



January, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association
fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

The Fort Bend Beekeepers Association was last able to meet in person on March 10, 2020. We usually meet 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.)

Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status is now RED or "High Risk". This a dangerous condition as the number of infections soar and ICU beds fill up at unacceptable rates. Gatherings of more than 10 people is prohibited because of the public health emergency. See the announcement below for details of our online meeting in January.

Hopefully our meetings can return to normal soon.. It is impossible to predict when we will be able to meet in person again.

January meeting is online

Our January meeting will again be online:

Tues., Jan. 12, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

login: [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85622635183?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85622635183?pwd=UFR1NFN6MWU1emh1YmJDNG1EK1UrUT09)

pwd=UFR1NFN6MWU1emh1YmJDNG1EK1UrUT09

Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183

Passcode: 275853

To connect by telephone (audio only), call 346 248-7799, Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183 , Passcode: 275853.

An email with clickable instructions will go out ahead of the meeting. We plan to start the meeting at 7:30 after 30 minutes of "social time".

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: I want to expand my beeyard by a couple of hives. What are my options (I've never bought bees before)?

An A: You actually have options that don't necessarily involve your wallet. With swarm season right around the corner, you can get on our club's swarm call list. You can sign up to collect "freebees" by emailing Secretary-Treasurer Lynne Jones at emaillynne@yahoo.com. Gene deBons coordinates swarm calls that come in through our website or calls to the Extension office

or local animal control offices. Since swarms often don't hang around for very long, you need to be able to respond at a moment's notice.

Another option is to lure bees into a swarm trap when they are in search of a new home. The trap (or a vacant hive) should be placed where bee colonies are known or near where swarms have been seen in the past. A splash of lemongrass oil from the grocery store spice aisle helps a lot since its odor mimics the smell of hormones that are very attractive to bees.

Another low cost option is to split an existing hive. You'll need a temporary site for your split (to avoid losing bees back to the original hive); give them a week or so before moving them back to your beeyard. You can take a chance on the queenless split, hoping they can successfully raise themselves a new queen. Unfortunately this often doesn't work since mating flights for a newly emerged queen is a perilous thing. Something like one in three never makes it back from their nuptial adventure. A better option (or maybe a backup plan) is to buy a mated queen since she can get to work laying eggs in just a few days.

If you plan to buy bees, you probably need to make those plans now. You have three options: an established hive, a nuc ("nucleus" hive), or a package. Each has a laying queen. The hive and nuc (usually

five frames of bees) are already functioning as a colony. The package usually consists of 3 lbs of bees (about 10,000 workers) and an unrelated caged queen. It will take the package a couple of weeks to draw comb and get started raising brood.

However you decide to go, you need to get equipment ready for your new colonies.

Election of Officers

Officers for 2021 were elected at our November meeting. Current officers Craig Rench (President), Lynne Jones (Secretary-Treasurer) and Danessa Yaschuk (Vice President) all agreed to continue their roles. Each was nominated and seconded. There were no other nominations and all three were re-elected by unanimous vote. Jeff McMullan has consented to continue as our newsletter editor.

November Meeting Notes

Before the online meeting, "Bee-scussions" were held from 6:30-7:30.

President Craig Rench opened our online ZOOM meeting at 7:30 pm and welcomed the 26 who had logged in.

First, the election of officers for 2021 was conducted (see results reported above). After the election, President Craig Rench thanked everyone for their participation and

November Meeting Notes (continued)

patience this year. Craig then introduced the meeting's presenters, Danessa Yaschuk and Lynne Jones.

Danessa gave a presentation on making infused honey with dried herbs. A light, mild flavored honey is the best to use for infusing. Dried Herbs you might want to try alone or in combination are: rosemary, sage, thyme, mint, lemon balm, lavender, chamomile, rose petals and pine needles. Danessa uses 1-2 tablespoons of dried herbs to 8 ounces of honey. Some spices work well also: cinnamon sticks, vanilla beans, and star anise are good choices. The basic steps are: prepare the dried herbs; combine herbs and honey; infuse (at least 5 days, longer for a stronger flavor); strain; and store.

Lynne gave two presentations. The first was on making creamed honey or, as she prefers to call it, "set honey". Set honey is simply intentionally crystallized honey. Some of the factors that determine how fast honey naturally crystallizes are: the type of nectar the honey comes from, the water content, pollen/particles in the honey, storage temperature, storage container, and agitation. When honey crystallizes on its own, it can have an unpleasant texture (chunky, crunchy, or gritty), but when it is done intentionally it should have a smooth and creamy texture. Lynne provided the pros/cons to pasteurized vs. unpasteurized methods of making set honey and went through the steps for both. (The basic directions can be found at <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-Creamed-Honey>.)

Lynne's second presentation was on honey and beeswax gifts. She included recipes for a few things she has made lately and many photos, recipes, and links for ideas ranging from krupnik (Polish honey-spiced vodka) to honey taffy, unique candles and beard balm.

After the presentations, the drawing for door prizes was held. A lovely set of beeswax ornaments donated by Danessa were won by Laura Parnell. A hive tool donated by "Bee Man Dan" Jones was won by Norm Harris. A bee bracelet, also donated by Dan was won by Margaret Wrzesinski. A bottle of honey vodka donated by Lynne was won by Tracey Grimme.

Craig announced that our next meeting will be on Tuesday, January 12, almost certainly via ZOOM. If you need some help or advice before then, please feel free to contact one of the officers or go to the website and use the Contact tab, or just reply to a FBBA email you've received. We wished everyone safe and healthy holidays and we hope to see you again in January.

Treasurer's Report

Our November treasury balance was \$3,662.34. Our only expenses were the \$12.99 monthly email cost for November and December (\$25.98 total). The resulting balance is \$3,636.36 (\$3,586.36 in our Wells Fargo checking account, plus \$50.00 in cash to make change). A financial summary and year-end property inventory for 2020 is presented at right (we spent \$186.08 less than we took in during the year).

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association 2020 Financial Summary

Opening balance (Jan. 1, 2020)	\$3,450.28
Income	
2020 dues paid (112 at \$5.00)	\$560.00
2021 dues paid (11 at \$5.00)	\$55.00
donations	\$300.00
mentee fees	\$50.00
Total Income	\$965.00
Expenses	
website expenses	(\$388.47)
Texas Beekeepers Association dues	(\$50.00)
PA system repair shipping	(\$25.10)
Zoom subscription	(\$159.80)
SurveyMonkey services	(\$105.53)
bank posting error	(\$0.02)
speaker expenses	(\$50.00)
Total Expenses	(\$778.92)
Ending Balance (Dec. 31, 2020)	\$3,636.36

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association December 31, 2020 Property Inventory

<u>Description</u>	<u>Date Acquired</u>	<u>Initial Cost</u>	<u>Member Contact</u>
three framed beekeeping posters	various	unknown	Boone Holladay
Learning Hive	various	\$313.81	Jeff McMullan
red wagon	10/16/2009	\$45.98	Jeff McMullan
extracting equipment			Jim Lynch
extractor, stand, etc.	8/19/2011	\$583.33	
pin uncapper	11/8/2014	\$15.15	
honey refractometer	11/30/2016	<u>\$71.64</u>	
		\$654.97	
frame assembly gear	3/5/2012	\$157.88	Nancy Hentschel
25 frame assembly jig	5/8/2018	donation	Lynne Jones
outreach exhibits			
banners	11/7/2013	\$80.96	Jeff McMullan
posters and easels	2/8/2016	<u>\$193.30</u>	Jeff McMullan
		\$274.26	
public address system	6/21/2014	\$620.22	Lynne Jones
7/18 remaining swarm traps	11/3/2014	\$54.62	Boone Holladay
Mentoring Program supplies:			Lynne Jones
19 Beekeeper's Journals		\$136.99	
56 extra Journal fillers		\$61.04	
8 "The Beekeepers Handbook"		<u>\$190.00</u>	
		\$388.03	
gray cart for meetings	7/7/2016	\$121.25	Boone Holladay

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

Texas A&M
AgriLife Extension Service
Fort Bend County
1402 Band Road, Suite 100
Rosenberg, TX 77471

Boone Holladay

Boone Holladay

County Extension Agent—Horticulture
Fort Bend County
jb.holladay@ag.tamu.edu
281 342-3034 ext. 7034

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.



February, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

The Fort Bend Beekeepers Association was last able to meet in person on March 10, 2020. We usually meet 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 wonderful and sorely missed social time.)

Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status continues at RED or "High Risk". This has been in place since mid-December and is a dangerous condition as the number of infections soar and ICU beds fill up at unacceptable rates. Gatherings of more than 10 people is prohibited because of the public health emergency. See the announcement below for details of our online meeting in February.

Hopefully our meetings can return to normal soon, but is impossible to predict when we will be able to meet in person again.

There is some good news in all this mess: you can attend online beekeeper meetings being held almost anywhere in the world! Texas beekeeper groups have seized the opportunity to host online programs given by beekeeping experts sitting at their dining room table somewhere.

February meeting is online

Our February meeting will again be online:

Tues., Feb. 9, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

login: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85622635183>

**pwd=UFR1NFN6MWU1emhIYm
JDNG1EK1UrUT09**

Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183

Passcode: 275853

To connect by telephone (audio only), call 346 248-7799, Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183, Passcode: 275853.

An email with clickable instructions will go out ahead of the meeting. We plan to start the meeting at 7:30 after 30 minutes of "social time".

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: When am I supposed to super my hive?

An A: "Supers" and "Supering" are really fascinating terms related solely to beekeeping. They originated with the invention of removable frame hives in the 1800's. The

familiar Langstroth hive design allows beekeepers to manipulate the boxes in a hive stack to achieve some objective. Honey "supers" are *superimposed* on top of the hive stack for honey stores or future harvest (that is the way people talked 150 years ago).

