



East Texas Beekeepers Association

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May 2, 2013

May Report by Dick Counts

Once again attendance has been great, 91 were present at our last meeting. If April showers bring May flowers, do March bees bring June honey?

Now is almost past time to put your supers on. With the weather fluctuating between nice Spring days and then another three or four unusually cold days, the bees seem to be a bit slow in getting into the honey making mode. My bees are just now starting to bring in a fair amount of nectar. Surely these unusually cool nights are behind us and the honey flow should begin in earnest. There has been enough rain that we should have a good bloom of flowers. Once the honey flows starts, keep an eye on your supers and add more as needed.

Swarm season is well underway. There have been numerous reports of swam calls across the area. I have had quite a few from the Tyler area. If you wish to have your name added to the swarm call or bee removal list, give me your contact information, including a phone number where you can be reached quickly. Please note which areas you can cover and how far you are willing to drive. Also, specify whether you will respond to swarms and/or removal calls. I particularly need someone in the Canton area.

On June 1st, the Texas Beekeepers Association will have its Summer Clinic at Clint Walkers Honey House, which is located in Rogers, Texas. Rogers is southeast of Temple on Hwy 190. You will see his commercial honey operation, including his honey sales office, winery, hot and cold storage rooms, wood working shop, and box and frames storage facility. Join us and enjoy a great BBQ dinner and good fellowship. Activities start at 11:00 AM. Hope to see you there.

We graduated 36 new beekeepers from our 2013 class. Eddie Collins delivered 100 hives of bees to my place the last week of April for the graduates to pick up. It is good to see such an interest in beekeeping. In addition to this large class, we have seen more new and want-to-be-new beekeepers at our meeting each month. With all of these new beekeepers in our group, I encourage more experienced members to answer questions, share advice, and be mentors.

President—Gus Wolf

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Dick Counts

Honey Queen Chair—Vi Bourns

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Program Directors — Joe
Mekalip, Gus Wolf

Webmaster—Ken Wilkinson

April 4
United Methodist Church
405 West Main in Whitehouse
6:45 PM

On the Web: etba.info
Or on the phone: (903) 566-6789

HONEY QUEEN REPORT by Vi Bourns



Hello to everyone. It has been a busy spring of keeping the schedule straight and everyone being where they should be on the correct day and time. Somehow we seem to all be on schedule. I fear one day I will slip up, so remember me in your prayers.

Our queen and princess are doing a great job, working alone or with each other. Dick, Gloria Harmon, and Linda Pelham are willing and ready to fill in when they are needed. I am working with a great team of beekeepers! Thanks to you all.

Our students will be getting their bees in the next two weeks and are all excited. Even though several have already felt the sting of a little girl, none have been discouraged. They just put their protective gear on a lot more carefully now. We have had many swarm calls and have passed them on the club members who are excited, hoping to increase their inventory this year. It is so good to hear their success stories.

Bless you and I'll see you on May 2nd in Whitehouse.



Hello Beekeepers! This month's article is a little different than usual. It is not about honey bees! At a few of my presentations, I've been asked questions about bumblebees, of which I really know (or knew) nothing. After being asked again about them at a presentation last week, I decided it was about time I learned more about bumblebees. I thought you may be interested in learning about them, too! They are actually quite interesting, and have a few similarities with honey bees, but also many differences.



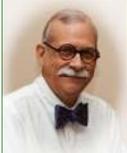
Unlike honey bees, which were imported to the Americas by European colonists, there are quite a few bumblebees that are native to North America and are important pollinators of many native wildflowers and crops. One characteristic that sets bumblebees apart from honey bees and many other pollinators is a special thing called "buzz pollination". During buzz pollination, the bumblebee will grab the anther cone (the flower part containing the pollen) and shake it, releasing the pollen that would otherwise stay trapped inside the flower. This is why bumblebees are such good pollinators of tomatoes and are used to pollinate many tomatoes grown in commercial greenhouses. Another characteristic that sets them apart from honeybees is that bumblebees have a smooth stinger and can sting multiple times. Bumblebees only forage within a mile of their nests. While they do make a small amount of honey, they only store up a few days worth and are much more vulnerable to food shortages. They also do something called "nectar robbing", in which they bite directly through the base of the corolla to the extract nectar, avoiding pollen transfer.

