



# East Texas Beekeepers Association

Vol. 29 No. 4

April 3, 2014

## *April Report by Dick Counts*

One hundred and ten members and visitors attended the March meeting. Thanks again for your continued support. The most common topic of discussion among the members present was about the loss of hives through the winter. The severe and prolonged cold has caused an unusually high number of hive losses this year. Several members commented they had done everything right -- fed well in the fall, kept syrup and patties available through the winter, did not disturb the hives in cold weather. Still, they had hives die. Several reported finding deadouts full of stores and even with capped brood. I lost several hives in different yards so I know it was the weather and not something unique to a particular beeyard. One of the hives that died was the hive I suspected the least. It was my strongest hive, well fed and healthy, but just did not survive the cold. It makes you sick to see that happen. But we just have to shed a tear and move on, it is a part of beekeeping!

Some of our suppliers of hives have also suffered winter losses. We are working to obtain as many hives as we can though some suppliers have not been able to meet our requests. If you still need to order bees, talk to me soon. We will get your name on the list and fill orders as bees become available. In the meantime, I encourage everyone to try to catch some swarms. If you don't need the bees, let me know you caught a swarm and we will find a home for it.

I maintain a contact list of people who want to receive referrals for swarms or for bee removal. If you are not on this list and wish to be, please contact me. I will need name, address, phone number and the area you are willing to serve. Also, specify if you are interested in catching swarms or removing bees from structures. As calls come in to me, I try to refer them to members in the area of the bees. As a reminder, we are supposed to be registered with the Apiary Inspection Service as a beekeeper and licensed to capture or remove bees.

At the April meeting, we will vote on club officers to serve for the coming year. Please come and participate. One of those positions will be our 2014 Programs Director. If you have ideas about interesting programs for the upcoming year, please share them with the new Programs Director.

President—Gus Wolf

Vice President—Mike Rappazzo

Treasurer—Tammy Lenamond

Secretary—Lanette Lanchester

Ex. Director and Reporter—  
Dick Counts

Honey Queen Chair—Vi Bourns

Directors-at-Large—Stanford  
Brantley, Randy Bobo

Program Directors — Joe  
Mekalip, Gus Wolf

Webmaster—Ken Wilkinson

Next Meeting

**April 3**

**United Methodist Church  
405 West Main in Whitehouse**

**6:45 PM**

**On the Web: [etba.info](http://etba.info)**

**Or on the phone: (903) 566-6789**

## ***HONEY QUEEN REPORT*** by *Vi Bourns*



The queen program is rolling into spring with new ideas and different ways to bring good news about the honey bees to East Texas. Queen Carrie's focus will be pollination and Princess Willow will be teaching about bees with her art. Depending on audience age group and facilities, they will also use a new PowerPoint presentation. Dick and I will make presentations when Carrie and Willow are not available. It is a joint effort and fun learning and interacting together. You know we stay young in spirit by being around the younger generation!

Education has already begun at the Discovery Science Center and speaking to three garden clubs. We will be at the Henderson Livestock Show, The Caldwell Zoo for Earth Day, and hope to join in The Athens Spring Open House in April.

Dick is busy with the Beginner Beekeeping Class every Saturday and throughout the week when students can come. In his spare time, he is busy making tops and bottoms for the students' hives. I am playing secretary and girl Friday and trying to keep everyone in line.

Somewhere in the midst of all this work, we find time to check our bees and have a little social life at Subway during lunch. Sometimes we can actually find time to talk -- unless his phone rings and it seems to ring almost all of the time! It is hard for me to keep up with him but he seldom seems to get tired.

March is blowing out with its reputation for "a windy month." I am ready for gentle spring rains and warmer weather and I imagine our bees are also. Spring is just around the corner. The birds wake me up singing, the squirrels are chasing each other up and down the tree branches, and I see tiny sprouts of green in my flower garden as new life springs forth. Life is good and the hives are alive with a buzzing sound when we check them. May life be good for you.



Greetings East Texas Beekeepers. I hope you are enjoying the spring-like weather that has finally come to Texas. As you know, I was in Kentucky during March due to the death of my great-grandmother. The storm that brought a couple of inches of ice and snow to East Texas swept on across the southeast and dumped a lot of snow in Kentucky. We ended up snowbound for over a week at my grandfather's house. His home is high on a mountain in areas where the highway crew could not plow the roads. We finally were able to travel and return to Wills Point. We had only been home for a couple of weeks and my great-grandfather died. So back to Kentucky we went. Life has certainly been an adventure since I last saw you. We have spent a lot of time dealing with family issues and estate issues, driven half way across the US twice, and been snowbound in the Kentucky mountains.

