



East Texas Beekeepers Association

Vol. 30 No. 6

June 4, 2015

June Report by Dick Counts

We had another big crowd at our May meeting. We kept pulling our folding chairs as people kept arriving. Thank you for your interest and your faithful attendance.

The church is in the process of making some renovations, including new flooring in the Friendship Hall where we meet. If all goes well, we will be in our regular room on the 4th. However, there is a possibility they may still be working on the flooring in our room. If so, we will use a different room for the night. If you arrive and find a sign on the door, follow the instructions to our alternate room and do not enter the Friendship Hall.

Entomologist Erfan Vafaie (MSc Pest Management, Simon Fraser University 2011, BScH Animal Physiology, University of Western Ontario 2009) will be our guest speaker at the June meeting. Mr. Vafaie joined the Texas A&M AgriLife team in 2013 as the extension program specialist in integrated pest management, serving mainly the greenhouse, ornamental and nursery industry. With a background in entomology, biological control, and experience in farming, Mr. Vafaie's goal is to deliver training in practical, economic and sustainable means of pest management. In addition to grower education, Mr. Vafaie aspires to fill the gap in public knowledge about general farming practices, pesticide tolerance and insect damage tolerance. Be sure to join us for his presentation.

The TBA Summer Clinic is Saturday June 6 in Conroe, Texas. Summer Clinic is always a good time to meet beekeepers from across the state and to learn what is happening in the bee world outside of your apiary. You can register on the TBA website at www.texasbeekeepers.org.

Some of our younger ETBA members have been involved in public education about the honey bee. Jacob and Peter Cole have been giving presentations at Athens elementary schools. Micah Sparks developed a honey bee presentation for his speech competition. In recognition for their accomplishments, TBA is sponsoring them to attend the Summer Clinic. Congratulations, guys.

I also want to give a special thanks to Terri Fields, who volunteered to keep our coffee service flowing, an important job at an ETBA meeting!

President—Gus Wolf

Vice President—John Stewart

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Ex. Director and Reporter—
Dick Counts

Honey Queen Chair—Lani
Lanchester

Directors-at-Large—Stanford
Brantley

Program Director — Matt Thomas

Webmaster—Ken Wilkinson

Next Meeting

June 4

405 West Main in Whitehouse

6:45 PM

On the Web: etba.info

Or on the phone: (903) 566-6789

Photo by Ginnie Jeske

HONEY QUEEN REPORT by Lani Lanchester



Everyone wants to learn more about honeybees these days. Demand for presentations from Queen Willow and Princess Brittany have been numerous. They have already spoken to thousands of students and adults all over East Texas, teaching about honeybees, pollination, beekeeping, and protecting honeybees.

However, Willow and Brittany have had considerable help from other youth in the club. In Athens, Jacob and Peter Cole have been teaching about honeybees to two elementary schools. At the Makers Faire, ETBA youth showed up to help work the booth teaching over 1300 people about honeybees. While working the booth, Laurel Lanchester demonstrated to the attendees how to make her beeswax lip balm. Just this last week, Micah Sparks traveled to Florida to



compete in a National Speech competition with his presentation about honeybees! Micah, age 12, came in 20th in a national competition of over 45 students that included students already in high school. Well done to all our youth!

Next week at the Texas Beekeepers Association Summer Clinic, TBA will be highlighting the work that Texas youth are doing teaching about honeybees in a program called "Kids Teaching Kids." Willow and Brittany will have the opportunity to present with all the Texas royalty from clubs around the state to local youth and their families. Additionally, the clinic will offer thirty-six educational programs to choose from. The Summer Clinic promises to be a phenomenal event and I hope you can make it. If you do, take a minute to give a pat on the back to all our Texas Youth who have been doing so much for the Honeybee.



As we start the summer, some of us have already had our first honey crop and others are getting ready to extract. While our excitement mounts for our incoming honey crop, we must remember last year's summer. Last year beekeepers experienced 42% losses according to a survey from the USDA. In fact commercial beekeepers' losses were higher in the summer than in the winter, which is truly alarming. To fight this and help keep your hives safe, check out the emergency response kits from the Bee Informed Partnership.