So, the basic, and really quite simple, question is "what are we trying to achieve?". The answer is that the beekeeper is making sure that the colony has ample room to grow and store its honey reserves. Otherwise, the colony will be honey bound and is more likely to swarm. The bees may even backfill the brood nest with honey if they have no place left to store nectar. You don't want to lose half your work force to a swarm, especially if they may decide to move into your soffit or the neighbor's shed.

The honey bee colony's drive to gather nectar and make honey knows no bounds, so long as they can find comb to store it. In answering this question, supering becomes a "Goldilocks" decision: not too soon, not too late, but just at the right time.

Unlike cold porridge, there's actually not much downside to supering too early. You need to wait if the weather is still cold since adding a

super makes it more difficult for the bees to keep warm. An added super also adds to the colony's guard duty. This is especially important when using drawn comb. If the bees aren't able to protect the comb, it is susceptible to wax moths and a mess of webbing and frass (caterpillar poop).

It is common advice that you add a super when 80% (8 out of 10 frames) are occupied by bees. Even if the bees are not quite there yet, you should super ahead of the nectar flow. In the meantime, you should have your supers all ready to go.

HLSR

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo was shut down early last year because of COVID-19. This year it was first postponed and has now been cancelled altogether.

One of the most popular attractions at the rodeo is the AGVENTURE honey bee exhibit and many beekeepers really look forward to telling rodeo visitors all about honey bees and beekeeping. It is almost symbolic of starting an ambitious new year with our bees. Sadly, it is not happening in 2021.

More About COVID-19

Our February meeting marks a full year since the Fort Bend Beekeepers were able to meet in person. In ways big and small, everyone's life has been upset by this worldwide pandemic. Thousands of families have suffered greatly. Experts tell us that our only exit ramp here is the passage of time and rising "herd immunity" (where sufficient numbers are vaccinated, perhaps gained immunity in surviving the disease, or are unfortunately dead). The disease is no longer a pandemic when it (or some new variant) can no longer infect potential victims (history says that that is what eventually happens to all pandemics).

The statistics in Fort Bend County are scary. There have been almost 46,000 confirmed cases. About 37,000 have recovered while some 450 have died, most likely alone in the ICU struggling to survive on a ventilator. The County reported 315 new cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday (February 3), along with 19 recoveries and 4 deaths.

Warning! Opinion ahead: There are those that worry that the COVID-19 vaccine is some kind of "roll of the dice". Get it and perhaps suffer some ill effect. Or don't, and risk dying all alone in the ICU. It is important to understand that those that choose not to be vaccinated are counting on everyone else to control this disease, chancing that if they get infected they won't necessarily suffer an awful (for them and their family) outcome. The fact is that COVID-19 outcomes for you range from fatal to no symptoms at all. Not all victims die and most suffer symptoms little worse than the flu. Some never even know that they had it.

But don't forget that in getting vaccinated you are choosing to help protect everyone that you might have infected down the road. That is the way we put this situation behind us. Consider your decisions carefully.

Your editor has had his first shot.

February Meeting Notes

President Craig Rench opened the FBBA ZOOM meeting at 7:30 pm and welcomed the 31 who had logged in.

Vice-President Danessa Yaschuck made several announcements and then introduced our guest speakers Chari and James Elam with Texas Bee Supply.

The Elam's presentation topic was "Maximizing Honey Production". The factors in the amount of honey a colony will produce are: availability of bee forage area, weather (rain washes away nectar), queen's condition (healthy/young), colony's health (nutrition and disease-free), colony's population, and beekeeper's experience (action or reaction).

Large colonies disproportionally produce more honey than smaller colonies. A colony of 60,000 bees will produce more honey than two colonies of 30,000 each combined. To maximize your honey production, your colony needs to be at the optimal 60,000 when nectar flow starts.

To achieve this, keep your colony healthy all year, control pests, feed when needed, and keep a young queen (lays more eggs and less likely to swarm). In mid-February begin feeding 1:1 syrup and pollen to stimulate brood production. A technique called "pyramiding" can be used to encourage the queen to expand the brood nest up into the second box.

It is important to prevent swarming. A swarm results in the loss of 30-60% of your colony's bees! Keep room for the queen to lay by adding a box, reversing boxes, or reallocating resources (giving frames of capped brood or nectar/honey to another hive and replacing with drawn comb). You need to inspect every 7-10 days to check for swarm cells.

Continue feeding and letting them draw out new comb until nectar flow starts. It's better to super early rather than late. (Don't feed syrup with honey supers on.) Once they are bringing in nectar, a technique called "checkerboarding" can be used to stimulate faster drawing of comb and filling with nectar. As soon as a super is 70% full, add another one. Contin-

ue adding supers until they stop filling them. Extract the honey and return the wet frames to the hives for the bees to clean up. Remove supers if they are not refilling them.

During the July/August dearth, you may need to feed if they do not have much to forage on or adequate stores in the bottom boxes. Depending on the Fall nectar flow, you may need to feed to ensure your colony has 40-60 lbs of honey stored for the winter.

After Chari and James' presentation, Secretary-Treasurer Lynne Jones conducted the drawing for door prizes. A Perfect Pocket Hive Tool donated by Jeff McMullan was won by Bob Hentschel. A Forever Bee Hive Stand donated by John Volek (Brazos Bend Bee Farm) was won by Laura Parnell. Also donated by Dan "Bee Man Dan" Jones was a miniature smoker key chain and a pair of bumblebee socks won by Nancy Hentschel and Peg Turrentine respectively.

Craig reminded everyone of Bee-scussions on Thursday at 7:30 pm and then the meeting was adjourned.

Treasurer's Report

Our February treasury balance was \$3,636.36. Since our last report we collected \$40.00 in dues and spent \$12.99 for the monthly website cost and \$91.03 for domain name renewal and forwarding. The resulting balance is \$3,572.34 (\$3,522.34 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash for change).

TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION

Boone Holladay

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



March, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

It has been a full year since the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association was last able to meet in person on March 10, 2020. We usually meet 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 sorely missed social time.)

Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status is at ORANGE or "Moderate or Significant Risk". It was reduced from the red "High Risk" category on February 23 as the number of infections, hospitalizations and deaths have shown declines. And at press time, Gov. Abbott has announced the end of his mask order and plans to allow full reopening of businesses in Texas. COVID-19 vaccinations are becoming more available and hopefully the end of this mess is now in sight. (In the meantime, see the announcement below for details of our online meeting in March.)

Be aware that you can attend online beekeeper meetings being held almost anywhere in the world! Texas beekeeper groups have seized the opportunity to host online programs given by beekeeping experts sitting at their dining room table somewhere.

March meeting is online

Our March meeting will again be online:

Tues., March 9, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

login: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85622635183?>

pwd=UFR1NFN6MWU1emhIYmJDNG1EK1UrUT09

Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183

Passcode: 275853

To connect by telephone (audio only), call 346 248-7799, Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183 , Passcode: 275853.

An email with clickable instructions will go out ahead of the meeting. We plan to start the meeting at 7:30 after 30 minutes of "social time".

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: It's that time of the year again. How about an update on swarming, catching swarms, etc.? (I look forward to this every year: reading about it in our newsletter fires me up about going out after swarms.)

An A: I guess you are asking for a "dump" all about swarms. That's good because managing swarming is probably the beekeeper's most

important job. It goes a long way toward "safe, responsible, successful beekeeping". Bees that have moved into the neighbor's bird-house or their soffit is the sort of thing that result in beekeeping bans, either by local government or homeowners' associations. In fact, no one, even a beekeeper, wants to have to deal with a colony occupying anything other than a stack of hive boxes!

A honey bee colony is much like a single organism and it "multiplies by dividing", swarming to produce a new colony. The old queen departs with about half of the bees in search of a new home. The bees left behind complete the process of raising a new queen. New queen bees mate in flight and it is a perilous trip. If she does not return successfully mated, the old colony will dwindle and die. In fact, this is often the cause of colony failure.

Make sure that your hives have plenty of room and are not over crowded. At this time of the year you may be surprised at how many bees are in your hive. Preventing overcrowding helps convince the bees that their colony needs to get busy and just stay put.

Colonies that are preparing to swarm begin raising new queens while the old queen slows or stops laying eggs and slims down for her

upcoming departure. Even with these preparations, the old queen is not a strong flyer and the swarm usually clusters nearby while scout bees search out a new home.

Always be on the lookout for queen cells. Those on the bottom of frames near the entrance are called "swarm cells" for a reason and there are usually quite a few of them. On the other hand, there are usually only a few "supercedure cells" in the middle of a frame when the colony is replacing a dead, old, or failing queen.

It is a bad idea to destroy swarm cells to stop swarming. You can't always tell if the hive has already swarmed or they may swarm anyway. Without a new queen, the hive is doomed. The best way to deal with swarm cells is to split the hive. If you are unable to find the old queen, just make sure that both splits have queen cells. After a few weeks you should see new brood in both splits. If you don't, give them a little more time before combining the splits back into a single hive. If you really don't want or need another colony, there are always other members that will take them.

A few drops of lemongrass oil in a swarm trap really helps lure bees inside. It is usually easy to find among the essential oils on the spices aisle at the grocery store. Keep a

close eye on your traps and move the bees into a hive right away. If the swarm gets well established in your swarm trap, it becomes a chore to get them in a hive. An unoccupied hive with old comb will often attract a new colony, making a swarm capture really easy.