I have been working with Ms. Vi by phone and email and preparing to represent ETBA as your Honey Queen. I do want to take this opportunity to thank everyone for the wonderful reception you shared with Willow and me at the February meeting. It is an honor to be your representative to the public. ~Carrie



These last few weeks have made it clear that Winter does not want to go away. Even so, we have been busy preparing for Spring. This past month has been a delightful combination of art and science. On Spring Break, I was able to speak to grade school children at a camp in the Discovery Science Center. On the first day, I taught the class about bee anatomy while teaching them to draw a picture of a bee for themselves. The second day, I taught them to draw flowers and the science of pollination. They were very enthusiastic and some of them were even interested in becoming beekeepers one day! On Saint Patrick's Day, Ms. Vi arranged for me to take watercolor classes with Mrs. Wincie Caskey. I had a great time and learned a lot about how to work with watercolors. She taught me different lighting techniques and how the quality of your materials affects the quality of the painting. With Mrs. Caskey's mentorship, I found a huge improvement in my art work!

**(cont'd on page four)**



## President's Letter *by Gus Wolf*

I don't think it was a cooperative winter at all, do you? It was cold and uninviting. Since it was cold so often and I need to do my wood cutting in the driveway, some of the winter bee projects I wanted to get done were never accomplished. And, due to illness, I was not able to be at the last meeting. I'd like to tell you that I am all better as of this writing, but I'm still recovering. That means for about 4 or 5 weeks not much has happened in my beeyard because I was just not well enough to be there. I hope to work with them this week because soon there will be new queens arriving in the mail!

So, where does this all lead? Regardless of what I do or don't do with my bees, they get along just fine. They do what needs to be done with the circumstances they are given. I fully expect to see some queen cells and possible evidence of one hive having swarmed. But that is the price I pay for inattention.

The bees do very well all by themselves. They keep doing what they need in order to keep the hive alive and well. And they would do so either in one of the boxes I provide for them or in another home of their choosing.

We like to call ourselves bee keepers and rightly we are keepers of bees. However, if we are doing our craft correctly, we are really bee managers. We carefully regulate the hive and its parts to provide the maximum benefit to the insects we keep. We watch for problems before they get out of hand and apply modalities to correct them. It is all done with a goal to provide ourselves with the optimal amount of workers at the right time to harvest the bounty of nectar that is waiting to be converted into honey.



Of course, managing bees is a lot like managing people. You study and learn about different management techniques and try to apply them equitably. But sometimes circumstances beyond your control interfere with your best laid plans. Then you must re-evaluate the situation and adapt new solutions to achieve the best outcome. You certainly must agree that trying to manage bees has more than its share of uncontrollable circum-



stances. For example, look at the photo on the front page — a couple of hives in a blueberry orchard. East Texas blueberries start to bloom around the first of March and bloom profusely for two or three weeks. The orchard pictured has five different varieties of blueberry trees, each chosen to begin blooming and bear ripened fruit at a different time, prolonging the bloom for several weeks. This sounds like an early honey producing machine, a full nectar flow while most local plants are just starting to bloom. Two of our ETBA beekeepers arranged to place a couple hives in this orchard and make some early honey off the blueberry bloom. Sounds like a great plan! The hives were moved into the orchard on a near-80 degree day in early March. The trees were heavy

in buds with a number of fully-open blossoms on each tree. Two days later, they were covered in sleet and snow with temperatures dropping into the teens. All of those beautiful blueberry blossoms were turned to brown mush. With nothing for forage, our beekeepers had to feed the hives and hope for a second set of blooms to form. The jury is still out if the trees will be able to successfully develop another set of buds. Will our two beekeepers succeed? Maybe we will know next month. One word of caution — if you plan to place hives in an orchard, be sure to check with the owner about insecticide and fungicide use.

As a help for you, our club has developed a booklet that guides you month by month in what you should probably be doing with your bees. It is specifically geared to beekeeping in East Texas and would probably be of limited use further North, unless, of course, you adjusted the calendar. If you don't have the booklet, I would encourage you to purchase one and use it to guide your beekeeping activities. You can find a copy at the Treasurer's table in the back of the room. I think the cost is only a buck or so.

