



# East Texas Beekeepers Association

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## *March Report by Dick Counts*

We had 136 in attendance at our February meeting! Several of these were first time attendees, people new to bees and people wanting to get started in bees. It is really good to see this growing interest in beekeeping. It is also a challenge to our club to meet the needs of new or future beekeepers. Stanford Brantley continues to provide his Q&A session from 6:00-6:30, offering an opportunity for people to ask questions about beekeeping. Let me encourage all of our members to introduce themselves to newcomers and to share your knowledge and experiences with them. Be sure to wear your name tag, it helps visitors know who you are. And be sure to put it back in the badge holder before you go home!

Several of last month's visitors were inquiring about sources for bees. Unfortunately, local sources of bees and queens are already sold out. If additional sources become available, we pass that info along.

When I drive around the area, I see not only the Wild Plum in bloom but already see Redbuds and even Pear trees in bloom. It will soon be time to add your honey supers. However, we do have some cold weather yet to come. The forecast for the last week of February includes several nights at or near freezing. Make sure your supers are ready and be prepared to add them in the next couple of weeks. Also, make sure your queen has plenty of space to start laying. If you need to reverse brood boxes, do so on the next warm day — don't wait until the honey flow gets started.

Our special guest at the March meeting will be Dr. Juliana Rangel, the new entomologist at the A&M Research Lab. Dr. Rangel will share with us her impressive background in bee research and also her vision for the future at the A&M facility.

Our 2013 Beginners Beekeeping class is half-way through their studies. Hives have been ordered from Eddie and are in the process of growing. Protective gear has been ordered and is on the way. The class is hard at work building and painting woodenware and preparing to receive bees in April.

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Vice President—Mike Rappazzo

Treasurer—Tammy Lenamond

Secretary—Karen Anderson

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



## *HONEY QUEEN REPORT* by Vi Bourns



Exciting things are happening in the world of the honey bee!!! Flowers are beginning to bloom so nectar will be plentiful soon. Pollen has been flowing for a while, starting with the Elm trees. Even though our world in East Texas has not yet turned green with leaves or yellow with pollen, you can take it to the bank that the bees know it is available because they have been bringing it in on their little back legs. We can thank God for the rain and warm days this winter. However, winter is not through with us and we are looking toward a cold week and the continued high wind we have seen during the past month.

Martha and Hayden have begun presenting programs in East Texas and really are pros; so graceful, calm, confident, and poised it even surprises me. March and April begin the round of weekend festivals and outdoor events. We will soon be setting up the ETBA booth at events such as Earth Day and the Wills Point Blue Bird festival. Make plans to join our Royal Court at some of these events this spring. It is a good time of fellowship and a great opportunity to share information about bees with the public.

The scholarship students have been working like Trojans to get the brood boxes built and painted and the frames built and waxed. Believe it or not, they are on schedule! Boxes are being dropped off almost daily now so Dick can load them onto Eddie's trailer for the trip to bring the bees to their new homes, hopefully in late April or early May.

I am looking forward to seeing all of you at our March meeting and appreciate especially the ones who drive from so far away.



Hello Beekeeping Friends!

I recently read an article talking about how the California almond orchards may be in trouble this year due to a lack of bees to pollinate the almond trees. I thought you all might find it interesting so I summarized the article and added some of my own comments.

California grows and supplies 80 percent of the world's almonds. Seventy percent of those almonds are sold overseas. Each year, about half of the U.S commercial beehives are brought to California just to pollinate the almond trees. This year, the 800,000 acres of California almonds are in need of 1.6 million beehives, an average of about 2 hives per acre. However, California currently has about 500,000 hives, only one third of the hives that they need. They still need a million more colonies but probably won't get the full amount of bees needed to sufficiently pollinate the almonds. Many brokers are getting calls from beekeepers saying they can't fulfill their contract and are going to be short on bees. One of the reasons there isn't enough bees is because of Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), which is caused by a number of things, such as parasites, diseases, pesticides, GMO's, herbicides, malnutrition, and stress. Eric Mussen, who has been an apiculturist in the UC Davis Department of Entomology for 37 years, had some thoughts on the matter. He stated that "last year was not a good year for honey production in the United States. We were short on nectar, were short on pollen, and honey bees need both. So 2012 was a bad year for bee nutrition." He went on to say that "fewer colonies will be available for the almond growers and the colonies that are available aren't going to be as populous." "Usually, almond growers want at least eight frames of bees per hive, but this year they will be lucky if they get even six".