There is an adage that you “move a bee hive less than three feet or more than three miles”. This is all about the foragers returning to the old site and becoming completely disoriented. If when exiting the hive they recognize that it has been moved, the bees will reorient to its new location before continuing their flight. It is usually pretty easy to find a temporary site at another member’s beeyard. Close up the hive after dark when everyone is inside. If there are stragglers outside, a few puffs of smoke is all that it takes to get them in. Move the hive to its temporary site and after a week or so away from home you can move them back to where you want them.

Our club owns a number of swarm traps that are lent out to homeowners with bee problems from the Extension office in Rosenberg. When bees move in, a member comes after them. Sign up if you want to be on the list to retrieve a swarm trap or capture a swarm.

Swarms will cluster almost anywhere. They don’t hang around very long, so they should be captured ASAP. Old comb and a few drops of lemongrass oil make your box a welcome home for a captured swarm.

Other than those that have occupied an empty hive, the easiest swarms to catch are those on a low limb that can be carefully cut off and then shaken into a nuc or hive body with at least a frame or two of drawn comb. This is HUGE: a spray of insect repellent (like Off!) prevents the bees from returning to where they were clustered. A small spray (avoiding any bees) speeds thing up a lot. You can leave the swarm until nightfall if you want, but stragglers just return to where they came from.

February Meeting Notes

President Craig Rench opened the FBBA ZOOM meeting at 7:30 pm and welcomed the 33 members and visitors who had logged in.

There were no announcements, so Vice President Danessa Yaschuk introduced our guest speaker, her husband, partner-in-crime, and fellow FBBA member, Brent Yaschuk.

SweetNes Honey Beetique is now a preferred partner of Premier Bee Products. Brent gave a presentation on Premier’s plastic foundation and why it is superior to other plastic foundation available. Premier developed their foundation based on the cell size and mimics what the bees build naturally. By making Premier’s cell walls as close to that of natural comb, they have up to 10% more cells per sheet than what’s found on other foundation. Additionally, their cells are deeper which results in more honey production per frame. Premier only uses cappings wax to coat their foundation. (Cappings wax is the top layer of wax that’s removed so honey can be spun out in an extractor.) Premier waxed foundation is drawn out by the bees as much as 36% faster than other foundation, it’s easier to install because it is more flexible, it works with all uncapping and extraction methods, and it costs less. You can learn more about Premier foundation at their website: <https://www.premierbeeproducts.com/>. If you are interested in buying Premier foundation, go to Danessa and Brent’s website: <https://shop.sweetneshoney.com/collections/premier-bee-products>.

This year Brent and Danessa sent hives to California for almond pollination for the first time. Brent shared his experience in preparing 40 hives for transport and answered questions about the process. Prior to departure, the Texas Apiary Inspection Service must inspect the hives and give them a clean bill of health. The hives are double-deeps and each needs to have 6-8 frames full of bees in either the top or bottom box. It took them about four days where, during the day they would ‘grade’ the hives and in the evening Brent would take the chosen hives and move to cleaned pallets that are raised off the ground to keep

bugs from them. The pallets don’t touch the ground until they are placed in the almond orchard because insects can be cause for refusing to let them into California. Their 40 hives were piggy-backed with another commercial beekeeper’s hives. Each semi-truck carries 408 hives. Though beekeepers and orchard owners could deal directly, most use brokers that arrange the contracts. California instituted a 6% sales tax on the pollination fees this year. Additionally, a permit is required.

After the presentation, Secretary-Treasurer Lynne Jones conducted the drawing for door prizes. A Perfect Pocket Hive Tool™ donated by its inventor, Jeff McMullan was won by Kaleena Fisher. A yellow hive tool, donated by “Bee Man Dan” Jones was won by Ben Keel. Danessa donated one of her amazing beeswax candles which was won by Norm Harris. Lastly, Jeff McMullan won a You’re the Bee’s Knees plaque also donated by Dan.

After a show of hands, Craig announced that Bee-scussions would be the following week on Wed. Feb. 18th. The meeting was then adjourned.

Treasurer’s Report

Our February treasury balance was \$3,572.34. Since our last report we spent \$12.99 for the monthly email cost. The resulting balance is \$3,559.35 (\$3,509.35 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash).

**TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION**

Boone Holladay

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.



April, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

It has been over a year since the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association was last able to meet in person in March, 2020. We usually meet 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 sorely missed social time.)

Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status remains at ORANGE or "Moderate /Significant Risk". Fortunately the number of infections, hospitalizations and deaths have continued to show declines. COVID-19 vaccinations are becoming more available with the latest County vaccination count at 111,276. The County also reports that we have had 54,879 cases with 53,143 recoveries. Sadly we have suffered 579 COVID-19 deaths. Commissioner's Court extended their emergency declaration through April 30 so public access to County offices and facilities remains limited.

See the announcement below for details of our online meeting in April. Also, be aware that you can attend online beekeeper meetings being held almost anywhere in the world! Texas beekeeper groups have seized the opportunity to host online programs given by beekeeping experts sitting at their dining room table somewhere.

April meeting is online

Our April meeting will again be online:

Tues., April 13, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

login: [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85622635183?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85622635183?pwd=UFR1NFN6MWU1emh1YmJDNG1EK1UrUT09)

pwd=UFR1NFN6MWU1emh1YmJDNG1EK1UrUT09

Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183

Passcode: 275853

To connect by telephone (audio only), call 346 248-7799, Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183 , Passcode: 275853.

An email with clickable instructions will go out ahead of the meeting. We plan to start the meeting at 7:30 after 30 minutes of "social time".

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

It is said that if you ask a dozen beekeepers a question, you need to expect about 14 different answers. With that in mind, here is this month's Q (from one of our members) and an A:

Q: I'm really gonna start keeping bees this spring. I've got bees on order and boxes of stuff I've ordered has showed up on my doorstep. How about some guidance on what I've decided to get into?

An A: First, it's usually not a good idea to buy "beginner kits". It is better to look at what's in it and decide, item by item, if it is what you want. It is a good idea to enlist the help of an experienced beekeeper.

Your boxes of stuff need to contain basic tools (like a smoker and hive tool), protective gear, and hive components.

You will probably end up with several smokers and hive tools, but this outcome is less likely if you buy the last one first. The same holds for protective gear. A ventilated bee jacket is a better purchase than a veil and helmet for not a whole lot more money. You'll probably find that heavy leather gloves are clumsy for handling frames (in fact, working without gloves seldom results in a bee sting). Dishwashing gloves work well so long as you can find a pair that fits loosely. You may have to shop around to find some big ones.

Guess what....smokers get hot and rubber gloves can melt. Be sure to get a smoker with at least a wire heat guard. An added solid shield is a plus. Smokers come in different sizes and bigger is better (for a few more bucks) since it is more likely to hold enough fuel to complete the job at hand. Wooden smoker bellows are the traditional design. Brightly colored plastic

bellows are ugly (you have 13 more opinions coming for that one). You might give the wooden bellows a coat of varnish (they should come that way) since it makes it easy to wipe off the inevitable gunk. Some stain from the garage helps if you are in a bellows beauty contest.

Never say never, but bees seldom fail to draw out embossed beeswax foundation. Plastic foundation is a whole lot easier for the beekeeper, but the bees sometimes won't cooperate. An interesting problem arises when five frames from a nuc (on wax foundation) are introduced to a hive body with five frames of undrawn plastic foundation. The bees don't understand. The first solution is to give the plastic a heavy coat of beeswax but they sometimes remove the wax and use it elsewhere.

We usually buy unassembled wooden ware. The boxes should go together with top quality wood glue. Check the hand holds and use a framing square to make sure you have it put together right. Caulk even the tiniest crack, then use a top quality primer and a couple of coats of house paint. The bees really don't care what color the boxes are, but white is traditional and it's cooler for the bees in August.

Assembling frames is incredibly tedious, which is why the club owns frame assembly gear that you

can borrow. Be sure to use good quality wood glue when assembling frames since they can be damaged if they prove difficult to pry loose. If you have access to an air compressor, a pneumatic brad nailer or stapler is a huge help. Plastic foundation just pops in, but embossed wax must be secured with a “wedge”. A brad nailer helps this go much quicker.

Reporting in....

Past President and long time member Jack Richardson has reported in from Caddo Lake on the Texas side near Shreveport, La. (where he started with bees in 1966). His mom is now 99 and he still gets back to Fort Bend helping care for her. We hope she continues to enjoy good health. Member Michael McLean took over Jack’s hives in our area. Jack is building cabins on the lake and trying to get going with bees again. Before you complain too much about our recent cold snap, he said that he had to deal with -2° F, 8” of snow and ice on the lake. He also reported only a minor tsunami from the recent earthquake in the area.

March Meeting Notes

After 30 minutes of social time, President Craig Rench opened the FBBA ZOOM meeting at 7:30 pm and welcomed the 45 members and visitors who had logged in.

Vice-President Danessa Yaschuk introduced our guest presenter, Chris Barnes. Chris is the owner of Cornerstone Honey Bees in Bryan, Texas and the Youth Program Director of Brazos Valley Beekeepers Association.