Bumblebee queens are quite different than honey bee queens. One difference is that bumblebee queens only live for one year. Bumblebee nests are actually first constructed in the spring by an over-wintered queen that has been hibernating underground. Only the queens survive during the winter. When the queen emerges from hibernation, she begins foraging for nectar and pollen and starts searching for a suitable nesting site, either in an underground hole, in tussock grass, or directly on the ground. Once she chooses a site, she begins making wax pots to store food and wax cells in which she lays eggs. The whole process from egg to adult bee can take up to 5 weeks. Bumblebee nests are quite a bit smaller than honey bees, holding at the most 50 bumblebees. Most species do not preserve their nests throughout the winter. However, some tropical species live in their nests for several years.

I also found a book online about raising bumblebees, called "Befriending Bumblebees: a Practical Guide to Raising Local Bumblebees". I never realized that some people keep bumblebees like we keep honeybees! Of course, they can't extract honey from them as they only make a very small amount.

Well, I hope you enjoyed learning a little bit about bumblebees! I'll see you all at the May meeting!

~Hayden



President's Letter *by Gus Wolf*

It's happened to me before, you know: "Musical Chairs" with bees. Two years ago, my apiary of eight hives was fairly close to the house. I have since relocated the apiary much further from the house. There are some Roses of Sharon close to the original location of the hives. Those bushes seemed to be the initial congregating place of choice for any swarms. Well, I did have some swarms and they were pretty easy to grab and hive. One swarm in particular took me a week to hive. Five times they were put in a box and each time they would stay for a day and then leave for the safety of one of the Roses of Sharon. At last, I put them in a box and left them in place and they stayed, but it took me three weeks to move them a few feet a day to get them back to the rest of the bees. Since then, I learned when hiving a local swarm, there are scout bees that may find a location that trumps yours and will lure the swarm back out again. I have also learned that a queen excluder on the bottom may prevent the swarm from leaving the box into which they were hived.

My latest experience came two weeks ago when I received a call from someone in Longview that there was a swarm on their garage door, right up in one of the corners. It was a good sized one, too. I had another obligation that night so I really could not capture it and bring it home. Instead, I brought a hive box that contained some older frames and a feeder with a little syrup in it, and a plank and saw horses to set it all on. I set it up about 50 feet from the hive and doused it liberally with lemongrass oil. My thought was that the scout bees would smell the alluring aroma of lemongrass, find the luxurious accommodations, and beg the rest of the swarm to follow. I could then pick them up the next day and bring them home. And, wow, almost immediately there were bees poking around the box and going in and out. "This was a done deal," I thought.

The owner of the house was fascinated with the whole procedure, and so were his three young, school aged daughters. So, I naturally began to tell them what I was doing and why and invited questions and discussion. It was a bee class on the fly. The more I told them, the more interested they became. Meanwhile, the bees seemed pretty interested in the box I left them. I explained to them (the people, not the bees) that with some amount of luck, the bees would accept the new house and fly in there before sundown.

A text from the homeowner at 7:00 AM the next morning revealed that the bees were still clinging fast to their original landing site. That meant I would have to go get them. So, armed with a nuc box and step ladder, I went back to force them into a new home. When I arrived, they were still hanging off the garage door. I set up my materials, sprayed them lightly with some sugar syrup, and swept them gently into the nuc. As I did, I immediately saw why they had not moved — there was a small piece of glistening white comb attached to the header of the garage. They had found their new home already and were prepared to stay. Putting the top on the nuc, I waited for the remaining bees to enter on their own accord and paid careful attention to the amount of bees coming out of the box. Whew! There were more going in than coming out, way more. I was safe. As more bees settled on the box, I herded them to the little hole in the front so they could be with their queen. Finally, when most of the bees were inside, I inserted a cork, packed up, and headed home after telling the homeowner that a couple of hundred bees might still be left behind but they would dissipate over the next few days.

Coming home, with two boxes — one full nuc and the unsuccessful swarm lure box — I unpacked the car, took the two boxes off the roof rack, brought the nuc up to the apiary and "popped the cork" to let the bees out. The lure box was set next to the car to be put away that evening.

Later in the afternoon, I happened to be at the car when I couldn't help but notice the air filled with bees — another swarm! And it was settling into the box that had failed to lure the other swarm. What luck, two swarms on one day! After waiting for them to settle in, I brought them up to the apiary. Thinking to check on the swarm brought home earlier that day, I found that box empty! The bees had rejected my rent free apartment. Where did the swarm I caught by accident come from? I don't know but I think the bees I brought home finally accepted the home I had hoped they would originally go into!

You can do everything "by the book", but bees still have a mind of their own! I hope all your beekeeping adventures are as memorable as mine.