If there is a shortage of almonds, it could prove to be the "canary in the coal mine", alerting people to the serious consequences of CCD. Also, with the shortage of bees for pollinating the almonds, we may see the price of almonds go up in the next few months.

I hope you're all having a wonderful month and I look forward to seeing you at the meeting in March! ~Hayden



## President's Letter *by Gus Wolf*

My wood stove is still eating wood like Cookie Monster in an Oreo factory. But, I have to admit the days are feeling warmer. Just the nights still need the warmth of the stove to keep the chill out of the house. Did I say that we try to heat with wood as much as possible? Every garden trailer full of wood that I bring to the back door seems to be the last one we'll need, until another chilly snap strikes!

The bees must be enjoying the temperate conditions during the day. A casual observation at the front of three hives shows they are bringing in lots of pollen in a wide variety of colors. The early blooming trees have already started to provide food for the bees and almost all of the other trees show buds that are starting to swell. Many flowers are now starting to bloom as well. Dandelions are all over – although my children should be pulling them up before they infest our lawn. There are also already a profusion of smaller flowers blooming all over. Parts of some lawns I see are frosted white with a low blooming wild flower that the bees seem to like.

Even so, I have been feeding my bees. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, we fed two hives a gallon of syrup each. Two days later, we went to feed the third hive, filled the feeder, and checked the other two that had been filled two days previous. Both feeders had been emptied already! They are voracious little beasts. Pollen, syrup and nectar – that sounds like a perfect formula for baby bees!

Since the temperatures are moderating and the bees are covering all the frames, I thought it might be a good idea to add a second brood box to each hive. Having twenty-one drawn frames available should give them a head start and a place to put all that syrup I am giving them and pollen they are bringing in. Yes, there are three frames in each hive that they will have to draw out but I am sure they are up to the task.

With the arrival of Spring right around the corner, I need to hurry up and get my swarm traps cleaned out and ready to be placed. I have five and a number of empty, old frames that should be pretty attractive to a searching swarm. I have spoken to some in the club who prefer just an empty box without any frames. They let the swarm build their comb right on the underside of the lid. I guess I'll have to try it both ways and see what happens.

We'll have to observe temperament of our bees this year. One of my hives is wild caught and seems to be pretty gentle. Even when we took them out of their home in December, they were pretty docile and non-defensive and they have remained such. The other two hives are both offspring of queens from Weaver Bees. They are a Buckfast hybrid and may not be wonderful when it comes to temperament. We noted that when we fed those two hives, one in particular seemed a bit cranky. So, we'll watch them as the nectar flow progresses to see if they calm down. Perhaps they are just being protective of what they have in the face of their own perceived dearth. But nectar is just around the corner!

With this being the March meeting, it is intuitive that April is just around the corner. April is the month for the election of new, or repeating, club officers. Nominations will be taken at this March meeting and we will vote at the April meeting. So put on your thinking caps, or your volunteer hats, and be ready to nominate people for President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. If you, yourself wish to be nominated, reach out to someone and have them throw your hat into the ring for you.

**ETBA member Graeme Wolf**



**Board Meeting at 6:00**



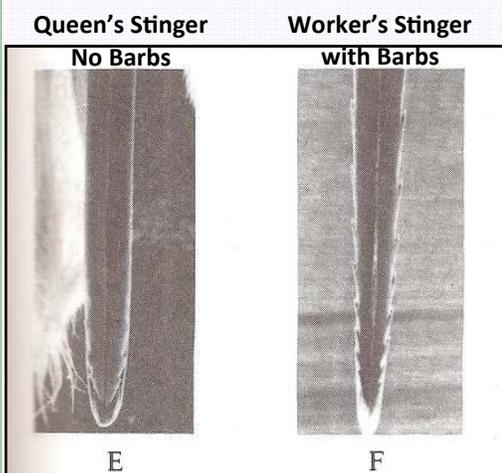
Hello, everyone! This past month has been a busy one for me. On February 14, I spoke to an 8th grade science club at Lindale Junior High. There were eight students and they seemed to really enjoy learning about the bees.

