



East Texas Beekeepers Association

Vol. 29 No. 1

January 2, 2014

January Report by Dick Counts

I sure missed seeing everyone at the December meeting. To the best of my recollection, that was the first time we have ever canceled a club meeting due to weather. The weather forecast was so bad that we hated to risk people driving in and finding icy roads on their way home. It was a difficult call to make but the board was concerned, and properly so, about the travel safety issues. We discussed the issue early that morning but the forecast still looked OK at that time. By early afternoon, with the deteriorating forecast, we felt that the meeting should be cancelled. In addition to immediately sending an email to everyone on our email list, Gus Wolf and Dan Eudy began the process of phoning all members. Linda and Royce Pelham opened the church in case anyone did not get the message but only three people arrived.

For January, we will have our **meeting on the 9th**, not on the 2nd, as the church needs our room on the 2nd. They say that repetition is the key to learning so I will say that again —**come on the 9th**, not on the 2nd!

The January Beginners Beekeeping class is full. If there is sufficient demand, we would consider having two classes again this year. If you know anyone who may be interested, have them contact me quickly.

If you need to purchase bees, act now! Bees are in great demand and there will not be enough locally to go around. If you need to order packages, nucs or hives, start contacting suppliers. All of Eddie's bees are already committed and he is looking for other sources. We will give an update on this situation at the meeting.

At the January meeting, we will nominate and vote on the Beekeeper of the Year, announce the Honey Tasting awards, and give you update on our Honey Queen Program.

During our program time, we will talk about what you need to be doing to get ready for spring. In the world of bees, winter is almost done. Elm trees will start to bloom before the end of January, prepping the hive for the spring expansion. Be ready!

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
Jan. 9
6:45 PM
United Methodist Church
405 West Main in Whitehouse
On the Web: etba.info
Or on the phone: (903) 566-6789

Photo by Ginnie Jeske

HONEY QUEEN REPORT by *Vi Bourns*



As the New Year begins, it is only natural to reflect on the blessings of family, good friends, good health, and the healing of our bodies. It is also good to look forward with anticipation to the friends we will meet this coming year.

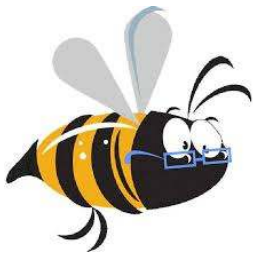
Looking back at 2013, hopefully each of us has learned from fellow beekeepers and through our own experiences new things about how to better care for our precious honey bees.

I was recently privileged to take a trip with a special friend to help feed her hives. In the process, I also learned a valuable lesson to implement with my hives in the future. As we opened each hive, sugar water, pollen patty, bag, knife, and a straw in hand, I expected to lift the inner cover to get to the feeder box. Much to my surprise, once we tipped the outer cover upward, the feeder box was right there. All we had to do was take the old sugar bag out, insert the new one, make two slices with a razor knife, and insert a plastic straw into the bag to keep it open. All done in a few seconds then move on to the next hive. Pretty nifty huh!

I am telling you of my experience as an illustration of how we can learn from each other. And how joining a fellow beekeeper in the field can sometimes be more educational than than reading a book. I am a hands-on person. Actually seeing and working with a friend's technique was a great learning experience. She thought she was asking me for a favor to go and help but instead it was me who received the blessing.

I encourage you to work with fellow beekeepers in your area. Go with them and see how they tend their hives. You can benefit from their intuition and their experiences. You may find you are encouraged to try something new.

Do not hesitate to experiment when you get a new idea! It may just change someone's life and make it easier to take care of the bees entrusted to their care.



Bee Facts by *Eddie Collins*

One thing about this great hobby of ours is it's a continuous learning process. While some may take this as a negative, I choose to take it as a positive. Just recently at the Texas Beekeepers Association convention, the question was asked, "What is the temperature of the bee cluster during the winter". My immediate answer was 91 degrees. Or at least somewhere close to that temp. The more correct answer is that the core temperature can range from 64 to 91 degrees. Researching on the Internet produces a lot of varied findings, with the majority documenting winter cluster temperatures towards the upper end of that range. I'm still not sure if I yet know the exact answer, but one thing is certain -- the question caused me to do some research and as part of this I continue to learn new things about the honey bee.



