

Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



May, 2014

The Fort Bend Beekeepers Association meets on the second Tuesday of the month (except December) 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). Our next meeting will be Tuesday, May 13. The meeting is called to order at 7:30 pm after a half hour of social time. The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks. Thanks to Doug Rowell (something salty) and Mike Jurek (something sweet) for volunteering to bring treats for our May meeting. We still need a few volunteers for a few vacant spots on our refreshments sign-up sheet.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: One of my hives was queenless with lots of bees, but only scattered drone brood to be seen. I gave them a swarm cell that I found in my other hive to get them back on track with a new queen. Checking later I found the queen cell with the side all chewed out, unlike the "trap door" in the end that would indicate that a new queen had emerged. The colony continued to dwindle and I ended up having to combine them with my other hive. What went wrong?

An A: Given the benefit of hindsight, you figured out that the scattered drone brood was the product of a laying worker depositing unfertilized eggs.

In what seems like a desperate attempt to at least allow drones from the doomed colony to contribute to the survival of the species, a young worker in the queenless colony begins to lay eggs. Eggs from a laying worker can be seen on the sides of the brood cell since her abdomen is not long enough to deposit the egg on the bottom of the cell. And quite often she lays several eggs in a cell. These unfertilized eggs develop into drones who do not gather nectar or pollen. The colony's female workforce inevitably declines as aging bees die. Sometimes the hive falls victim to robbers or small hive beetles when there aren't enough guard bees to defend their

home.

Another key observation that you made is that the damaged queen cell and the missing queen pupa are the result of a colony that thought the laying worker was a fertile queen. Your intended replacement was killed. Usually the bees quickly tear down the old queen cell, so the "assassination" was likely within a day or so.

Beware that there may be risk involved in combining a laying worker colony with a stronger queenright hive. A "newspaper combine" lessens the chance of conflict with the laying worker. Place a sheet or two of newspaper between the two hives. A few slits in the paper encourage the bees to chew through, combining the hives.

It is better to rid the hive of its laying worker(s). Move the entire hive a few yards away and then brush all

the bees off onto the ground one frame at a time. Put the bee-less frames back in the boxes and return the hive to its original location. The bees quickly return: all except the laying worker. The theory is that the laying worker is a younger bee that has not oriented herself to the hive's location. Rid of the lost laying worker, the queenless colony can now be safely requeened or combined with less risk of problems..

Treasurer's Report

Our April 2014 balance was \$3,535.23. Since that time we collected and spent \$2,873.25 on our honey container order. \$25 in dues (5 members at \$5.00 each) and got a \$250.61 in donations. The resulting treasury balance is \$3,810.84 consisting of \$29 in cash (to make change) and \$3781.84 in our Wells Fargo checking account.



Honey Containers

At our March meeting, we gathered individual orders for honey containers to combine into a single order from Sailor Plastics. Eleven of our members placed orders for a total of 35 cases of containers. We worked with the helpful Sailor folks to make it all happen. The bulk order saved about \$30 in shipping on each case, totaling almost \$1,000 in savings for our members.

April Meeting Notes

At our April meeting, Jack Richardson gave details for the purchase of honey bottles in bulk to save on shipping costs. Follow-up details are discussed elsewhere in this month's *Buzz*.

Albert Smaistrila just received two packages of Russian bees from Walter Kelley at a cost of \$115 each: for every swarm we do not catch over \$100 is flying away.

Jack Richardson gave a timely program on swarms including a table full of equipment to show. Jack's first swarm capture was in 1967. His first trap, a cardboard box containing a pheromone lure, was used in 1987. Following the cardboard traps, Jack moved to the much-discussed plant pots baited with pheromone and hung in trees. Now he most often uses nuc boxes with frames of old comb and lemongrass oil so that he is able to move the bees into hives on the frames instead of cutting them out of pots. He checks his traps often so they can be hived right away. He treats newly hived swarms with Check-Mite+ for varroa and small hive beetles. For better success in keeping the new swarms, Jack recommends using a frame of capped brood (no bees) from another hive.

Jack also reported on an essential oil mite treatment concocted by Dane Beito. Dane claims success in killing mites while it repels small hive beetles. He calls it "Beetle Juice".

Jack also addressed making splits. He uses one frame of brood with lots of bees and a queen cell. It is important that this small colony's entrance is reduced to about one or two "bee widths".

Gene DeBons presented more fascinating beekeeping history in April. First, from a 1957 book "Treasury of American Science," he reviewed a summary of current research in 1941 at the USDA Laboratory in Beltsville, MD. That lab had recently responded to beekeeper re-

quests for bees with longer tongues so they could reach into deeper flowers; with larger bodies so they could carry more payload; with gentle disposition so they would be easier to work; and with distinguishing markings like stars on their wings so they would be easy to identify. After some preliminary work, the lab scientists decided the development of all these characteristics would not be easy and they put the project on hold. While honey bee research has been going on for many years, the challenges are hugely different decades later.

Gene also related several tales from his 1940 edition of "ABC and XYZ of Bee Culture," by A. I. Root and E. R. Root. A. I. Root began beekeeping in 1865 when he lost a bet to a fellow field worker who said he could capture a swarm of bees that had just flown over the field. Mr. Root offered him \$1 if he could capture the swarm and he returned shortly with the swarm in a box. Mr. Root then began his learning about bees by finding Rev. Langstroth's book and by purchasing a queen for \$20 from the Reverend. By 1867 Mr. Root learned about a honey extractor from Germany. He copied that machine and within a couple of years he had 48 hives and had extracted 6,162 lb of honey, which he sold for \$0.25/lb.

A. I. Root was the first to manufacture extractors and wax foundation commercially in the United States. He also improved the smoker making it essentially the same as we use today. His bee supply company was located in Medina, Ohio, and today is a major supplier of beeswax candles, but not general beekeeping equipment.

For many years he contributed a column under the name "Novice" in his journal, *Gleanings in Bee Culture*. His view was that all beekeepers could learn from his mistakes and would not have to repeat those errors in their own operations. Mr. Root wrote the first edition of his book, "ABC of Bee Culture," in 1877. It was expanded in 1940 by

his son E. R. Root to include XYZ. A. I. Root died in 1923.

Boone Holliday spoke about the Extension Service Swarm List. He repeated last season's comments that initial contacts with county residents should not involve a fee, that we are providing a service to the community by assisting with bee calls. Members should contact his office if they wish to be removed from the Swarm List.

Sharon Moore showed the Fort Bend Herald spread showing results of the Super Painting contest held in March. She supplied photos and a write-up to the paper which were published.

Door Prizes:

Herman Hoot, Grape Vine donated by Nancy Hentschel

John Lynch, Gerber Daisy donor unknown

Clarence Thielemann and Jocelyn Kasmir, solar powered novelty bee "toy", donor unknown.

Check It Out

Check your address label for this newsletter. If your name is in italics, you haven't paid dues for 2014 and you will be dropped from our mailing list next month. If you'd like, you can mail your \$5.00 dues to Jeff McMullan, 74 Hessenford St., Sugar Land, TX 77479.

TEXAS A&M
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Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socio-economic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin. The Texas A&M System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating. If you have special needs in order to participate in this program, please contact Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service of Fort Bend County at (281) 342-3034.