Recently, Chris was instrumental in the formation of the Texas Association of Professional Bee Removers, a 501(c)6 trade organization. Interest in forming the organization came up in 2019 due to some Texas legislation (which ultimately did not pass). In addition to representing and providing benefits to its members, the association’s goal is to educate the public about bees and live removals. There are two levels of membership: Swarm Capture Spe-

cialist (\$25.00/yr.) and Colony Removal Professional (\$50.00/yr.) You can find more info at: <https://txapbr.org/>

Chris’ program topic was “How to Prevent Swarming”. Swarming is the honey bee colony’s natural means of reproduction. The urge to swarm is instinctive and as beekeepers, the best we can do is to manage and control the behavior to meet our needs and objectives. The types of swarms are: reproductive swarms and ‘bad hive conditions swarms’ (commonly known as absconding). Reproductive swarms usually happen in the Spring from March to June. The bees have engorged themselves on honey in preparing to swarm and are docile. The Bad Hive Condition swarms have left the hive due to flooding, mold, lack of food, infestation by varroa mites, hive beetles or other pests/disease. Bad hive conditions can be prevented or addressed before the colony reaches the point of leaving the hive. Once a colony has decided to make a reproductive swarm, it can’t be stopped. You have four options: 1) control WHEN your hive swarms 2) create an artificial swarm by splitting the hive 3) allow to swarm but catch them with swarm traps, or 4) let nature take its course and simply allow your hive to swarm and find a new home. Although some advocate letting nature take its course, you are losing a lot of your bees and if you live in town, the bees might make a home in your neighbor’s soffit. For the first three options, you need to understand and address the factors that trigger reproductive swarming. Congestion in the hive can be controlled by giving more space or transferring brood to a smaller colony. If you suspect reduced levels of QMP (queen mandibular pheromone) as the queen gets old, replace the queen. Increase of food resources coming into the hive and longer daylight hours are factors you can’t do much about, but you can recognize when they are happening. Once you see queen cells (not queen cups), the urge to swarm is in place and if you see capped queen cells, swarming is imminent or may have already occurred. Either way, the best thing to do is to split the hive and always take the queen to

the new hive box. If you do not want an additional hive, after splitting, destroy all the queen cells in the old hive. Allow them to remain queenless for 3-4 days. Then go back and ensure they are queenless, destroy all new queen cells, and then do a newspaper combine with the ‘new’ hive on top of the old hive. The third option is to catch your swarm in a trap (which is a good plan even if you are taking action to prevent swarms), because try as you might, sometimes swarms still happen. (Also google Russian Scion.)

Next, Secretary-Treasurer Lynne Jones, drew for door prizes. Scott Smith won a Smoker Stopper, Andrew Marlowe won a Perfect Pocket Hive Tool, Gerrald Verran won a beekeeper key ring and Laura Parnell won a Smoker key ring.

After a show of hands, Craig announced that Bee-scussions would be the following week on Thursday, March 18. The meeting was then adjourned.

Treasurer’s Report

Our March treasury balance was \$3,559.35. Since our last report we collected \$15.00 in dues. We spent \$12.99 for the monthly email cost and made a \$50.00 donation to the Hunt County Beekeepers (Barnes’ speaker donation). The resulting balance is \$3,511.36 (\$3,461.36 in the 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.



May, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

We are excited to announce that our May 11 meeting will be both in-person and online. In-person will be at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469 (not far from the Community Center where we used to meet). It is a fully equipped facility with a great setting for our meetings. ZOOM contact information is the same as before (an email with links will go out soon). Of course there will be conditions due to COVID-19, so see the announcement below for details. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of sorely missed, but socially distanced, social time.

On April 13 Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status was reduced to YELLOW or "Low/Moderate Risk" as the number of vaccinations has grown and infections, hospitalizations and deaths continue to show declines. Fort Bend's COVID-19 vaccination count is nearing 200,000 and growing every day! We hope that everyone decides that getting vaccinated is a good idea since the scariest part of this disease is its easy transmission and huge uncertainty of outcome: few symptoms, the ICU or worse. The County also reports that we have had 57,833 cases with 56,227 recoveries. Sadly we have suffered 615 COVID-19 deaths in Fort Bend. "Low/Moderate Risk" allows us to resume careful contact with others as we look forward to being able to resume normal contacts. (Perhaps GREEN is in sight!)

May meeting

The May 11 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will be both online and "in-person" beginning at 7:00 pm. The ZOOM setup instructions remain the same. We plan to be ZOOMing from our in-person meeting at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469. The LAR gate will be open until 8 pm. If you arrive after the gate has closed, the keypad code is 2337 (bees). This code will only work during FBBA meetings. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of social time.

There are a number of important requirements due to COVID-19:

- Every person in attendance must complete and turn in a COVID-19 Screening Form. If possible, please bring the completed form with you. Check your email before the meeting for the Screening Form and other important information.

- Masks must be worn while in the Long Acres Ranch (LAR) building. If you don't feel well or have a medical condition that prevents you from wearing a mask, we ask that you please do not attend the meeting.

Don't forget to bring \$5.00 to pay your dues for 2021.

- Maintain 6-foot social distancing, including in the Sign-In and Dues Payment line.

- No refreshments will be provided. Because of the mask requirement, eating in the building will not be permitted and we ask that you please refrain from drinking while in the building as well.

We ask for your patience with these COVID-19 precautions. Like you, our association's leaders look forward to returning to long-winded mask-free conversations. We are grateful for the efforts by AgriLife's Brandy Rader and Boone Holladay in arranging for the Long Acres Ranch meeting. We also thank October Smith, Manager and the LAR staff for accommodating us; we look forward to being a resource and asset to their educational program and mission of promoting the appreciation of nature in Fort Bend County.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: A neighbor called to tell me that there was a swarm in his tree. When I went to check it out, it was the size of a football and I could see comb! It was about 20 ft above the ground so I told him that there was nothing I could do. He wanted to

know who he could call so I told him that I'd get back to him. My wife says that I have way too many bee books, but none of them said anything about open-air colonies. Google couldn't find anything either. Help!

An A: Open-air or "aerial" hives are not all that uncommon so it is a bit surprising that little reference material could be found. Unable to do our usual research, we'll have to settle with what we think we know.

Swarming is the way honey bee colonies "multiply by dividing". About half the bees and the old queen leave the existing colony to set up a new home (a new queen will emerge from her queen cell in the old hive within a day or two).

The old queen is not a strong flyer, so the swarm usually settles somewhere relatively near their old home. They can gather almost anywhere, even on the ground (some call them a "pancake swarms" for obvious reasons). Most often we find swarms clustered in a bush or tree or on a wooden fence or the side of a building. (You should always look around to see if you can determine where a swarm came from since a cutout may be waiting.)

It is the job of scout bees to find a new home for the swarm as the cluster waits to be guided away.

Research has shown that honey bees have a strong preference for cavities about the size of a deep Langstroth box (duh?). Other factors include the nature of the entrance, like obstructions, how high it is above the ground, its size, etc. It is interesting that research shows that the scouts have little concern about proximity to the old hive.

Sometimes the scout bees are unable to find a suitable nest site and the bees begin constructing comb out in the open. It is not unusual to see signs of this when capturing a swarm that has been there for a while. New white wax can be seen affixed to the surface after a swarm has been removed. If need be, the bees continue their work out in the open building comb to raise brood and store pollen, nectar, and honey. Winter survival of open-air hives is low since they don't tend to store much honey and it is quickly consumed trying to stay warm. Last winter's severe cold snap was likely brutal for aerial hives.

April Meeting Notes

After 30 minutes of social time, President Craig Rench opened the online meeting at 7:30 pm and welcomed the 28 members and visitors who had logged in.

Vice-President Danessa Yaschuk made several announcements regarding upcoming events:

May 29: Buzz Fest at BeeWeaver in Navasota

June 19: TBA Virtual Summer Clinic. Dr. Tom Seely will be the special guest speaker.

November 5-7: TBA Fall Convention will be in-person and held at Moody Gardens in Galveston.

Danessa then introduced our first speaker, Carson Bryant. Carson has been a member of FBBA since 2017 and a longtime fan of honey bees since being introduced to beekeeping by his mother many years ago in Dallas. Carson shared with us a video that covered his journey in developing the ArkHive, his floating bee

hive system for flood-prone apiaries. After the video, Carson answered questions and several members were interested in talking to Carson further.

Our next speaker was Lynne Jones, our Secretary-Treasurer. Lynne provided details on another major change in the rules for beekeepers selling honey in Texas.

Honey is unique in that it is the only human food directly produced by an insect. It falls in a "never never land" of food safety rules. Like farm products it can be considered a "raw agricultural product" that is not changed in any way by the beekeeper as it is removed from the hive, extracted from the comb, sieved or strained then bottled, labeled and sold. In August 2018 the federal Food and Drug Administration weighed in, declaring officially that honey is indeed a "raw agricultural product" and should meet rules that apply to farm products.

Farm products are not the only type of food with their own niche in Texas food safety law. "Cottage foods" are on a very detailed list of products that can be produced and sold from a home kitchen. Simply put, food that can be safely stored at room temperature may be produced and sold from a home kitchen as "cottage food". All other foods must be produced in an FDA-registered food manufacturing facility. The facility must be licensed and inspected by the Texas Department of State Health Services and the product must meet TDSHS packaging, storage and labeling requirements.

The fact is that beekeepers have paid little attention to all this except for those that show up in Austin every two years trying to get laws passed. It seems that every time we turn around some new rule suddenly appears. The most recent allowed "small scale honey producers" to market up to 2,500 lbs (!!!) of honey with little or no food safety requirement beyond basic labeling and meeting onerous rules for the transaction itself.

In short, as long as it is pure and raw, beekeepers can now sell bottled honey to anyone in Texas, including grocery stores and restaurants with few restrictions.

More details can be found in an article Lynne wrote for the May edition of Texas Bee Supply's online magazine. Rather than include all the details here, you can read Options for Selling Honey in Texas, part 1 at <https://texasbeesupply.com/blogs/texas-bee-supply-monthly-magazine>.

Next, Lynne again conducted a door prize drawing for a Perfect Pocket Hive Tool, donated by Jeff McMullan which was won by Ron Rogers. (Door prizes won in 2021 have not been mailed, but will be distributed when in-person meetings resume.)

After a brief discussion, Craig announced that Bee-scussions would be on Thursday, April 29. The meeting was then adjourned.

