accustomed to pastures full of goldenrod and fence rows of ragweed for our second big flow. Horsemint that's getting good rain may bloom until October.

Once you've harvested honey, you should make sure that your hives go into winter with adequate stores. Every week or so you should lift the back of the hive to check its weight while you are keeping an eye on entrance activity. It is hard to predict nectar flow so you should

be prepared to start feeding when it looks like it is needed. If your hives seem to be getting light, start feeding. Bees prefer real nectar, so they may not take the syrup right away. In our area, bees seem to be able to find nectar right up to the first freeze (especially in neighborhoods), but winter stores should be ready before then. Feeding before it is really needed may encourage late season brood production when you'd rather see the population dwindling down for overwintering.

White granulated sugar mixed 2:1 in water (most easily measured by volume) is fed in fall so the bees can quickly get it capped. It is not necessary to boil the syrup, but boiling does help by killing any yeast or bacteria and deters spoilage.

You can "open" feed bees using chicken waterers with rocks in the tray to prevent drowning. Of course open feeding benefits all the neighborhood bees and can cause quite the commotion when there is no nectar flow. Entrance feeders (like glass jar Boardman feeders and others) are easy to check as the syrup disappears. When setting it in place, always invert the feeder away from hive entrance to prevent spillage which may encourage robbing or ants. It is usually a good idea to restrict the entrance to a smaller opening away from the feeder. Another option is a hive-cover that has a hole for a Boardman feeder on top of the hive.

Feeding inside the hive avoids rob-

bing and keeps the syrup warmer as winter approaches, allowing the bees to continue feeding when the weather is cool (remember what that is?). Boardman feeders and others can be set on top of the frames inside an empty box. A really really easy alternative is a Ziploc bag filled with syrup and placed on the frames. A dozen or so pinholes (or a couple of razor cuts) allow the bees to get to the syrup.

You can also buy feeders to stack on top of the hive under the cover. Be very careful that bees cannot get to syrup from ventilation openings in the cover because thousands of them will get inside and drown.

Division board (or frame) feeders fit in the brood box in place of frames. Use hardware cloth ladders or floats to minimize drowning. (It sometimes seems like feeding bees is a murderous undertaking.)

Even if you treated for mites before supering, you should probably treat again in cooler weather after your honey harvest. You really want a low mite population for your overwintering bees.

### August Meeting Notes

President Craig Rench opened our ZOOM meeting at 7:30 pm and welcomed the 26 who had logged in (the same as in July).

Secretary-Treasurer, Lynne Jones asked everyone to type their names into the Chat to ensure she gets everyone counted for Attendance. She quickly showed those who might not be familiar with ZOOM how to find the Chat screen.

Vice President Danessa Yaschuk made several announcements:

The in-person Texas Beekeepers Association's Fall Convention has been cancelled. Instead, an online virtual conference is planned. This will allow everyone to still have access to the great programs that you would find at the convention, all while still being safely at home.

Last month we had our second "beescussions" ZOOM meeting. This

was a separate meeting, the evening after the monthly meeting. Our "beescussions" are intended to be like our meeting social time, an informal get-together to talk about what's happening with our bees. You will be receiving an email invitation that includes a clickable link.

We want to update our website using photos taken by our members. We are seeking photos of honey bees, swarms, honey, or anything related to beekeeping. This is not a contest and there is no compensation if your photo is used. The photos used will include the photographer's name. A permission form must be completed and returned granting permission to use the photo. If you'd like to contribute a photo or two, the permission form will be included in the email with the "beescussions" meeting link.

Danessa then introduced our guest speaker, Harrison Rogers. Harrison lives in the Pearland area. He and his wife Mary keep about a dozen hives in their back yard. He is a Texas Master Beekeeper and past area director of the Texas Beekeepers Association. He now serves as a board member of Real Texas Honey and as Vice President of Harris County Beekeepers Association. Harrison coordinates the honey bee exhibit at the Houston rodeo every year.

Harrison presented Part II on Varroa Mites, focusing on sampling, treatment threshold infestation levels and treatment options.

The two methods of sampling are the alcohol wash and the powdered sugar shake. Of the two, the alcohol wash is more accurate. Both start by collecting ½ cup of bees from brood nest frames, being very careful to not include the queen. This is, on average, 300 bees. Once you have completed the wash or the shake, count the number of mites found. Divide that number by 300 (or the actual number of bees in the sample). Then multiply by 100 to obtain a percentage. For example, if you found 6 varroa mites:  $6 \div 300 = 0.02 \times 100 = 2\%$ .

Is that number good or bad? An acceptable varroa level during peak colony population would not be okay when the colony is dormant. The Honey Bee Health Coalition has a Varroa Management Tool that can help you decide what treatment is your best option based on your personal preferences and mite infestation level (<https://honeybeehealthcoalition.org/varroatool/>).

There are chemical and non-chemical options for mite treatment. Chemical options include synthetic pesticides, essential oils, or organic acids. IMPORTANT: Chemical controls have temperature and honey super limitations to consider.

Lynne then conducted the door prize drawing. Rose Delgado and Harrison Rogers won smoker key chains donated by Bee Man Dan Jones.

After reminding everyone of the "beescussions" virtual meeting, Craig thanked everyone for attending, and closed the meeting.

### Treasurer's Report

Last month's treasury balance was \$3,671.31. Since then we collected \$35.00 in dues (including \$15.00 for 2021). Our only expense was \$12.99 email costs. The resulting balance is \$3,693.32 (\$3,608.32 in our checking account, \$35.00 pending deposit and \$50.00 in cash).

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