The Bee Informed Partnership from the University of Maryland, in cooperation with USDA Agricultural Research Service, has made emergency response kits available. They offer two kits, the Basic kit and the Pesticide Analysis kit. The Basic kit costs \$80.00 and tests for basic pests and diseases such as Varroa mites and Nosema, as well as two samples that are tested for seven viruses each. This is a comprehensive way to assess a hive for damage and helps you to prepare for what you need to do next. The Pesticide Analysis kit is quite a bit more expensive at \$760.00. Although it is more expensive, the Pesticide Analysis kit tests for everything that the Basic kit does as well as testing pollen samples for 170 known pesticides. Although neither of these is cheap, they are something that every beekeeper should know are available. The testing kits could really make a difference in how we approach hive health.

If you are interested in obtaining either of these kits you can visit www.beeinformed.org. Both kits require test samples from 16 hives. They prefer eight samples from strong hives and eight samples from weak hives in order to give you a better view of your apiary's overall health. If you are interested in learning more about the Emergency Response Kits or how to properly remove samples from your hive, please visit www.beeinformed.org.

These kits were something I learned about when I visited the Texas A&M Bee Lab. Though I hope you never have to use one, it is good to have one more tool to use to protect our bees. ~Willow



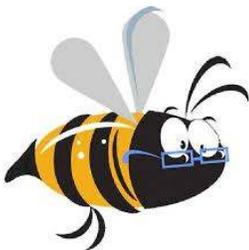
Often times people ask questions that are difficult to answer. Recently, I was asked about why honey crystallizes. I did some research and found the answer fascinating.

Honey sometimes takes on a semi-solid state known as crystallization or granulated honey. This natural phenomenon happens when glucose, one of the three main sugars in honey, spontaneously precipitates out of the supersaturated honey solution. The glucose loses water (becoming glucose monohydrate) and takes the form of a crystal (a solid body with a precise and orderly structure). The crystals form a lattice which immobilizes other components of honey in a suspension, thus creating the semi-solid state.

The water that was previously associated with the glucose becomes available for other purposes. This increases the moisture content in some parts of the container of honey. Because of the increased moisture, the honey becomes more susceptible to fermentation.

While crystallization is usually undesirable in liquid honey, controlled crystallization can be used to make a desirable product. Crystallization can be deliberately induced. With a control, it can be used to create products known as creamed honey, spun honey, whipped honey, churned honey, or honey fondant. Spontaneous crystallization results in a coarse and grainy product. Controlled crystallization results in a product with a smooth, spreadable consistency.

Why does honey crystallize? Honey crystallizes because it is a supersaturated solution. This supersaturated state occurs because there is so much more sugar in honey (more than 70%) relative to the water content (often less than 20%). Glucose tends to precipitate out of solution and the solution changes to the more stable saturated state. The monohydrate form of glucose can serve as seeds or nuclei which are the essential starting points for the formation of crystals. Other small particles, even air bubbles, can also serve as seeds for the initiation of crystallization. ~Brittany



Bee Facts by Eddie Collins

This has been one WET year. It has done a bad number on my honey crop. Right now, I am hoping to average one medium box per hive. But on the upside, my honey plants are growing like crazy. The rain may be washing all the nectar out and knocking off the blooms but the plants, like my Vitex, are growing rapidly. I am already dreaming about the big honey crop all this will produce next year.

Have you ever noticed some bee hives will make honey and some sitting right next to them will not make a drop? I have also seen this type of behavior in making splits. Some splits will explode and get real big, draw out comb, and bring in a lot of nectar while others will just “sit” there, looking good but not showing the “exploding” behavior. I really think this has a lot to do with timing. Yes, it can also be influenced by genetics, pest, and diseases. By timing, I mean how many bees are in the hive or how healthy the hive is at a certain time or how much stores the hive has when the nectar flow starts. If the bees are not at the right stage when the weather is at a certain stage or when the nectar is available, then they can’t take advantage of it and this leads into a declining spiral toward how the hive ends up later down the road.

Lets talk about the “other” side of beekeeping — Never forget that bees sting! I have always been amazed how much pain one little insect can cause and surprised how fast my body screams out in agony. But please remember this sting can be not only uncomfortable but can be fatal to beekeepers, non-beekeepers, and animals. Always practice good husbandry with your apiary and your bees. Be mindful of your apiary locations, how you treat your bees, the activities of people around you when you are working your bees, and in general to what the hive needs, like re-queening, to keep your bees on the more gentle side. Yes, it seems like sometimes the “mean” bees produce honey but I’ve always found that it’s never really any fun to work mean bees. Remember to take the correct precautions to make sure your protective equipment is correct for the job. We will talk more on this topic at the next meeting.

