



# East Texas Beekeepers Association

Vol. 30 No. 1

January 1, 2015

## January Report by Dick Counts

I hope everyone had a Merry Christmas and I wish you a Happy New Year. Because New Year's Day is falling on the first Thursday, we are holding our January ETBA meeting on **the second Thursday, January 8**. Be sure to mark your calendar properly and come on the second Thursday!

About ninety members and guests attended our December meeting. We enjoyed a little Christmas cheer, crowned our 2015 Honey Queen and Princess, and announced winners of our Honey Tasting Contest and our Beekeeper of the Year. We owe a special Thanks to Gail Mekalip on the piano along with Pastor Mat and Gus Wolf for leading us in some Christmas carols.

This was one of the most interesting Honey Tasting Contests I can remember. There were so many good tasting honey samples that people had difficulty choosing which was best. Third Place was a three-way tie with Mel Marszalek, Les Jeske and Timothy Harvey. Timothy was a 2014 Scholarship Student who successfully raised his bees and produced honey his first summer. Second Place was a tie with Pam McPeck and Gabe Sullens. Gabe was also a 2014 Scholarship Student who successfully raised his bees and produced honey his first summer. First Place was a tie with Steve Douglas and Ron Boerm.

The 2014 Beekeeper of the Year is Stan Brantley, author of the monthly article *Practical Experiences in the Beeyard* in our newsletter and creator of our "Got Questions?" mentoring session from 6:00-6:30 before each meeting.

It is time to renew your ETBA memberships for 2015. Renewals are \$10 Individual and \$20 Family. You can renew online at our **www.ETBA.info** webpage, by mail (ETBA, PO Box 9662, Tyler, TX 75711-9662, make checks payable to ETBA ), or at the January meeting. If you are a new member who joined in October, November, or December, you are covered for the 2015 membership year.

Don't forget — enjoy a safe New Year's celebration and then come to ETBA on **January 8**

President—Gus Wolf

Vice President—Mike Rappazzo

Treasurer—John Holladay

Secretary—Lanette Lanchester

Ex. Director and Reporter—  
Dick Counts

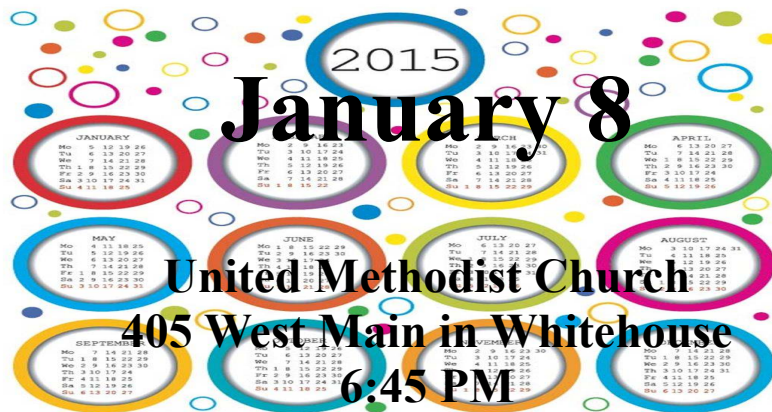
Honey Queen Chair—Vi Bourns

Directors-at-Large—Stanford  
Brantley, Larry Tarr

Program Director — Matt Thomas  
Brenda Sheridan, Eddie Collins

Webmaster—Ken Wilkinson

### Next Meeting



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*



A Happy New Beginning to everyone. A new year has begun and with it arises new opportunities in the beekeeping world. The bee's habits may not have changed but hopefully our knowledge of different situations in the hive has grown. As we take care of our bees and learn from our experiences, let us spread their importance far and wide so other people will catch a small glimpse of the miracles we are privileged to witness.

Our new year begins with the new edition of our cookbook, "Cooking With My Honey, 2014 Edition". The cookbooks arrived just before the Christmas holidays and will be available at our meeting on Jan. 8th. The price is \$9.00 each to the club and \$12.00 to the public. As most of you know, proceeds from cookbook sales help support the ETBA Queen and Princess as they travel to different presentations. So open your hearts and pocketbooks as Valentines' Day approaches and make someone happy with a bottle of your honey and a brand new set of mouthwatering recipes. The original cookbook will still be available at the previous price.



Plant your wildflowers now! Most beekeeping books say that now is the time to rest from your labors and to not disturb your bees. However, while on vacation with my family earlier this week, we learned that now is time to sow wildflowers. We visited Wildseed Farms in Fredericksburg, Texas. They offer all kinds of wildflower seed mixes that are beneficial to the land, including pollinator friendly mixes. They also provide free seed selection and planting guides to help you choose and plant your wildflowers correctly.