Treasurer's Report

Our April treasury balance was \$3,511.36. Since then we collected \$10.00 in dues and a \$15.00 donation. We spent \$12.99 for the monthly email cost and \$42.99 for the annual web site domain name renewal. The resulting balance is \$3,480.38 (\$3,430.38 in our 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.



June, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

Our June 8 meeting will again be both in-person and online. In-person will be at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469 (where we met last month, not far from the Community Center where we used to meet). ZOOM contact information is the same as before (an email with clickable links will go out soon). We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of socially distanced social time.

Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status is still at YELLOW or "Low/Moderate Community Risk" as the number of vaccinations continues to grow and infections, hospitalizations and deaths show weekly declines. There have been almost 213,000 vaccinations at Fort Bend County sites and the number is growing every day! The County also reports that we have had 59,032 cases with 58,142 recoveries. Sadly there have been 652 COVID-19 deaths in Fort Bend. "Low/Moderate Risk" allows us to resume careful contact with others as we look forward to being able to resume normal contacts. (Perhaps GREEN is in sight!)

The scariest part of this disease is its easy transmission and huge uncertainty of outcome. You may have few symptoms. Or you can end up in the ICU or even worse. And a few days in ICU can wipe out your bank account even if you have good health insurance. We hope that everyone has decided that getting vaccinated is a good idea.

June meeting

The June 8 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will again be both online and "in-person" beginning at 7:00 pm. The ZOOM setup instructions remain the same. We plan to be ZOOMing from our in-person meeting at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469. The LAR gate will be open until 8 pm. If you arrive after the gate has closed, the keypad code is 2337 (bees). This code will only work during our meeting. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of social time.

While there are no longer any special COVID-19 precautions, reasonable caution is probably still a good idea. Please "mask-up" for the in-person meeting and practice social distancing as well. If you don't feel well or have a medical condition that concerns you, we ask that you join the ZOOM meeting rather than attending in person.

If you haven't ante'd up yet, be sure to bring a \$5.00 bill to pay your dues for 2021.

We are grateful to the Fort Bend County AgriLife Extension office and the LAR staff for arranging the Long Acres Ranch meeting.

May Meeting Notes

After 30 minutes of social time, President Craig Rensch opened the FBBA in-person and ZOOM meeting at 7:30 pm by leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance. He then welcomed the members and visitors. 24 attended in person and an additional 9 attended via Zoom (33 total).

October Smith, the manager at Long Acres Ranch, was introduced and she shared with us a little on the background of The Ranch and what its mission is in the Fort Bend community.

Vice-President Danessa Yaschuk made several announcements regarding upcoming events:

May 29: Buzz Fest at Bee Weaver in Navasota 11:00 am - 3:00 pm, \$5 per person, 3 and under are free. Attendance will be limited to 1500 and tickets are required. Purchase tickets online at beeweaver.com

June 19: Texas Beekeepers Association Virtual Summer Clinic. Dr. Tom Seely will be the special guest speaker. Tickets will be available at texasbeekeepers.org

TBA has also announced that this year's Fall Convention will be in-person and held at Moody Gardens in Galveston. Mark your calendar

for Friday November 5th through Sunday November 7th.

June 5: Honey Bee Jubilee in New Ulm. 8:30 am - 3:00 pm. Admission is free. If you want to be an exhibitor or vendor, go to: www.NewUlmTexas.com

Danessa then went over *In the Bee-yard* for May and June.

Now: Continue to check for signs of swarming. Add another box when bees are working on 6-8 frames. Check honey supers weekly. Do not wait until one is full to add another. Or, swap out capped frames for empty ones. If bees are making honey, leave the brood box alone. No medications while honey supers are on unless the product specifically says it is okay. Check swarm traps. Plan ahead for the supplies and containers you will need for extracting and bottling honey.

Get Ready: (Normally) The main nectar flow will end in June or the first part of July. (But who knows this year.) The honey harvest can begin in June as soon as you have frames of honey that are at least 3/4 capped. Plan to harvest honey when the weather is dry and warm. New colonies can still be started in the month of June, but they will need to be fed more than those started in

April because the major nectar flow is normally over.

For our Ask a Bunch of Beeks: a Question and Answer Session, we had three Beeks on the panel. Craig Rench, Steve Brackmann and Jeff McMullan answered all questions with the ease that comes from years of successful beekeeping.

After the Question and Answer Session, Craig and Lynne conducted the door prize drawings. "Bee Man Dan" Jones donated a Bee brush, 2 queen clips, and a Bee-theme bracelet. Lynne Jones donated Swarm Lures; and "SweetNes" Nes Yaschuk donated a 12 Volt Jump Starter. If you previously won a door prize at a Zoom meeting and have not received it, you can pick it up at the in-person meeting.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: The smoker defines a beekeeper. There is certainly more to it than I probably realize.

A: You have discovered that smokers are indeed ingenious!

Honey bees are woodland creatures. The scent of smoke in the air may mean the forest is on fire so the bees prepare to leave their home by engorging on honey (it may be a while before they can eat again). They are calmed by a full belly and smoke-filled air covers the scent of alarm pheromones. Beekeepers can then go about their business with little objection from the bees. (There are cave paintings of primitive humans using smoke while robbing honey.)

Our familiar cone-topped smoker came along with the "golden age of beekeeping" that followed Langstroth's invention of removable frame hives. Its function is to burn fuel with little oxygen until a puff from the bellows sends a smoke cloud into the air. Large volumes of smoke aren't necessary. The bees get the message from only a few light puffs at the hive entrance and below the cover. Try not to get

in a hurry, give the smoke a minute or two to work.

A smoker functions somewhat like a chimney. Air (and smoke) heated by the fire rises to exit the funnel shaped top. A small amount of fresh air is drawn into the small hole in the bottom of the can to keep the fire going. A grate keeps the fuel from settling to shut off the air hole (some designs include a perforated internal can that serves the same purpose). The size of the hole is important since we only want just enough air to keep it lit.

A puff from the bellows blows extra air into the hole in the smoker can and out comes a cloud of smoke to calm the bees.

If a smoker falls on its side, the drafting action stops and the fire goes out. That can be a good thing if you are finished working bees and you want to save any remaining fuel for next time. A stopper (maybe a wine cork or a stick or a traditional corn cob) can also be used to put out the fire.

Traditionally, smokers were made of copper which really didn't work all that well since it doesn't like being repeatedly heated and cooled. It gets soft and is then prone to damage. Copper was replaced by tinned steel, but the fire inside caused the rust-preventing tin to fail and the steel to corrode. Every beekeeper's treasure collection should include a copper heirloom and an ugly rusted tin smoker.

Most smokers today are made from stainless steel sheet that stands up well in this service. The smoker gets really hot and a heat guard is an important design feature. In fact, it should be a rule that every smoker should have heat guard(s). Even with a shield, be especially careful if you use dishwashing gloves. They are easy to clean and prevent stings well, but will melt a hole if they contact the hot smoker can.

The bellows has a spring inside that pushes it back open after each puff. Some smokers have leather bellows

but "naugahyde" works well. In fact, sometimes bad bees have been known to attack leather bellows and cover it with stings! Some bellows are made entirely of plastic and they seem to work just fine. It is a good idea to see if replacement bellows are available when deciding which smoker to buy.

Almost anything can work as smoker fuel. Cotton lint from the roadside near Needville is favored by some. Leaves, dry grass or pine needles are good. Wood shavings or hamster bedding, burlap or old rags, whatever.

Lighting a smoker can be a chore. A propane torch makes it easy. Start with an inch or so of fuel then top it off once it starts to burn. Hold the smoker away from you when puffing the bellows so a wayward spark doesn't burn a hole in your veil. One great trick (attributed to Ed Veiseh) is to aim the torch at the outside of the can with the lid closed and puff when you see smoke. Voila!

Treasurer's Report

Our May treasury balance was \$3,480.38. Since then we collected \$105.00. Our only expense was \$12.99 for the monthly email cost. The resulting balance is \$3,572.39 (\$3,522.39 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash to make change).

**TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION**

Boone Holladay

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.



July, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

Our July 13 meeting will again be both in-person and online. In-person will be at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469 (where we met last month, not far from the Community Center where we used to meet). ZOOM contact information is the same as before (an email with clickable links will go out soon). We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of socially distanced social time.

Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status is still at YELLOW or "Low/Moderate Community Risk" as the number of vaccinations continues to grow and infections, hospitalizations and deaths show weekly declines. More than 219,000 have been vaccinated at Fort Bend County sites and the number is growing every day! The County also reports that we have had 60,007 cases with 58,919 that have recovered. Sadly there have been 714 COVID-19 deaths in Fort Bend. "Low/Moderate Risk" allows us to resume careful contact with others as we look forward to being able to resume normal contacts. (Perhaps GREEN is in sight!)

The scariest part of this disease is its easy transmission and huge uncertainty of outcome. You may have few symptoms. Or you can end up in the ICU or even worse. And a few days in ICU can wipe out your bank account even if you have good health insurance. We hope that everyone has decided that getting vaccinated is a good idea.

July meeting

The July 13 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will again be both online and "in-person" beginning at 7:00 pm. We plan to be ZOOMing from our in-person meeting at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469. A clickable ZOOM link will go out by email. The LAR gate will be open until 8 pm. If you arrive after the gate has closed, the keypad code is 2337 (bees). This code will only work during our meeting. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of social time.

While there are no longer any special COVID-19 precautions, reasonable caution is probably still a good idea. If you don't feel well or have a medical condition that concerns you, we ask that you join the ZOOM meeting rather than attending in person.