Did you know one of the primary reasons to use an entrance reducer is to keep mice out of the hive and not to keep the cold out? Other than reducing the amount of wind that enters a hive, I'm not sure if entrance reducers really change the inside temperature of a hive. Colder days when the bees start to cluster is an opportune time for mice to enter into the hive and take up residence in the unoccupied lower space. By using an entrance reducer, you can most of the time prevent mice from entering. While not a big issue in East TX, up in Missouri farm country, if they don't put on the entrance reducers, it's pretty much guaranteed a mouse will take up residence.

Starting with the January meeting, I will have deep and medium hive boxes for sale. Deeps are \$12 and Mediums are \$11. Boxes are good quality Shastina boxes with the new improved top joint.

See you at the next meeting!

~Eddie.



President's Letter *by Gus Wolf*

I have not lived in East Texas long enough to really know if we are having a typical winter or not. When we first landed here six years ago, we spent the bulk of the winter in tee shirts and shorts. This winter has been marked with significant stretches of cold weather. My wood stove continues to devour everything that is thrown into it to keep the house warm. Even though we have lots of woods on our property, I may not have cut and cured enough firewood to last the winter – if this cold keeps up.

Generally, my bees are going to have the same problem. Do they have enough fuel stored up in their hive to last through the cold weather? If they don't, there is really nothing for them to forage on the warmer days. They rely on us to make sure they have enough carbohydrate or sugar syrup to live and keep warm. Check your hives by tilting the back to get a feel for how heavy it is. If it is light, feed a two-to-one sugar syrup. If you can, on a warm day look inside and see what they still have stored.

I have a small 5-frame hive that I am nursing through the winter and I keep it close to the house. They are taking syrup as fast as I can feed it. For them, I have a quart mason jar feeder that sits firmly on the top cover. They feed through tiny holes in the lid. How fast they take the syrup is dependent on the outside temperature. When it is too cold, they stay in their cluster and do not feed and the level of syrup stays the same. On warmer days, they will feed and you can watch the syrup level slowly decrease. As soon as the jar empties, I fill it up and they work on emptying it again.

Now and then some bees will land on the outside of the jar to strip off some sugar that must be there. The other day, I found a couple on the jar in the cold of the morning. I felt bad that they were there and took a little stick to scoop one up and introduce it to the entrance hole. After all, the rest of the bees would still be clustered. It didn't take but a few seconds for the front of the hive to be covered with bees wanting to know what was going on and ready to defend the hive. I beat a hasty retreat and remembered – bees can be defensive this time of year!

I plan on splitting hives in the spring and ordered queens from two different sources. One source in California advised me that mid May would be the earliest they could supply me. That's going to be a bit late so I may need to cancel that order. If you are ordering queens, you should probably have placed your orders to get them in the early spring. Best not be waiting any longer and it may already be too late. I'm sure there will be queens available through the club when the time comes. So start asking now!

Even though it is a slow time of year for beekeeping, there is still a lot to be done. I have yet to start with my off-season bee projects but I am hoping for a stretch of more moderate weather to do them. Don't be like me and practice the art of keeping up with yesterday!

Wishing all of you health, prosperity and success for the New Year!



Happy Beekeeping in 2014



Honey Bee Geometry

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! I missed seeing you all at the Christmas meeting but pray you had a safe and blessed Christmas. This month, I had the chance to learn yet another interesting fact about beekeeping, thanks to Mr. Brantley. He shared an article with me from the Louisiana Beekeepers' Association Newsletter

about the importance of the honey bees' hexagon cell shape. I have noticed in my hives that the bees build their cells, regardless of size, in perfect hexagons. The reasoning for this, I'd heard, was that hexagons are the most structurally sound and efficient shape possible but I have never found confirmation of this. Thankfully, others have thought about this subject before. In 36 B.C., a soldier, scholar, and writer named Marcus Terentius Varro considered bees' hexagonal cells and proposed a theory, now known as "The Honeybee Conjecture." His idea suggests that there is a logical and mathematical reason for the hexagonal honey comb shape. With some information from physicist Alan Lightman, we can see that Varro's "Honeybee Conjecture" makes wonderful sense.