Before that, back in late January, my Dad and I collected a bee hive from a tree. Just this past weekend, I examined it for the first time since we hived it. The bees are doing very well and I was thrilled to spot the original queen! As my dad and I were driving back from the hives, I mentioned this to him, and we started talking about queens. Somehow, we started talking about why a queen dies when stung by another queen. Do queens have poison sacs or do they kill each other by stabbing?



This interested me, so I did some research. Externally, queen bee stingers are very smooth and capable of creating holes. The queen's stingers are not barbed like worker bee stingers and therefore are not pulled from the abdomen. This allows the queen to sting repeatedly where the worker bee dies as its barbed stinger is pulled from the abdomen. Internally, queen bees do have poison sacs. These sacs contain poison of the same chemical makeup as that of worker bees, however, in much larger amounts. In *The Hive and the Honey Bee*, Justin Schmidt and Stephen Buchmann state that worker bees contain "about 100 -150 ug [micrograms] of venom . . . and young queens about 700 ug". Thus young queens have about *five times* the amount of poison as workers! This extra amount of poison probably exists to help the queen kill rivals. Queens are equipped to use their stingers in battle to both create internal damage and to inject poison.

I hope to see you all at the March meeting! ~Martha



## *Bits of Pollen*

**2013 Membership Dues** — *If you have not renewed your ETBA Membership for 2013, please do so right away. Memberships are \$10 for individuals and \$20 for families. If you register for a family membership, be sure to give Tammy a list of all participating family members. You can renew memberships at the meeting (see Tammy), on our website at ETBA.info, or through the postal mail ( ETBA, PO Box 9662, Tyler, Tx 75711-9662.). An updated membership list is posted on our website. After the March meeting, we will update our database and mailing lists to include only 2013 members.*

**Compressed Cotton Plugs for Smoker Fuel** — *Some members have inquired about the availability of the compressed cotton plugs for smoker fuel. Dadant has carried this product in the past but no longer carries it. It is available from Brushy Mountain. It is listed on their website as " 1 pound Premier Cold Draft Smoker Fuel". It is sold in one pound lots for \$2.35 per pound. There are volume discounts at 10 pounds and 42 pounds. These prices do not include shipping.*

**The TBA Winter Delegates meeting** was held in Salado on Saturday February 16. Six members from ETBA attended the meeting. The purpose of the Delegates Meeting is to discuss and plan TBA activities for the coming year. Any ETBA member is eligible to attend and participate in the discussions. TBA has committed to locating the meeting as centrally as possible to encourage more participation from all of the bee clubs. The 2014 Delegates Meeting is scheduled for February 15 at the Stagecoach Inn in Salado.



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

March in East Texas is a time of big changes in your bee hives. As the weather begins to warm and early vegetation begins to bloom, expect to see increased activity in your hives. Look for increased traffic at the entrance, especially on warmer afternoons. Bees should be bringing in early pollen now and will soon be bringing in nectar as more nectar producing trees and flowers begin to bloom.

Inside the hive, look for increasing amounts of brood as the queen ramps up egg laying, preparing for the Spring flow. A good hive will show two to four frames of saucer-sized brood in early March and four to six frames of solid brood by late March. A good late March brood pattern will have solid brood from the top bar to the bottom bar. If the pattern has a few holes here and there, that is OK. If there are lots of empty cells (over 2/3 of the pattern is empty), consider replacing the queen at the earliest opportunity.

There are numerous methods to replace a queen. Study the literature and the Internet and pick a method that appeals to you. All methods have some risk of being unsuccessful. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is to ensure that the hive does not have a queen before you install a new queen. Be sure to either remove or kill the old queen or verify that the hive is queenless.

If you want the bees to make their own queen, try this method if you can verify that there are eggs and brood in the hive. First, find and either remove or kill the old queen. Encourage the now queenless hive to make their own queen by supplying sugar syrup and a small pollen patty. If there are no eggs and brood in the hive, you can move a frame containing eggs and brood from another hive.

Queens are becoming increasingly difficult to find unless you order early. I encourage beekeepers to keep one or more small Nucs for the purpose of having ready access to a queen in case you need to replace one. I actually suggest that you keep a small Nuc for every five hives that you keep. As the Nucs grow and prosper, you can split them to start other Nucs.