We are grateful to the Fort Bend County AgriLife Extension office and the LAR staff for arranging the Long Acres Ranch meeting.

June Meeting Notes

After 30 minutes of social time, Vice President Danessa Yaschuck opened our in-person and ZOOM

meeting. Danessa reminded everyone of the TBA Virtual Summer Clinic on June 19 and then introduced our guest speaker Jacobo Campuzano who joined us via Zoom.

Jacobo is an instructor at the University of Antioquia in Medellin, Colombia. He teaches ecology, biology, environmental management, and wildlife management. He and his wife, Claudia are the owners of the Aburuma Jungle Bees, focused on using the natural Columbia rainforest for production of honey by Africanized bees. They also are working to develop a strain of Africanized bees with traits of gentleness, productivity and varroa resistance.

Jacobo shared with us some of the history of Africanized bees in Colombia and how the climate and topography has resulted in four primary 'stocks' there. The hot-humid lowland bees are higher in honey production, the high elevation and dry climate bees are major pollen gatherers, the bees in hot and arid climate produce honey, and the jungle bees are known as 'brood monsters' that make fast-growing colonies. Africanized bees reached Columbia in the mid-70s and in only about 10 years had spread throughout the country. Prior to this, bee-

keeping was limited, mainly hobbyists, with only a few apiaries over 100 hives. Not surprisingly, when the Africanized bees took over beekeeping was greatly diminished. The government and educational institutions have not invested much in research, but in the last twenty years or so, small-commercial beekeeping is starting to take hold and private projects have started breeding programs. There is also interest in promoting beekeeping as an income for people in remote areas. Though most known for their excessive defensiveness, Africanized bees seem to be heartier than European bees, with high levels of varroa resistance. There are obvious challenges in working with Africanized bees, challenges in the breeding program (the need for instrumental insemination), and even challenges with working in Colombia (limited access to knowledge, technology, and equipment). However, using the selection process to breed a gentler bee, results can be seen in as few as 10 generations. Due to time restrictions, members only had time for a few questions of Jacobo.

Danessa and Lynne conducted the door prize drawings. Thank you to those who provided prizes and congratulations to the many winners.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: I would like for one of your members to put beehives on my property. Can you help?

A: This is a question that is frequently asked though it is not usually from one of our members. The underlying issue is most likely to gain or preserve an "ag exemption" to cut property taxes. An internet search for "Texas beekeeping ag valuation" yields many website links, but few provide basic information about how property taxes work.

For the most part, it is property taxes that fund schools and local government including roads, bridges, law enforcement, and emergency services. They are also used to satisfy bond debt for things like parks, levee construction, new schools, etc. These taxes are sometimes referred to as "ad valorem taxes", literally meaning that they are "based on value". The property value used to calculate taxes can be its actual market value or some lower value allowed by law. Government must go on, so any property tax "savings" by one taxpayer just shifts the burden to others.

Any specific questions about property tax valuation should be raised with the Fort Bend County Central Appraisal District. Understand that these folks don't assess or collect taxes. Their job is to establish value. The County, School Districts, Levee Districts, etc. set the tax rate (sometimes referred to as "millage"); they do not collect taxes. Taxes are collected by the County Tax Assessor/Collector. For anyone wishing to understand their property taxes, this whole system seems designed to create an adolescent "go ask your mother" situation. Tax rates are set by elected officials, so you'll have to deal with them at the ballot box. The tax collector is elected too, but they just multiply the millage times valuation and send you the bill.

Except for at the ballot box, the only property tax impact an individual can make is in the value set by their appraisal district. Our county appraisal district folks are very helpful when it comes to understanding how property is appraised. It is an especially good idea to visit with them if you are contemplating purchase of rural property. What is the property's market value appraisal? Is the property currently ag exempt? What must be done for it to remain in ag?

The intent of having ag valuation is noble: preventing increasing ad valorem taxes due to rising property values from "taxing farmers off the land". Ag valuation for cropland, pasture, timber production, etc. each has its own valuation based on the potential value of crops or livestock produced. "Beekeeping" seems completely different in that it is an activity. Fallow cropland or a pasture without cows is still in ag use. "Beekeeping" without bees isn't.

A 500 acre ranch can be appraised as "native pasture", but a subdivided piece of "native pasture" may not be considered large enough to support livestock. Property currently "in ag" can stay there, but if it can't, five years of "rollback taxes" become due. This is important to know: it is the sum of previous tax reductions attributed to ag use and can amount to nearly 10% of the property's market value (5 years x 2%/year). Ag valuation benefited the previous owner but the purchaser gets the rollback bill if the sale results in ag exemption going away. Similarly, property must be in ag use for five of the preceding six years to gain ag valuation. When your request for ag valuation is denied, or, worse yet, when you get a surprise tax bill (sometimes a year or more after buying rural property) it is too late to start worrying about property taxes.

Taxable market value is the sum of land value plus improvements less any exemptions provided by law. The most significant exemption is for one's "homestead". If someone

lives on rural property, one acre of the tract is the usual size considered as their homestead. The remaining acreage may be taxed at a much lower ag valuation if it is in ag use.

By law, "beekeeping" activity can significantly reduce a landowner's tax bill on 5 - 20 acres. But if a beekeeper fails to "perform" and the ag valuation is lost, the five years' "rollback taxes" become due. After having lost their ag exemption, the landowner would have to pay market value property tax for five years before they can get it back. Any beekeeper in such an asymmetric situation should be very careful. Beyond liability for beestings and wayward swarms, the beekeeper could be viewed as responsible for a huge tax liability. It would work best for property owners to do the "beekeeping" or, at the very least, own the hives. Any formal "beekeeping" agreement, especially one that tries to accept (or deny) any liability is probably a bad idea.

Treasurer's Report

Our June treasury balance was \$3,572.39. Since then we collected \$75.00 in dues and \$100.00 in donations. Our expenses were \$12.99 for the monthly email cost and \$233.82 annual website fee. The resulting balance is \$3,500.58 (\$3,450.58 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash to make change).

**TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION**

Boone Holladay

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.



August, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

Our August 10 meeting will again be both in-person and online. In-person will be at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469 (where we met last month, not far from the Community Center where we used to meet). ZOOM contact information is the same as before (an email with clickable links will go out soon). We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of socially distanced social time.

More than 221,000 have been vaccinated at Fort Bend County sites, but our COVID-19 infections have taken a scary uptick. The County also reports that we have had 63,530 confirmed cases with 59,416 that have recovered. Sadly the number of COVID-19 deaths in Fort Bend has grown to 746. We all need to continue being careful about contacts with others. Members that have not been vaccinated are strongly advised to attend our August meeting online.

New variants of this disease continue to crop up. The vaccines don't appear to be 100% effective, but they do prevent hospitalization and death. COVID-19 is easily transmitted and carries huge uncertainty of outcome. You may have few symptoms, but if you have symptoms resembling a cold, you should self-quarantine and get tested for the virus. If you do contract the disease, a few days in ICU can wipe out your bank account even if you have good health insurance. This disease will continue to be a huge problem until virtually everyone has been vaccinated (or recovered from it).

August meeting

The August 10 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will again be both online and "in-person" beginning at 7:00 pm. We plan to be ZOOMing from our in-person meeting at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469. A clickable ZOOM link will go out by email. The LAR gate will be open until 8 pm. If you arrive after the gate has closed, the keypad code is 2337 (bees). This code will only work during our meeting. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of social time.

If you haven't been vaccinated, don't feel well or have a medical condition that concerns you, we ask that you join the ZOOM meeting rather than attending in person.

Our guest speaker for August is Tony Andric. Tony is a beekeeper in Lockhart and will be coming to speak in person. His presentation is: The Untamed Bee: Methods to Managing Defensive Colonies. This is an important topic since managing bad bees is critical to being a safe, responsible beekeeper.

Thanks to the AgriLife Extension office and the LAR staff for arranging the Long Acres Ranch meeting.

July Meeting Notes

We had 26 in-person and 7 Zoom attendees at our July meeting. After social time, President Craig Rench opened the meeting.

Vice President Danessa Yaschuk announced two important upcoming events: The Brazos Valley Bee School is on September 25th, in Bryan, Texas. The cost is \$70/person, \$125/couple. For ages 12-17 the cost is \$15 if attending with a parent/guardian. The fee includes a Chicken Fajita Lunch. For more info and to register go to: www.bvbeeks.org

The Texas Beekeepers Association Fall Convention will be at Moody Gardens in Galveston, Friday November 5 through Sunday November 7. The annual convention isn't usually this close to home, so consider attending. For more info and to register go to: www.texasbeekeepers.org.

Danessa also went over the "In the Bee-yard" for July and August. You should get your honey harvest done in July. Despite all the rain this year, July and August are usually hot and often dry. Ensure bees have a consistent supply of water. Providing shade and extra ventilation is a good idea. There is little for bees to forage on in August and

colonies can be very cranky during the nectar dearth. Bees can starve in August so feeding may be needed. August is the time to treat for varroa. Varroa mite indication can be from using sticky boards, powdered sugar rolls, or checking drone larvae. For an accurate count use an alcohol wash (if the varroa count is 5 per 100 bees, treat immediately). Consider re-queening in the fall for a healthy hive entering the winter. If you plan to purchase a queen, make arrangements in advance.

The presentation, given by our officers was "Time to Pull Honey!" and covered all the ways to extract honey and the equipment that can be used to do so. The club's extracting equipment was there for members to see and members had a good discussion and shared tips on getting bees out of supers, equipment preferences, and clean up afterwards. Unfortunately, for those attending via Zoom, we experienced some technical difficulty and they did not have good visual or audio of the presentation. (If anyone would like to receive the PowerPoint slideshow, send a request to info@fortbendbeekeepers.org)

Danessa and Lynne conducted the door prize drawings. Thank you to those who provided prizes and congratulations to the winners.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: I know that swarm season is about over, but I want to give swarm capture a try. I'm new at beekeeping and a bit apprehensive about this.