Nacogdoches Fire Department Tackles Honey Bees



The City of Nacogdoches recently invested funds in a purchase some might think bizarre – two white bee suits. No, the city does not keep bee hives on the courthouse roof or donate brand new bee suits to beekeepers in need (don't we all wish!). Instead, these suits belong to the Nacogdoches Fire Department and will be used to benefit locals in need.

I recently had a chance to talk with firefighter Ray Cole who informed me that the fire department has always received bee emergency calls funneled to them from 9-1-1. Until recently, they handled the calls by either referring people in need to a local beekeeper who could take care of the bees or spraying the bees with an insecticide foam to kill them. However, as new diseases and strains of bees have crept into the Nacogdoches County area, local beekeepers have become wary of accepting unknown bees.

Since then, the firefighters have begun tackling some of the bee calls themselves. The department uses, when necessary, its two new bee suits, as well as bunker gear and hoods to address bee problems. However, Mr. Cole told me, "Our main purpose is to educate." When someone calls about a bee problem, the firefighters investigate to see what the situation is. If it is an established hive, the firefighters will refer the caller to a local beekeeper who can remove the hive. One beekeeper on their list comes all the way from Lake Fork to answer bee calls. If the bees are swarming, the firefighters instruct the caller to "leave the bees alone. They'll leave in a day or two." However, if the bees are attacking or stinging people, the firefighters promptly address the issue by spraying the bees.

Fire Chief Keith Kiplinger explained to me that although Africanized bees are creeping into the East Texas area, they are skipping Nacogdoches. "They've spread out around us and created kind of a pocket around our county." The fire department does, however, occasionally send samples of honey bees off to a lab to determine whether or not they are Africanized. One entomologist the department has talked with predicts that Africanized bees will continue traveling north until they reach the Texas-Oklahoma border.



Firefighters "suit up" in the Nacogdoches Fire Departments new bee suits.



A firefighter examines a hive as part of beekeeper training.

The Fire Department makes sure that two fire fighters trained to handle insect and other animal emergencies are on staff during every shift. Although they receive only a few honey bee-related calls each year, mostly in the spring and fall, they also handle snake calls. They treat snake calls similarly to the bee calls, only exterminating when necessary. The firefighters often work with a herpetologist in Lindale to relocate the snakes but not kill them. They want to be eco-friendly and not needlessly kill both snakes and honey bees.

Mr. Cole summed it up, saying, "We're just out there to do good."

~Martha





Practical Experiences in the Beeyard by Stan Brantley

Our bees are getting tuned up to really start gathering nectar. More and more blooms are appearing every day. If the bees place this nectar in the brood nest because there are no supers on the hive, it will not be long before the brood frames become crowded and the swarming instinct kicks in. If you are not around to see a hive swarm, how will you recognize that it happened the next time you visit the beeyard?

Picture in your mind's eye the landing board activity the last time you visited the hive. Or, if you are one of these new-fangled, high-tech beekeepers, just whip out the smart phone and review the video you recorded on your last visit! Compare the activity level of the last observation to what you are seeing now. If the hive has swarmed, bees will not be running over each other trying to get in and out of the entrance. You may also notice bees on the outside surface of the hive, just doing nothing. They are waiting for the new queen to start laying eggs before they go back to work.

Open the brood chamber and examine the frames. There will probably be queen cells near the bottom of the frame. If a queen cell is opened on the bottom, the virgin queen has hatched. Look for other queen cells to have a hole chewed in the side of the cell where the virgin queen or workers killed the unhatched queens.

When you are looking at the brood frames and see open queen cells, no eggs, and a small amount of capped brood, it is a sure sign that the hive has swarmed. Check other brood frames to see if there are no eggs, little brood and the center part of the frame looks clean and polished. When the bees are waiting for the new queen to mate and start laying, they will place nectar and pollen in cells around the edges of the frame but reserve the center cells for the queen's use. I have seen some of these areas that are almost a perfect circle of empty cells.

However, if the queen cells are still closed, you have an opportunity to start a Nuc. Choose a frame with unhatched queen cells. Carefully remove that frame with bees still on it and place the frame and bees in a Nuc box. Add other frames of bees and pollen to finish filling the box.

If you happen to capture a swarm and start a new hive, it is a good idea to initially feed them 2-to-1 sugar syrup to encourage them to rapidly draw comb. Drawing comb and building a new home is part of the natural instinct of a newly settled swarm. Feeding sugar syrup provides the carbohydrates the bees need to make wax. Capitalizing on their natural home-building instinct and providing the food resources is a good way to rapidly build frames of drawn comb. If you provided frames with new foundation, a gallon of syrup is not too much. However, if you used frames of already drawn comb, a couple quarts of syrup will be sufficient.