I look forward to seeing each of you at the next meeting. One of the things we'll be doing is electing club officers for the next year. We can re-elect the current officers but I would ask you to become involved in your club and volunteer for a position. ETBA is a group effort and we encourage everyone to take a part.

Willow — cont'd from page 2

### *Willow's Pollination Art*



This week, my mother, sister and I did our own artsy, science project. We made Honey Beeswax Oatmeal Soap. (It probably needs a better name, that is quite a mouthful!) We used the wax from the caps of cells that we had frozen since our last honey extraction. We found and adjusted a recipe using beeswax, honey, oatmeal, as well as olive oil and coconut oils. The result was a fragrant block of lye soap, now curing on a wooden board. We even embossed the surface with the hexagonal pattern of honeycomb.



In the next year, I hope to be able to teach more people about bees and beekeeping through art. As my art matures, I hope to make gifts of watercolor paintings at my presentations and for the club. Overall March has been a fun month for me and I know as Spring takes hold we will all be excited to get back into our bees!

~Willow



## Texas Apiary Inspection Service

Texas Apiary Inspection Service (TAIS) is charged with regulating the honey bee industry in the State of Texas. Statutes dealing with honey bees (including permits and certifications for movement of bees and equipment) are administered by TAIS, under the Texas AgriLife Research, a part of the Texas A&M University System.

TAIS can be contacted by phone at 979 845-9714 or email at [tais@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:tais@ag.tamu.edu).

### Links to TAIS Forms

Beekeeper Registration:

<http://tais.tamu.edu/forms/pdf/Registration%20Application%20fillable.pdf>

Bee Removal Application:

<http://tais.tamu.edu/forms/pdf/Bee%20Removal%20Application%20fillable.pdf>



## *Practical Experiences in the Beeyard by Stan Brantley*

If you have done everything right, you will have a strong hive headed by a young queen, ready to start gathering nectar. If you did not do it right, you may have a strong hive headed by an older queen just looking for an excuse to swarm and take more than half of the nectar gathering bees with her.

There are several things you should do every time you leave your beehives. Watch the landing board activity for two or three minutes. Make a mental note of this activity and store it in your memory. The next time you return to the beeyard, set up a system of actions that you will go through upon arrival.

First, look at the landing board activity before disturbing the hive. Compare it to what you saw on your last visit. If there is no change or if the activity has increased, you can be relatively assured the hive has not swarmed. Second, take the time to closely scan the area around the beeyard. Swarms do not always cluster high in a tree. Many will be from knee-high to head-high in a tree or bush. If the queen has been clipped or her wings damaged, the swarm could even be on the ground or in the grass or weeds. Third, carry a metal garbage can lid and a two-foot stick, or a metal coffee can and your hive tool, or two pieces of metal that will make a ringing sound when banged together. Should a swarm begin to circulate in the air, position yourself under a low hanging limb and start to “beat the drum”. The metallic banging will often cause the swarm to settle near you.

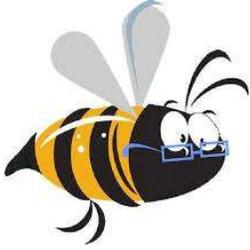
Some beekeepers, particularly those who keep bees in single brood box hives, feel it is important to keep lots of room just above the queen excluder to prevent incoming nectar from being stored in the brood nest and initiating the urge to swarm. Add a second super between the first super and the queen excluder, giving the bees a new box in which to store nectar just above the brood nest. This is known as “bottom supering”.

The loss of a queen or finding that your hive has a poor queen means a considerable loss in the productivity of the hive until it is successfully requeened. If you have to obtain a queen by mail from a commercial supplier, you may be facing a month or more before a new queen is established in the hive. You even run the risk the queenless hive may develop laying workers, a situation that is sometimes difficult to remedy. An alternative is to start your own queen factory. While the bees are in the spring expansion, start one or more Nucs that will raise a queen for your use, if needed. Pull a frame of open brood with newly laid eggs, or even better, a frame that has some developing queen cells or swarm cells. Put it in a 5-frame Nuc with a frame of honey, a frame of pollen, and one frame of foundation. Leave the nurse bees on the frames when you pull them. Just make sure the queen is not on the frame you pull. This will allow the bees to make their own queen. You can maintain the Nuc until you need the queen. If you don't need to use the queen, allow the hive to grow and expand into a 10-frame box and you have started a new hive.