A: Though we generally think of swarm season as being in early spring, swarms can happen at almost any time of the year. Bees form "reproductive swarms" in the spring to produce a new colony while "absconding swarms" are abandoning an unsuitable nest site. We usually see a jump in absconding in August and September. Reproductive swarms that moved into someone's attic may find that their home is unsuitable because it just gets too hot for them to deal with.

The fact is, catching a swarm is not something that requires a lot of beekeeping skill. Almost anyone with protective gear that has been around bees is usually ready to take on a swarm capture. Of course it is probably easier with the guidance of an experienced beekeeper.

What's needed? Probably "what's not needed?" is a more important first question. Using your smoker is a bad idea since we want the bees to freely communicate by scent to find your box. At the scent of smoke, bees want to engorge on honey to be ready to leave since their home may be on fire. It just makes sense that you don't want to hide scents or encourage the bees to leave.

Aggressive behavior in bees is a defense mechanism to protect their home. Swarms are usually quite docile since they are "homeless". Nonetheless, protective gear is a good idea to avoid stings.

You'll need a box to put the bees in and a nuc works best since you can leave the bees inside to get established. Drawn comb is far better than empty foundation which is better than nothing. Without frames, the bees will quickly make a mess building comb for their new home.

A small pump sprayer from the beauty supply store is almost essential. Fill it with sugar syrup with a splash of feeding stimulant with essential oils. You can use something like Honey B Healthy or just make your own. If it is accessible, spray down the swarm. It makes them sticky and less prone to fly. They are probably hungry so they may quickly begin feeding on the syrup. It's a good idea to spray your comb/foundation too since the scent will help attract the bees.

Another essential is a can of insect repellent like Off!. Never spray any bees with it, but if you spray where the bees were clustered they won't go back there and enter your box instead. You can also use it to keep the cluster from moving higher by spraying a paper towel and placing it above the swarm. Bees that cluster in small brushy live oaks in new neighborhoods are particularly difficult to capture. You can use the paper towel trick to push the bees down for more easy access. In fact, you can push them all the way to your box that way.

A small folding tv table is handy for keeping your box at a working level. Remove a few frames then shake or brush as many bees as possible inside. (Wooden nucs are pretty heavy, cardboard or plastic ones are easier to handle.) Don't close up the box right away; leave it open to attract more bees. Workers have a scent gland in their abdomen and you will see bees with their butts up and wings fanning to spread their scent so others know where everyone went. Give the wayward workers a few minutes to reunite inside your box.

It is usually not worthwhile to search for the swarm's queen. If it is a "pancake swarm" (on the ground) you can usually just put the nuc near them and they will begin marching in. You have little else to do while this is going on, so you may find watching for the queen to enter to be entertaining. Sometimes she will be among the first to go inside, or she may wait patiently outside for a little while.

Pruners or a small pruning saw may be handy if the swarm has clustered on a small branch or limb. Carefully clear the area first then cut the branch, holding it in your spare hand. You can then shake the bees into your box. Another option is to put the box on the ground on an old towel and shake the bees in front of the entrance (the towel prevents bees from going under the nuc).

Your bee brush is helpful for swarms clustered on a fence or a wall or a heavy tree limb. You'll really appreciate a light weight nuc as you hold the box up to brush the bees in. Use Off! to deal with bees that are clustering instead of going in your box but be aware that sometimes the queen may not yet be in your box. Look carefully for her before putting the cluster to flight with your bee brush. As soon as the queen is in your box, bees will rush to join her. If need be, Off! can be used to keep them from going back instead of entering your box. Bees really dislike insect repellent so be judicious in its use.

Treasurer's Report

Our July treasury balance was \$3,500.58. Since our last report we collected \$50.00 in dues. Our only expense was \$12.99 for the monthly email cost. The resulting balance is \$3,537.59 (\$3,487.59 in our checking account plus \$50.00 in cash to make change).

**TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION**

Boone Holladay

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.



September, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

Our September 14 meeting will be online only due to conditions from Tropical Storm Nicholas. Hopefully everyone's power will have been restored in time. ZOOM contact information is the same as before (an email with clickable links will go out soon). We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of socially distanced social time.

The Fort Bend COVID risk level remains at RED or HIGH COMMUNITY RISK. Vaccination is highly recommended. Almost 224,000 have already been vaccinated at Fort Bend County sites. The County also reports that we have had 76,575 confirmed cases with 68,549 that have recovered. The number of COVID-19 deaths in Fort Bend now stands at 838. Members that have not been vaccinated are strongly advised to attend our September meeting online.

The vaccines aren't 100% effective, but they do prevent hospitalization and death. COVID-19 is easily transmitted and carries huge uncertainty of outcome. You may have few symptoms, but if you have symptoms resembling a cold, you should self-quarantine and get tested for the virus. If you do contract the disease, a few days in the ICU can wipe out your bank account even if you have good health insurance.

September meeting

The September 14 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will be online only beginning at 7:00 pm. A clickable ZOOM link will go out by email. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of online social time.


Our program topic for September will be on managing varroa mites presented by Jeff McMullan. These eight-legged pests are the largest ectoparasites in the animal world. No other host is attacked by a parasite of such large relative size! They are an invasive pest that originated in Asia and their natural host is the eastern or Asian honey bee. The Asian bee has adapted to the parasite and it seems to cause them only minor difficulty (which makes sense since a parasite that kills its host is going up and evolutionary dead end). When our European (or western) honey bee was brought to Asia, *Varroa destructor* began a host shift over a period of 50 to 100 years. It infests European honey bee colonies almost everywhere.

Varroa presents the biggest challenge in keeping bees no matter how many hives one has. We will go over the interconnected biology of honey bees and varroa mites and the management options we have.

2021 Dues

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association dues are \$5.00 per person per calendar year. Our dues have not changed since the club was formed, due mostly to support from Fort Bend County AgriLife Extension Service and donations made when our members help in our community with problem bees. Our club's financial needs are met year after year and we have a healthy account balance. Those that feel that our dues are too low are encouraged to donate whatever amount they like.

Members whose 2021 dues have not been paid were recently notified by email. If someone believes they've already paid for 2021, please do not hesitate to let Lynne Jones know at info@FortBendBeekeepers.org.

 If there is a sad bee on your newsletter address label this month it is a reminder that our records show that you have not paid dues for 2021.

If you haven't paid your dues and wish to continue your membership, you can send an email to info@FortBendBeekeepers.org to get info on mailing in your payment.

Herbert Wesley Carew

1942 - 2021

Club member Wes Carew passed away on Thursday, September 2. Wes and his wife Marja have been members for several years. Please keep Marja and the Carew family in your prayers.

August Meeting Notes

We had 32 in-person and 13 Zoom attendees at our August meeting. Due to our guest speaker, Tony Andric, coming from Lockhart, we started Social Time at 6:30 to allow everyone a chance to meet and visit with him. Also in attendance was special guest, Stan Gore, owner of Texas Friendly Beekeepers facebook group.

The announcements and other information were shared during social time via a slide show on the room's presentation screens. Of particular note:

September 25th Brazos Valley Beekeepers Assn., Bryan, TX \$70/person, \$125/couple \$15/ages 12-17 w/ parent/guardian includes chicken fajita lunch www.bvbeeks.org

November 6th through November 7th. Texas Beekeepers Association's Fall Convention will be at

Moody Gardens in Galveston.
<https://texasbeekeepers.org>

If you have been a beekeeper for at least a year and attend FBBA meetings regularly (in-person or via Zoom), have an enthusiasm for beekeeping and want to share it with a new beekeeper we need you to be a Mentor! Contact Margaret - mje52@hotmail.com.

To allow as much time as possible for the presentation, at 7:30, we skipped all formality. Tony Andric introduced himself and began his presentation, The Untamed Bee: Methods to Managing Defensive Colonies. (But for the record, Tony describes himself as a Beekeeping & Bee Removal Addict. He has 50 hives in Lockhart and his colonies are treatment-free with under 10% annual losses. Tony is the inventor of the Everything Bee Vacuum and a maker of Chicken Doors.)

Tony's presentation was not about how to 'fix' an overly defensive, or "hot" hive; rather, he shared his experience and techniques for working with defensive bees in a way that is safe for the beekeeper, the people and animals in bees' vicinity. It is important to understand, this is not for new or inexperienced beekeepers. Making a mistake with these bees can be deadly. First, why intentionally keep "mean bees"? In Tony's experience they are heartier. He doesn't treat any of his colonies and has very low losses. In order to keep colonies of mean bees, the location is very important. It must be at least 300 feet from a residence and 500 or more feet from any confined animals. The apiary should be in full sun and fenced to keep other animals away from the hives. Each hive should be uniquely marked and spaced as far apart as possible. There needs to be a constant source of water that is not near humans (no pools, bird baths at the house, etc.). The apiary needs drive-up access. You need a full, vented (3-layer) suit, PVC-coated gloves, and shrimp boots (PVC muck boots). A ball cap's brim will keep the veil away from your face and wearing a sweat band is a necessity to keep

from being blinded by sweat in your eyes. A pair of tube socks, with the ends cut off, pulled over your gloves and up your sleeves make a good barrier to keep the bees from getting under your gloves or up your sleeves. Duct tape seals up unexpected holes and gaps. It's a good idea to have epi-pen, Benadryl, sting-relief available as well. For equipment, Tony recommends two smokers, both filled and lit, with plenty of available fuel, an assortment of hive tools, and a frame grip. Have boxes, bottom boards and covers with you, even if you don't expect to need them. Tanglefoot is a good product if your hives are having problems with ants. Wash your suit regularly to remove attack pheromone. Planning and preparation are important. Make sure you have a phone signal. Make sure you have a way to escape (clear path). Make sure there are no innocent bystanders (people/animals). What is your purpose? Before you open a hive, you should have set up all your equipment on a work surface (tailgate or table); prepped supplies (sugar water, pollen patties, hive boxes, frames); and gauged the mood (are they ignoring you or already bumping you?). Some management rules: never risk safety, get in and out (no dilly-dallying), don't let a hive get hungry or crowded, don't thump boxes/bang frames/leave the hive open, don't try to find the queen, don't introduce outside queens, don't do mite counts (you aren't going to treat, so you don't need to count). The good news, is you aren't going to inspect the bees very often. Unless they need to be fed or need a brood box or honey super added, you're going to leave them alone for the most part.