First in his conjecture, Varro set out to explain why honey bees make their cells all the same shape. Honey bees use beeswax to store honey, pollen, and brood – all extremely valuable to them. Thus, it makes sense for them to choose a storage system that is quick and simple to build. If the bees started with a random shape, say a jelly bean-like squiggle, they would have to build a slightly different shape to fit next to that one without wasting any space. Then any adjacent cells would have to be built one at a time, all in different shapes that conform to the other cell shapes. Now this might work if only two or three bees worked on building comb at a time, but this isn't the case. Look in your hives during the spring and summer nectar flows, and you'll see hundreds of bees festooned on each comb, all working feverishly at the same time. Thus, the bees need one consistent shape that fits together efficiently so lots of workers can build honey comb at the same time. Some bees can work on the top corner of a frame, while others work on a bottom corner, because the cell shape is all the same and will fit together when the two sections join.

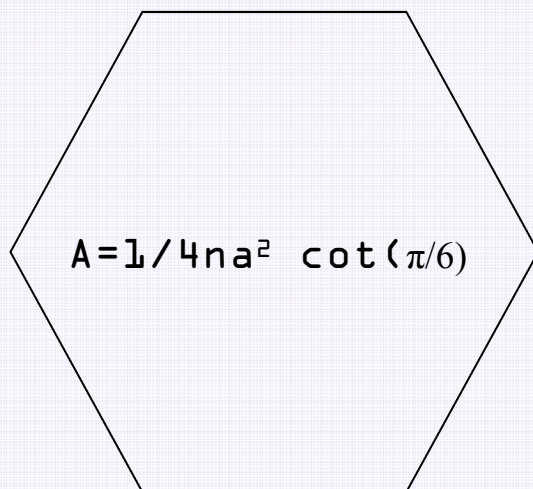


That explains about the need for a standard cell shape. But why is this shape always a hexagon? Think about it. If the bees used a circular shape for the cells, there would be a lot of wasted space between the cells. A pentagon or oval would waste space too. According to Alan Lightman, "It is a mathematical truth that there are only three geometrical figures with equal sides that can fit together on a flat surface without leaving gaps; equilateral triangles, squares and hexagons." Hexagonal cells make sense, but if triangular or quadrilateral shapes do too, why do honey bees choose to make hexagons?

Varro proposed that hexagonal honey comb might be slightly more compact than triangular or quadrilateral honey comb. Perhaps the hexagonal honey comb holds just as much honey as the others, but has "the smallest total perimeter" and thus the least amount of wax needed to build it. More than two thousand years later, Thomas Hales, a mathematician at the University of Michigan, created a proof that showed Varro's theory was correct. Building cells in hexagonal shapes is more wax-efficient than building cells in any other shapes.

Though we haven't known it all along, honey bees' cells are "absolutely perfect in economizing labor and wax." While this fact in itself is incredible, if we pair it with all the other amazing things we know about honeybees and the myriad of facts we don't yet know, it's impossible to miss the hand of the Creator in these tiny insects we love.

~Martha





Practical Experiences in the Beeyard by Stan Brantley

The trend of growing interest in beekeeping continues. I was at the Louisiana Beekeepers Convention on December 6 and 7. There were 209 participants who pre-registered for the convention and about 40 more who registered for the Saturday session. “What is so great about these numbers?”, you may ask. Consider that past attendance had never exceeded 100 and you can see why we were excited!

Here it is the week before Christmas and the daytime temperature is in the 70s. This unseasonably warm weather can cause the bees to become really cranked up like it was early spring. If the queen begins to lay and expand the brood nest too quickly, the bees may not be able to cover all of the new brood and keep it warm on the next below freezing night. Some of the new brood may become chilled and die. After the cold spell passes and the weather warms again, housecleaning bees will remove the dead brood and drop it out of the front of the hive. They may also remove any adult bees that died and fell to the bottom board. Don’t be alarmed if you see some dead bees and brood on the ground in front of the hive. This is a natural consequence of the roller coaster temperatures of our East Texas winters.

Bees cluster tightly in the hive during these cold days and nights. During the severe cold period in early December where we had daytime highs barely above freezing for several days, another ETBA member called me expressing concern that his bees had died. On a trip to his apiary that afternoon, he did not see a bee, even by lifting the lid and looking through the hole in the inner cover. Pressing his ear to the hive, he could not even hear a sound inside. I encouraged him to keep the faith and look again as soon as it warmed a bit. A few days later, on a sunny 45 degree afternoon, his bees were flying and all hives were active. Interestingly, he also reported that many bees were sitting on the western side of the hive boxes, enjoying the warmth of the afternoon sun.