Let's talk a bit about Top Bar Hives. It is sometimes more difficult to get newly installed bees to stay in the more open TBH than in a Langstroth hive. If you are trying to start a new Top Bar Hive by installing purchased package bees or a captured swarm, some of the knowledgeable Top Bar authors suggest having an upper entrance near the cluster of bees to encourage ease of entering and exiting. Use a feeder with sugar syrup to encourage the bees to build comb rapidly. It is also suggested to use a “follower board” to restrict the bees to a smaller portion of the long Top Bar Hive. Bees naturally demonstrate a preference for certain sized cavities to build nests. Some think that the large open cavity of a Top Bar Hive is part of the reason that newly installed bees will not stay in the larger box. A follower board is basically a board that allows the bees to be confined in a portion of the hive while new and then moved to allow more space as the colony becomes established and expands. Watch and see if the bees are building the new comb in an orderly fashion on the top bars. It is often helpful to have a small strip of foundation attached the top bar to give the bees an incentive to build the comb in the proper orientation.



The “Got Questions” room will still be open 6:00 – 6:30 before the meeting. If you are new to beekeeping or just have some beekeeping questions, join us in the Got Questions room before the meeting and we will try to help you find



## *Bee Facts* by Eddie Collins

The question for this month is plastic vs wax foundation. This is actually a topic I have switched sides on. In my early beekeeping hobby days, I would always say wax is better than plastic. I even used to say I like to use wax because this is how grandpa did it. Well, grandpa also lived in a house without AC but I don't plan on doing that any time soon. Now I am saying just the opposite. I prefer the wooden frames with wax-coated plastic foundation rather than wax foundation.

### Plastic pros:

- Very durable. You can throw it in the back seat, the back of the truck, or in a tool box and it will still be usable.
- With black plastic foundation, it's amazing how much easier you can see eggs or larva.
- You can extract a first year frame without worrying about the frame coming apart in the extractor.
- Less labor to build frames because you do not have to wire plastic foundation like you do wax foundation.
- Cheaper than wooden frames with wax foundation. Also, when I'm building frames with wax foundation, I always seem to ruin a few sheets of wax.

### Wax pros:

- Wax smells good.
- You get to do it like they did it in the good-ole-days.
- In some cases, the bees may like it better.

Whether bees prefer wax over plastic is another of those beekeeping discussions that has no definitive answer. I used to say that bees like wax foundation better but now I'm not so sure. I do know if you put a wooden frame with wax foundation beside a wooden frame with plastic foundation, bees will usually work the wax foundation first. But if you only give them one option, they seem to work them and draw them out just the same. I'm actually doing some tests on how the bees draw plastic and wax in my hives this season.

As for cost, the plastic foundation even wins on this one. This was actually a surprise to me and I had to double check the Dadant catalog and my math. And that's even without factoring in the additional labor to install and wire the wax foundation. (Side Note: as for labor, I am not sure if you ever come out ahead in beekeeping if you count your labor.)

Using the Dadant pricing for a 10 count of frames and pieces of foundation:

- \$2.34 each on the wood bound wax foundation frames + the additional cost and labor of frame wire.
- \$2.26 each on the wood bound plastic foundation frames (and this is using the wax coated plastic)

Note that this discussion has been about wooden frames with plastic or wax foundation. There are also the all-plastic frames, where the frame and the foundation is molded as one piece of plastic. The all-plastic frames are a completely different situation. In my opinion, these rank very high on the list of some of the worst beekeeping equipment you can use. When it's cold, the frame ears are easy to break. When you shake the bees out of a box, the frame ears are easy to break. When you pry a frame out of a box, the frame ears are easy to break. When a frame ear breaks, you can't simply fix it by putting a nail in the end. And for some reason the bees always glue the plastic frames to the lid or to the frame above it. Nine times out of ten, I can accurately tell you if a box has a plastic frames in it when I lift a lid or pry two boxes apart. With all-plastic frames, they are usually glued together and are tough to get apart.



Stick with wooden frames with either wax or plastic foundation. Both will work for you. If possible, try not to mix them in the box and try not to mix them in the extractor. For sturdiness and ease of use, I prefer the wooden frames with plastic foundation. It is also nice that they cost a little less.

# Annual Officer Elections at our April Meeting