The Texas Beekeepers Association annual Summer Clinic is on Saturday, June 6th, 10am-4pm in Conroe, TX. Take a look at www.texasbeekeepers.org for more information. I have been to several of these over the years and have never been disappointed



President's Letter *by Gus Wolf*

I don't know where the expression "throw in the towel" came from, but everyone knows right well what it means. Well, I throw in the towel with my top bar hive. That expression does imply some finality, but I am not ready to jettison the concept completely. I'm just done for now. It has exasperated me and worn me out. Some is of my own doing, but, none the less, I'm sticking to Langstroth hives for the foreseeable future.

You remember how last year I bought the hive box, not having time to build one of my own – those top bars can be a little tricky to make. It took four tries to get bees to stay in it. Finally, after buying a queen and adding nurse bees from three hives, the bees did stick around and begin the business of building comb and making a home for themselves. They stayed as opposed to figuring out how soon they could beat a retreat and abscond! And build they did. Even during the nectar flow, I fed them. They quickly made comb big enough for the queen to lay eggs and for the rest of them to store pollen and honey. Comb by comb they built their little home.

They had gotten up to five full combs and another small half comb when the frost hit and they stopped building. Now it was time to monitor their well-being because, for the amount of bees in the box, there could not be enough stores to carry them through the winter. And here came one of my big mistakes. The hive box was big enough that I could place an entrance feeder with a quart jar right inside the hive with them. About once a week, I would lift the rear four bars and check the level in the jar, replacing it with a full one when it was needed. All winter long it was a fine arrangement but the last cold snap brought my undoing.

That cold snap made it precarious to check the feed jar and let the heat out of the hive and it was too cold for them to break cluster and go get it. Consequently they starved. Well, more properly said, I starved them. Had I put the feeder on the outside of the box, I could have monitored the feed level more easily and replaced it more frequently. That situation has since been corrected!

Dejected over what I had done, I shook off the dead bees, cleaned out the box and set it in my garage while I decided what to do next. While I was deciding, wax moths and small hive beetles were taking advantage of another one of my big mistakes. I never protected the comb in that hive, even though it was safely stored in my garage. I don't know how they got in my garage but they found it and destroyed the five good combs that had been tirelessly built the previous year. I stripped the ruined comb off the bars and decided I would give it one more try.

At the May meeting, I bought another queen from Johnnie Cox and brought it home. The next Saturday morning, I situated the hive outside – with the external feeder – installed the queen, and shook nurse bees from two other hives into the box. It was chaos and pandemonium for a while, but by nightfall things had settled down. Sunday, bees were flying in and out of the box and the level of feed was beginning to drop. Surely this is a good sign. Monday, late afternoon, I went out and saw no activity. Opening the box, I found that the queen had been released from her cage and the new queen and all her new subjects had absconded! Hence, I throw in the towel – for now.

The hive has been cleaned out. There is lots of wax and propolis inside along with some lemongrass lure. If a passing swarm should take a liking to the luxurious accommodations, I'll not complain. But I am not going to force tenancy on anyone! My top bar hive is now a swarm trap and so it shall remain.





Practical Experiences in the Beeyard by Stan Brantley

Our guidebook says we can extract honey this month. Yes, you can if your bees produced it between the downpours of rain! Reports from my contacts with Louisiana producers indicate that some honey has been capped but the moisture content is still above the 18% level required to prevent fermentation.

We usually talk about it being OK to extract a frame if 80% of the honey is capped. Given the usually wet spring and the apparently high moisture content being found in some honey, it may be prudent to leave the frames in the hive until they are completely capped. It may be mid-July or later before we are ready to start extracting this year.

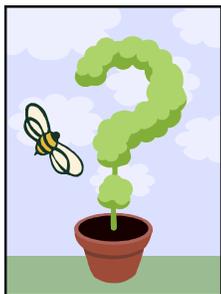
Most of my hives have been slow in starting to cap honey. Interestingly, I am finding a few that are off to a good start. The Chinese Tallow trees are just starting to bloom in the Jefferson area where I am located. Tallow usually provides a good flow and hopefully will help in my honey production this year,

Supplies of honey may be limited this year. Limited supply usually means better prices for your honey. If supplies do indeed prove to be less, don't short change yourself by pricing it too low. You and your bees worked hard to produce that desirable commodity. Let the market appropriately determine its price. An old adage is that your price is probably right if ten percent of your customers refuse to pay that price. Check with knowledgeable honey producers in your area or with your bee club to help determine the right price for your product.