Now you may ask why should we plant wildflowers? Won't wild flowers just come up on their own? The answer is some of them might, but the constant mowing of our lawns and spraying of weed killers has probably killed off most of your native wildflowers. So it is an important time to start planting wildflowers native to your area to sustain your bees throughout the year. When your bees are struggling to collect nectar, they will collect mainly from a single source. This offers bees very little variety and is not very healthy for the bees because, just like you and me, bees need a balanced diet to thrive. Planting wildflowers will offer the opportunity for this balanced diet for your bees so they may thrive and produce not only more honey for themselves but also for you.



Choosing what you plant takes some research. It is essential that you plant flowers that produce plenty of nectar, have a prominent aroma, are the right colors, and have the proper structures to be useful to bees. It is also important to plant flowers that will thrive in the local environment so you do not waste money on seeds that are not compatible with your location. Several varieties of wildflowers native to Texas are extremely beneficial to pollinators, including Scarlet Sage, Texas Paintbrush, Greenthread, and Mealy Blue Sage. Other bee friendly flowers that adapt well to the climate in Texas are Blanket Flower, Purple Tansy, Black-Eyed Susan, Purple Coneflower, Cosmos, and all sorts of Sunflowers. Even some European wildflower varieties adapt readily to the Texas environment. Two that are very beneficial to honey bees are Yarrow and Shasta Daisies. These are only a few of the wildflower selections that would flourish here in our East Texas area.

Planting the seeds is the easiest part of the equation. This is the method recommended by the Wildseed Farms Company. The first step is to pick a compatible location for your chosen flowers, whether in the shade or full sun, wet or dry area, etc. It is important to research your selected varieties. For example, Coneflowers and Sunflowers require full sun where other varieties may prefer some shade. Once this is done, the next step will be to cut down the weeds and remove all the cuttings to make room for the wildflowers. This is followed by raking the ground to loosen the dirt, but no more than one inch deep so as not to awaken dormant weed seed. They also recommend that you mix 1 part wildflower seed with 4 parts sand or potting soil or something similar to enhance even seed distribution. The next step, and because I cannot state this any more clearly, I will quote directly from the Wildseed Farms catalog: "Broadcast ½ of your seed as uniformly as possible over the prepared area. Sow the remaining seed in

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a direction perpendicular to the initial sowing.” The final step is to gently press the seed into the ground by either walking on it or patting it with the back of a shovel. This concludes the planting process.

Now get out there and go plant wild flowers for your bees. Not only will your bees love it but your yard will become a spectacular sight. This is good information for planting wildflowers, whatever seed provider you employ, and I hope you find it useful.

I am pleased to say I am not only planting wildflowers on our property, but our family is also giving seed to our neighbors with the hope of getting a good crop of wildflower honey to share come summertime. Once again, feed your bees and get your wildflowers in the ground now. To get your own free wildflower seed catalogue and planting guide go to [www.wildseedfarms.com](http://www.wildseedfarms.com). ~Willow



## *The Great Hobby*

The word hobby makes me think of many things. Sports, writing, quilting, canning, horseback riding, or reading. Beekeeping, however, had never entered my mind. But when my dad first suggested that I take the classes, my interest quickly grew. The more I learned about bees, the more fascinating they became to me. I decided that beekeeping was something I wanted to begin doing.

I got my first hive from Mr. Counts. At first, it wasn't very strong. The hive had just been split and there were not as many bees. Over time, the population increased and the hive became stronger. Along with the growth of the hive, my personal knowledge also increased. As we worked the hives, I got to see the process of making honey up close.

Towards the fall, I went to check my hive and noticed that there were not many bees. They had plenty of honey, plenty of space, so I wasn't sure why they had left. I came to the conclusion that they had probably swarmed. Once again, I was back to a small hive.

A couple of weeks ago, when I went to feed my bees, I looked down at the opening and saw no activity. It was a nice day so my dad and I decided to take a look inside the hive. As we opened up the hive there were no bees. The honey super had been full, but was now empty. It had been robbed out by other bees. As we got down farther, we found the bees in their ball and their bottoms sticking out of the cells. We also found several bees on the bottom board. Our hypothesis is that they froze to death.



The loss of my hive was upsetting but my dad and I still have five hives that appear happy and healthy. As we continue to work these hives, I hope to take my past experiences and incorporate them into future beekeeping. ~Brittany



## President's Letter *by Gus Wolf*

With the arrival of the Winter Solstice a few days ago, we can celebrate that the shortest day - longest night is finally past. From this point forward, each day gets a bit longer. It's not much each day, but it gives us something to look forward to.

When it gets cold, we people bundle up in one way or another to stay warm. We have the luxury to modify our clothing to suit the weather, adding layers when it gets colder. I am a believer in the old adage, "There is no such thing as cold weather, only inappropriate clothing."