At the conclusion of his presentation, Tony answered a few questions. He then shared some published research on feeding bananas and colony growth.

Danessa and Lynne conducted the door prize drawings. Thank you to those who provided prizes and congratulations to the winners.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: My back yard hive has managed to fill a super. What are my options for extracting the honey?

A: The most straightforward thing to do is "crush and strain". You cut the comb out in chunks, saving some comb honey if you want. Strain the honey through a kitchen strainer lined with cheese cloth (a slow process best done at warm temperature but not in the open outside).

A better option may be to borrow the club's extracting equipment. We own a manual two frame extractor, uncapping tools, an uncapping tub, and a double sieve. Our honey refractometer allows you to check moisture content before extracting, especially honey that is not yet capped.

Treasurer's Report

Our August treasury balance was \$3,537.59. Since our last report we collected \$80.00 in dues and received a \$200 donation for a swarm collection done by Gene DeBons. The expenses were the \$12.99 the monthly email fee and \$50.00 Texas Beekeepers Association annual membership. The resulting balance is \$3,754.60 (\$3,704.60 in the checking account, plus \$50.00 in cash to make change).

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

Boone Holladay

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.



October, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

Tropical Storm Nicholas is long gone, but with the never ending COVID-19 pandemic, our October 12 meeting will be back to both in-person and online. In-person will be at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469 (where we met in August, not far from the Community Center where we used to meet). ZOOM contact information is the same as before (an email with clickable links will go out soon). Members that have not been vaccinated are strongly advised to attend our October meeting online. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of socially distanced social time.

The Fort Bend COVID-19 risk is still at the highest level: **RED or HIGH COMMUNITY RISK**. Every one should get vaccinated, including booster shots after six months for those over 65 or with immune system difficulties. More than a million vaccine doses have been administered in Fort Bend County; 76.74% of the County's population has received at least one shot. Surely we will soon turn the corner on this awful import from China! Fort Bend County reports that we have thus far had 82,748 confirmed cases. That number is up 6,173 cases since our last newsletter or about 200 new cases in our community every day. It is good news that 77,036 have recovered, but the number of deaths in Fort Bend now stands at 903, with 65 families getting sad news since our September newsletter (two each day). Please keep these families in your thoughts and prayers.

Vaccination is safe, readily available, easily done and "free", so there are few legitimate excuses for not having been vaccinated. In fact all of us have been vaccinated for one thing or another: smallpox, mumps, measles, whooping cough, tetanus to name a few. For those that have traveled overseas, the list gets much longer. The vaccines aren't 100% effective, but they do prevent hospitalization and death. COVID-19 is easily transmitted and carries huge uncertainty of outcome. You may have few symptoms, but if you have symptoms resembling a cold, you should self-quarantine and get tested for the virus. If you do contract the disease, a few days in the ICU can wipe out your bank account even if you have good health insurance.

October meeting

The October 12 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will again be back to both online and "in person". We plan to be ZOOMing from our in-person meeting at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469. A clickable ZOOM link will go out by email. The LAR gate will be open until 8 pm. If you arrive after the gate has closed, the keypad code is 2337 ("bees" on your cell phone keypad). This code will only work during our meeting. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of social time.

If you haven't been vaccinated, don't feel well or have a medical condition that concerns you, please join the ZOOM meeting rather than attending in person.

Our program topic for October will be the what, when, and why of winter preparations. Our seasons are sometimes screwy (like last year) so our winter prep is important.

2021 Dues

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association dues are \$5.00 per person per calendar year.



If there is a sad bee on your newsletter address label this month it is a reminder that our records show that you have not paid dues for 2021.

If you haven't paid your dues and wish to continue your membership, you can send an email to info@FortBendBeekeepers.org to get info on mailing in your payment.

September Meeting Notes

Due to the imminent arrival of Tropical Storm Nicholas (not the one at the Yaschuk house), our September meeting was conducted by Zoom only. We had 22 Zoom logins.

President Craig Rench opened the meeting at 7:30 and then turned the meeting over to our speaker, Jeff McMullan.

Jeff is a longtime FBBA member. He was previously our Secretary-Treasurer and is the Editor of the **Fort Bend Buzz** and uncredited author of the *Ask a dozen beekeepers...* column each month. If you want to see your question in print, phone or email Jeff, then you can check to see if he can keep his story straight.

Our September program topic is the most serious pest of honey bees, *Varroa destructor*, commonly called varroa mite, or just varroa. His presentation was in part from material put out by the Honey Bee Health Coalition.

It is inevitable that a honey bee colony will be infested by varroa. If nothing is done to prevent it, the colony will most likely fail. The best approach is to proactively control mite levels before they threaten colony survival. It is important to understand the biology and population phases of both the bee and its parasite.

Adult females can be found feeding on bees. This is called the phoretic stage that lasts 4 1/2 to 11 days when honey bee brood is present. She enters brood cell before it is capped to begin her reproductive stage. She lays an egg that develops into a male mite then follows with eggs that will become female mites. Her offspring feed on the bee larva. Mating occurs in the capped cell between siblings. Varroa prefer drone brood because it is more robust and spend more time in its capped cell.

Ways to control varroa include:

1. Beekeeping Practices - screened bottom boards, monitoring mite drop and infestation levels, intentional brood breaks.
2. Genetic Controls - breeding selection for "hygienic behavior".
3. In-hive Controls: drone comb destruction, sugar-dusting, thymol/organic acid products, pesticides.

"Live and Let Die" is not effective beekeeping. When you have a colony of bees that is infested with varroa, the colony is suffering. If your dog was suffering from fleas and ticks, you would treat their infestation. Likewise, you should treat your bees' infestation. When you allow a colony to die from varroa, you put other colonies at risk because the varroa will transfer to other bees rather than stay with the dying colony. Bees are expensive and if you are routinely replacing colonies every year, you'll find you are spending more on beekeeping than you need to. Without very careful breeder queen selection, you aren't making better bees. You might have some colonies that seem to be survivor stock, and you might even make more queens from them. But those queens are going to be open-mated and it will be hit-or-miss on what kind of bees you get from them.

Lynne Jones announced that if there was interest, she would like to conduct a trial run via Zoom of the "Options for Selling Honey in Texas" presentation she is giving at the

Brazos Valley Beekeeper School. From a show of hands, it was decided to do the presentation on Tuesday September 21 at 7:30 pm. An email invite will be sent to all FBBA members.

Lynne then conducted the door prize drawings. Jeff McMullan donated one of his Perfect Pocket Hive Tools (won by Andrew Marlowe). Bee Man Dan Jones donated a wooden grip frame lifter which was won by Norm Harris. These prizes must be picked up at an in-person meeting.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: What am I supposed to use for smoker fuel?

A: This is a perfect question since there are far more than 12 (a dozen) options for you. You came looking for another suggestion since an old-timer recommended that you use cattle dung. In fact, you just wanted to know if this was just a bad joke.

Honey bees are woodland creatures and the scent of smoke may mean that the forest is on fire. They prepare to evacuate their home by engorging on honey since future meals are at risk. Smoke also hides any alarm pheromones.

Smoke of any kind will trigger this behavior in the hive. It does not have to be unpleasant to the bees or the beekeeper. You should find your fuel selection to be easily tolerable. Almost anything that burns at a low temperature while producing smoke will work (fuel that burns too hot will injure bees). Smoke from cattle dung probably works so long as it is completely dry. If it still a bit fresh, you'll likely have a hard time getting it lit. If you give it a try, let us know what it smells like. Dry grass, leaves or pine straw works well and probably smells better than smoldering cow poop, but some beekeepers find the smoke to be too irritating for their eyes. It is probably not a good idea

to use grass that has been killed with herbicide. Wood shavings are probably best since they burn longer. Use a chain saw "longwise" to create stringy shavings from oak, pecan or, better yet, fruit trees like ornamental pear. Your bee jacket will begin to smell like a backyard barbecue.

Treasurer's Report

Our September treasury balance was \$3,754.60. Since our last report we collected \$80.00 in dues and received a \$15.00 donation from a member. Our only expense this month was the \$12.99 monthly email cost. The resulting balance is \$3,836.61 (\$3,786.61 in the checking account, plus \$50.00 in cash to make change for dues payments).

Margo "Mac" McDowell

1951 - 2021

Margo "Mac" McDowell, Master Volunteer Coordinator at Fort Bend County AgriLife Extension, passed away during the evening of October 7, 2021 after a brief and hard-fought battle with cancer. Those that have been lucky enough to know Margo will miss her friendship, smile, cheerful can-do attitude and sense of humor. Our thoughts are with Mac's husband, Jim Cowan, daughter Stephanie, son Shaun, and their families during these difficult times. Memorial plans are not yet available.

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

Boone Holladay

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.