During the next several weeks, many days will be too cool to open and work inside the hives even though you may see bees flying. If possible, don’t disturb the hive if the temperatures are less than 60 degrees. If you feel you need to feed the hive, lift the Outer Cover and add the food as quickly as possible. Some beekeepers use an extra box (often called a “feeding super”) between the Inner Cover and the Outer Cover, placing the syrup or pollen substitute on top of the Inner Cover. If you use this method, opening the Outer Cover on a cool day has much less impact on the hive than lifting the Inner Cover and exposing the brood nest to the cooler air. The feeding super can be an extra deep or medium hive box or can be a commercial feeding super purchased from some of the bee supply catalogs. I know Walter Kelly lists one in their catalog for about \$20. It can also be homemade from a 1x3 for about five bucks.

Sometimes in discussions with other beekeepers, I am surprised when someone says “Hey, I am glad to learn that, it will help me in the apiary” about a comment that I would not have otherwise considered important. We all have learned or developed tricks and techniques that help us in our beekeeping. Talking with other beekeepers and sharing ideas and techniques is a good way to teach and to learn. As an example, I carry a box with the tools I find useful in the field. They are always in the box and therefore always with me when I go to the beeyard. In addition to the usual beekeepers tools, I keep a few things that I have needed at times over the years. Something you may not think about is a roll of duct tape and a bag of steel wool. Duct tape can help resolve many emergencies and even be used to seal up a hive entrance, if needed. For a more permanent job, steel wool can be packed into entrances or into cracks and holes and will stay there until you remove it. If you have a hive with an upper entrance and need to close it for cold weather, pack the upper entrance with the steel wool. Another thing I carry is a wet dishtowel in a gallon plastic bag. Thoroughly wet the dish towel and seal it in the bag before you leave home. If you get honey or sugar syrup on your gloves or tools, just reach into the bag and wipe them clean.

I had hoped to see you at the January meeting but will be unable to come on the 9th as I will be attending the American Beekeepers Federation annual convention. There will be an ETBA member at the Treasurer’s table to help you with memberships or renewals for TBA. You can also renew your TBA membership by mailing a check to Jimmie Oakely, TBA Treasurer, 1799 Goodson Court, Round Rock, TX 78664-3706. Annual dues are \$35 for an individual, \$50 for family. Make checks payable to TBA.

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 some answers.

It is time to renew memberships for 2014!

ETBA

Individual \$10 Family \$20

Three ways to renew: Online at www.etba.info,
Pay Tammy at the ETBA meeting,
Mail to ETBA, PO Box 9662, Tyler, TX 75711-9662

TBA

Individual \$35 Family \$50

Mail Renewal Form Below
Or
See Cecelia Eudy at the January ETBA meeting

2014

TEXAS BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NEW / RENEWAL

(CIRCLE ONE)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE TX ZIP _____

PHONE(H) _____ (CELL) _____

(W) _____ (E-mail)** _____

**To save the Association money on print & postage may we e-mail your copy of the Journal? [] YES

Recommended by: _____

BEEKEEPING CLASSIFICATION (CHECK ONE)

COMMERCIAL (301 + Colonies)

SIDELINER (26-300 Colonies)

SMALL SCALE (0-25 Colonies)

NEW MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

effective :Jan. 1, 2013

CENTURY CLUB \$100 _____

INDIVIDUAL BEEKEEPER (a person) \$35 _____

BEEKEEPER FAMILY (husband, wife, & children) \$50 _____

ASSOCIATE MEMBER (nonbeekeeper person) \$35 _____

BEEKEEPER ASSOCIATION (an organization) \$25 _____

DONATIONS

Honey Bee Research Fund _____

Texas Honey Queen Fund _____

Legislative Fund _____

State Fair Honey Booth Fund _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

LOCAL BEEKEEPER ASSOCIATION AFFILIATION _____

Remit To: Texas Beekeepers Association

1799 Goodson Court / Round Rock, TX 78664-3706

(512) 388-3630 (e-mail: jimmie.oakley@att.net)