Animals, on the other hand don't really have that same advantage. I am sure that there are winter and summer coats on animals, but I never have seen any significant difference. Cows stand contentedly in the shade when it is 103 and yet stand just as contentedly when it is 36 and a driving rain. Although my dog is spoiled rotten, he is pretty much the same way. Cold or hot, he's just as happy – although when it is cold he does hanker to come inside. I'm more than happy to let him!

I would venture that there are very few of us who like coyotes. But there is an animal that is outside through hot or cold, rain or shine, dry or wet – and they thrive! How do they do it? I find it amazing, don't you? Little things like this intrigue me.

Our bees have adapted pretty well to the same kind of conditions. Either that or they have been created that way, and I subscribe to the latter. As long as they have access to honey or sugar and pollen or protein they should be fine during the cold of winter. They don't complain either, but this time of year you do open their nest at your own peril!

During the last cold snap, I thought it prudent to assist my three weakest hives. Two are nucs and the third is my Top Bar Hive. The first one I fed was easy as it is a two story nuc that had a quart mason jar inserted through a hole in the top cover. It was a quick swap, an empty jar for a full one. The second nuc was a bit more perilous. It is a single nuc and it also has a hole in the lid for a quart mason jar. Only this one needed a small pollen patty. Lifting the lid, I slid the patty into place and disturbed the edge of the cluster. Instantly, about 15 bees came out to defend the hive from the large intruder. I had just enough time to lower the lid, swap jars and beat a hasty retreat while shaking bees off my sleeves. Although I would have deserved it, not one stinger found a home, although I came pretty close.

The Top Bar Hive, usually pensive and friendly, was not much more friendly than their nuc sisters on the other side of the yard. I had just enough time to remove the top, lift three rear bars, insert a small patty and swap jars before the guards came out after me. Another crisis averted. Later today, I'll mix up another batch of syrup and do another round. What northern beekeeper would understand what happened when you get stung in December?

As I shared at the last meeting, an article concerning sustainable beekeeping in the recent issue of ACRES Magazine really intrigued me. I recently received the book that was recommended in the article: "Beekeeping With a Smile" by Fedor Lazutin. It is translated out of Russian. Yes, they have different bees there and different conditions, but what he writes about low impact beekeeping in horizontal, deep hives seems to make sense. The author of the ACRES article, Dr. Leo Sharashkin, has been keeping bees this way for a while in Missouri with great success. The article explains the methodology and gives complete plans for building the hives. If you would like a copy of the article, email me at [glwolf@gmail.com](mailto:glwolf@gmail.com) and I will send you a copy.

If I get the time this winter, I plan to build one of Dr. Sharashkin's hives and give it the old college try. If I do, I'll keep you informed of the results.

Look at the upper left corner on the front page, just above "January Report". See where it says "Vol. 30 No.1"? Here we are, starting ETBA's thirtieth year! This club has been teaching people about bees since 1985. Can you imagine the number of people who have learned about the importance of bees in our environment during that thirty years? One of the founding members of the organization, Mr. H.T. Reaves of Canton, is still a member today. I am very appreciative for the impact this club has had in my family's life for the past several years. Thank you, ETBA and may you continue to serve East Texas for years to come.

I wish you a Happy and Prosperous New Year!



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

The year of 2014 has come and gone and new, fresh, untainted year awaits your presence. Will 2015 foster as many new and excited “want to bee” beekeepers as we have seen for the past couple years? Only time will tell.

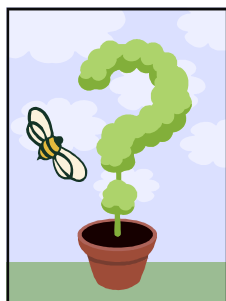
I hear many discussions about beekeepers wanting to be “natural” or “chemically-free” in their beekeeping practices. For many years, almost all non-commercial beekeeping was done in the manner we now refer to as “natural”. John Knight, a long-time beekeeper in Mabank who was still raising bees at his 100th birthday, once commented that it was easy to raise bees before the beetles came. Add to that the growing concern about Varroa Mites as an additional stressor in our hives. I do applaud the beekeeper who prefers to keep hives free of chemicals and medications but I also realize that some situations may require making different choices. The smartest beekeeper is the one who makes the best decisions at the most optimum times about how to maintain their hives. In some situations, that “BEST” decision may be to assist the hive with a chemical or medical treatment.

Varroa Mites have become a common occurrence in almost all of our hives. Unlike the Small Hive Beetle, our bees cannot so easily control the mites by preventing entry, capturing and carrying them out, or isolating them in propolis jails. It is up to the beekeeper to monitor levels of Varroa infestation and know when to take steps to intervene before the hive becomes weakened or damaged. Mites should be kept under control in order to have a vibrant hive that will be able to survive and produce honey.