One grey and cloudy but not rainy day last week, I was checking hives. Because of the weather, the bees were rather nasty. Though I was being very gentle and using smoke, the bees were much more aggressive than usual and gave me numerous stings through my suit, particularly on the back and shoulders. Be mindful of how weather can effect the temperament of your bees and protect yourself appropriately. Prolonged wet and stormy weather like we have enjoyed this past month can make your gentlest hive become testy. Know when to back away and come back another day.

I checked a hive that appeared to be doing very well the week prior. Last week, it already had several frames of beautifully capped honey. It had three supers and my eyes were gleaming as I pictured it becoming three full supers of honey. Twenty seconds after lifting the inner cover, my excitement turned to dismay. A worker climbed out between two frames, struggling to drag a dead drone with it. Within seconds, I saw another worker dragging out another dead drone. My honey supers had become a brood rearing area! The virgin queen must have returned from her mating flight and slipped through the queen excluder before her body became too large to pass. Now the supers above the queen excluder had frames of capped brood, except for the two outside frames which were filled with honey.

After removing the supers and setting them aside, I pried the queen excluder off the top of the Deep on the bottom that was supposed to be the brood box. Carrying the excluder to a tree about ten feet away, I banged it a couple times to dislodge the dead drones stuck to it. I was standing around, trying to figure out the best way to get the queen back down into the brood box and happened to look back at the tree where I dumped the bees. I noticed a little cluster of live bees at the base of the tree. Looking closely, I saw the queen climbing around in the grass stems. I happened to have my Kelly Queen Catcher in my work box and used it to capture the queen before she flew away. With the queen safely secured, I began to reassemble the hive. I put the queen excluder on top of the bottom Deep and the supers full of brood over the excluder. The brood should hatch and the bees will clean and then refill the cells with honey. After all was put back together, I set the queen cage on the landing board and opened the door. The queen crawled out and disappeared into the hive. Hopefully, I will find this hive in good shape when I check in another week or so.



Lessons Learned??? You never know where your queen may be. Always check for her on the underside of the Inner and Outer covers when you open the hive. If you see brood or dead drones above the excluder, you may need to find and relocate the queen. And don't count your honey till it is extracted and in the jar!

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. We will try to help you find some answers. I plan to join you, weather permitting. However, if the weatherman is predicting another flood or tornado, I will see you next month!



**TEXAS
BEEKEEPERS
ASSOCIATION**

Summer Clinic 2015

Saturday June 6th, 10am - 4pm

**Join us as we explore all aspects of Beekeeping
from Observer to Producer!**

Membership in Texas Beekeepers Association is not required

**Door
Prizes**

Montgomery County Fairgrounds

9201 Airport Road, Conroe, TX 77303

www.mcfa.org

Hosted by Montgomery County Beekeepers Association

**On-site
Vendors**



Classes for ALL ages Featuring "The Bee-zeebo!"



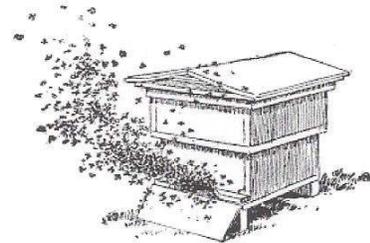
One of Texas' largest outdoor observation hives with LIVE BEES!

***** Live Hive Inspection and Honey Extraction Classes *****

TOPICS

(Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Classes)

- Bee Biology and Behavior*
- Getting started with Beekeeping*
- Pest Management (Varroa)*
- Maximizing Honey Production*
- Capturing Swarms*
- Top Bar Hives*
- How to turn your Hobby into a Bees-ness!*
- Raising Queens*
- Queen Breeding and Sperm Viability*
- Drones*
- Marketing your Honey*
- And more...*



Kids Teaching Kids

Texas Honey Queens and Princesses teaching classes to school aged children about Honey Bees and Beekeeping!

**\$40/Person, \$70/Couple & \$15 Children 16 and under
(Includes Catered lunch) for registration by May 25th, 2015**

**Registration after May 25th is \$50 per person, \$80 per couple
Please register now!**

**For registration and a complete list of classes and speakers
Go to www.texasbeekeepers.org**