Barring unexpected extended winter weather, the honey flow should be starting by mid-to late March. If you have stored your supers containing drawn comb under Paramoth crystals, be sure to air them well before putting them on the hives. Allow at least 2-3 days for the chemical to dissipate from the wax. If you do not have drawn comb and will be putting frames with new foundation in the supers, start with all ten frames in the super (or all eight frames if you are using 8-frame equipment). After the frames have been fully drawn, you may choose to remove one frame and re-space the others to encourage the bees to pull the capped cells out past the edge of the frame. If you start with nine frames in a ten frame box, the bees will try to bridge the enlarged gap between the frames, making it difficult to remove the frames for inspection or extraction.

The hive knows the Spring flow is near and is focusing on laying and hatching the new force of bees to forage and make honey. The number of bees in the hive can increase rapidly once the queen gets in the laying mode. If the hive begins to feel crowded, it can start the process of preparing to swarm. Next time you inspect the hive, make sure that there is brood space available. If the frames in the brood box are full of packed pollen, you may want to replace a couple of them with empty drawn comb. If you have two brood boxes and the bottom box is empty or nearly empty, you may wish to reverse the boxes. If you have only one brood box and it is crowded, you may wish to add a second brood box on top of the original (remember the bee's natural tendency is to move UP, not Down). I know we have discussed this before, but I bring it up again as a reminder. The number of bees can expand quickly this time of the year. It is good beekeeping practice to check for and eliminate over-crowding as part of swarm prevention. If the hive feels too crowded, it will respond with its natural tendency to start preparations for swarming. Once the hive starts preparing to swarm, it is difficult to keep the swarm from happening, no matter what steps you take. It is also good practice to check for swarms in the trees and bushes within 50-75 yards of your hives. If one of your hives should swarm, you might find it has settled nearby and can retrieve the swarm to start a new hive.

Got Questions? I will be at the meeting early. Look for me in the classroom just inside the double doors on the far side of the Friendship Hall. Join us 6:00 to 6:30 with your beekeeping questions. I will also bring a section of tree trunk and demonstrate how to set up a screen-wire trap to remove bees from hollow trees.



## 10 Bad Beekeeping Blunders *by Mike Rappaazo*

After seeing all of the new beekeepers at the last meeting, I thought I would share some of my "blunders" and a few tips so you may skip some stings. Many of these have happened to me this past month. Others have happened in the past to myself or other beekeepers.

1. Don't tie-out goats near hives. Having hives near a pen or even in a pen is one thing, but when a goat is determined to get off of its 15' cable, it is a totally different ball game. The main problem is when the hive is within the said 15' radius of the irritable goat on the tie-out. Everything in that 15 foot radius gets knocked over.
2. Don't forget to feed your bees. Yes, this happened to me this month. And yes, they can starve this time of year.
3. When in doubt, wear a veil when getting close to your hives. This is one of those things that comes with time. You will learn after a few stings when is a good time and when is a bad time to get near your hives without any protective gear on.
  - Corollary 3.1 When in doubt wear gloves when working hives.
  - Corollary 3.2 Spend extra money on good protective equipment. Its money well spent.
  - Corollary 3.3 Err on the side of donning too much beekeeping attire when you think the bees could be cranky.
4. Wet and/or cold bees are not happy bees.
5. Be sure to give your bees plenty of room, but not too much room. Too many supers = moth and beetle infestation. Too few supers = swarm or absconding.
6. Never stop increasing your beekeeping knowledge base. Beekeeping changes every day! I am guilty of this as much as anyone.
7. Along those lines, Ask questions. The only stupid question is the one you didn't ask. ETBA has many experienced beekeepers who are more than happy to answer your questions.
8. When relocating bees, keep the following rules in mind:
  - A. The minimum distance to relocate a hive is 2 miles or more. Anything less and they will fly back to the original location.
  - B. Another option is to move the hives no more than 2-3 feet a day until they reach the final destination. This only applies to moving bees short distances.
  - C. Move bees early in the morning or after dark. Otherwise you could risk leaving the hive's entire field force behind.
9. Bees crawl when there is a reduced lighting situation such as late evening or at night. Keep this in mind when suiting up to move bees or they may crawl up your leg.
10. Have fun. If you do something wrong and your hives die, there's always next year. Its a learning process that most beekeepers go through. However, for the most part, bees are quick to forgive the blunders of their keepers!



### What's in your hive?

Bobby Howell found a snake skin hanging out his hive this past January!