It is difficult to judge the mite level in a hive during your usual inspection process. Adult mites are fastened onto bees and are hard to see. Immature mites are on unhatched bees inside capped brood cells. If you do see adult mites running around on topbars or on the comb, your hive is probably carrying such a mite load that it will eventually succumb without your intervention. Bill Baxter, our State Apiary Inspector, once referred to this as the “treat or die” situation. The mite level is already out of control and will continue to rise as long as the hive has new brood. Eventually, the hive will abscond, leaving behind an empty hive with stores and brood (How many times have we heard beekeepers say, “They looked fine last weekend and this weekend they were gone.”) or they will be too weakened to survive the stress of winter.

The most reliable way to judge mite levels is the Sugar Roll Method. Add 2 tablespoons of powdered sugar to a half cup of bees (estimated 300 bees) in a jar and roll it around several times. Shake the powdered sugar out through holes in the lid onto white paper. Mites will be dislodged with the powdered sugar. If you see more than 10 mites per a 300 bee sugar roll, the mite load in that hive is at the dangerous level. In most circumstances, you would be advised to treat such a hive with a commercial miticide.

Many beekeepers prefer to treat mites by dusting the hive with powdered sugar. When a bee is dusted with powdered sugar, it will preen itself to remove the sugar from its body, knocking off adult mites in the process. This method has become prevalent in non-commercial beekeeping and is generally felt to be a “natural” method of controlling mites. However, in the last couple years, formal studies of the powdered sugar dusting seem to indicate that the method is really not very effective at controlling mites. Some adult mites are dislodged as the bees preen, but the brood is a continual reservoir of developing mites. Frequent dusting, as in weekly, does help lower adult mite loads but also subjects the hive to the continual disruption of the dusting. These studies also found late fall dusting was more effective as it knocked down adult mite loads at a time when brood production has slowed or stopped and hatching mites are at their lowest level, allowing the hive to go through winter with a lowered adult mite load.



If you choose to be “natural beekeeper” and raise your bees chemical free, you can expect to lose some hives. Bees less capable of dealing with Varroa will die. Bees more capable of dealing with Varroa will survive. Ultimately, that is the goal bee geneticists are striving to reach. Let me encourage you to use both sides of the equation to the best benefit of your beekeeping experience.

The Got Questions? room will be open 6:00-6:30 before the meeting. Join us if you are a new beekeeper or have some beekeeping questions. Since we are meeting on January 8th, I will be unable to attend as I have another meeting on each 2nd Thursday. Hopefully, we can all make it in February. Until then, I wish you a Happy and Productive New Year.



### *Bee Facts* by Eddie Collins

If you have taken a winter break from your bees, now is the time to wake up and start paying a little closer attention. As we move into the new year, the days start having more daylight hours, the trees start producing pollen, and a few early flowers start blooming. It is amazing how quickly a beehive will “EXPLODE”. Now is a good time to do the following things to stay on top of this explosion:

**Provide a form of sugar.** There’s still a lot of cold ahead and the queen is soon to start laying more. Both of these situations require adequate food stores to support the hive. Either feed supplemental sugar or take frames from the abundant hive and give to the hive in need. I recommend having a minimum of three full frames of sugar food in the hive at all times.

**Provide pollen.** This can be in the form of a substitute or by moving frames of pollen from one hive to another. This time of the year, a lot of two story “double” hives have a lot of pollen stored in the bottom box. I like feeding a powder outside the hive just because I like to watch the bees come get it. Other than this reason, I think feeding directly in a hive using a pollen patty works very well. Just don’t feed a bigger piece of patty than the strength of the hive can support. This is because beetles really like the stuff, so keep a watch on this. As a general rule, make sure you have enough bees in the hive to cover the patty and don’t use a bigger piece than they can eat in a week. This really varies depending on the strength of the hive, the weather, and whether the hive actually eats it. So just check back a few days after putting ithe patty in, see how much has been eaten, and go from there.

Most beekeepers just think about feeding sugar and not pollen. It is amazing how big an impact having pollen in a hive this time of the year directly effects early brood production.

**Build those extra boxes** to support splits or get ready for that massive honey flow we are all predicting for 2015.

**Place orders for packages, nucs, or queens.** It seems like it’s never too early to place these orders.

**Place orders for that bee equipment** you thought you would get from Santa Clause but he did not have have room for it in his bag to deliver to you this season.

In doing the above things, you can start to see a lot of the advantages of having more than one beehive, allowing you to move frames of stores or pollen from hive to hive..

If you’re in the area on January 12th, I will be giving a talk on making splits at the Collin Co beekeeping meeting in McKinney.

I will be selling nucs again in 2015. Please send me an email or give me call if you are interested.

[beeman@cncfarms.com](mailto:beeman@cncfarms.com) / 903-245-0105.

### Honey Tasting Winners who were present at the December meeting

Les Jeske



Timothy Harvey



Pam McPeck



Steve Douglas