If the captured swarm is small, start it in a Nuc box. However, if you capture a large swarm, start it in a Medium box. Add a Queen excluder and two or more Medium supers with undrawn foundation. Add a feeder on top of the supers. Feeding a gallon of 2-to-1 sugar syrup to a large swarm this time of the year can really jump start the hive to draw comb. This early in the season, with the new queen starting to lay and workers bring in an abundance of nectar and pollen, the number of bees in the hive can increase rapidly.

A question often asked by new beekeepers is "How do I know when I can harvest my honey?" Honey is stable and ready to be harvested when its moisture content is reduced to 18%. Fortunately, we do not have to go through the beeyard testing the moisture content to know when honey is ready. Bees will seal the honey cells with a wax cap when the moisture content is right. Usually, bees will fill and cap the frames in the center of the super first. As the frames are filled and capped, the bees work outward toward the outside frames. As the super becomes filled, add additional supers to provide more honey storage space. If you are impatient to try your honey, you can pull one of the center frames as it is capped. Be sure to replace it with another frame or the bees will try to bridge the gap with burr comb. Ideally, the all of the cells in a frame should have a white wax cap over the cells of honey. In reality, you will find some frames that are not completely capped. The rule of thumb is that the frame is safe to extract if 80% of the cells are capped. Another beeyard test is to hold the frame with the open cells facing down and rap it sharply on the edge of the hive. If the honey splashes out when you rap the frame, it has too much moisture and should not be extracted. Return the frame to the super and let the bees work on it some more.

Got Questions? New to beekeeping? I will be at the meeting early and will try to help!. 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.



The Bee Gardener by Bobby Howell

At the last meeting of the East Texas Beekeepers Club, Dan Eudy suggested that I write an article on honey plants for the club's newsletter. He didn't have to ask me twice. I agreed wholeheartedly and absolutely.

I have been attending meetings of various beekeepers clubs, groups, etc., for about 14 years. Seldom has there been much discussion about floral food sources for the bees. On the other hand, at most, if not all meetings, the use of sugar syrup and High Fructose Corn Syrup were suggested and praised and recommended and enthused about.

So, I quickly accepted Dan's suggestion because I want to show that the syrups should only be used as a last resort. And, we all, small scale, sidliner, yes, ever commercial beekeepers, can get by with very little resorting to the syrups. Yes, nothing personal, but I want to suggest an alternative to Sugar Syrup and High Fructose Corn Syrup. My approach may be considered somewhat of a holistic approach to beekeeping. Not exactly, but close.

One of my goals in the forthcoming articles will be to show there should be no such thing as a dearth of nectar in our region. There are many really easy to grow flowers, shrubs and trees that bloom during the summer, early fall and up until the frosts and freezes come.

Each month, I will look at some plants that will help us reach our goals, save us money that now goes for syrups, make our yards and gardens prettier, and the bees more productive and healthier. It might include getting to know your neighbors better.



Many of us are making good use of vitex. Thank you, Dick Counts. I'd like to be called "Bobby Vitex," but you are the vitex man. One of my favorite plants is African Blue Basil. It is one of two, maybe three, of the basil's that is a perennial. One plant set out in March can grow into a plant about three feet wide and four to five feet tall. When the honey bees discover it, your place will never be the same again until frost. Cuttings will root in one week and be blooming in three weeks or less. I give it a 9.5 on a 10 basis.

One of the very best plant choices for this area is a salvia or sage. Mexican Bush Sage is a late summer and fall blooming sensation. Shorter day length kicks it into bloom mode. Until then, it just keeps growing and growing and sending up stems. About the middle of August, the first flowering spike will rise. Many more will follow and then the bees, humming birds and other pollinators will congregate at your place. It will bloom until frost.

Club policy prohibits me from mentioning the names of commercial companies who are sources for seeds and plants, but at the next meeting I will give you the name of a site that sells seeds in small packets at really cheap prices and shipping is not out of sight. You will be able to purchase seeds for Japanese Buckwheat, New Zealand Clover, Strawberry Clover, Crimson Clover, Wild Italian Arugula (a wonderful plant that is not only great in salads, but is mucho loved by the honeybees and it blooms all summer and fall right up the freezes and may even stretch past that.)



Probably not at the next meeting, but at future meetings, I will have plants and/or seeds for you. There will be no cost from me to you, but if you feel like donating to the club treasury, don't be bashful about it.

A last reminder or two. Always keep some summer squash blooming and growing in your gardens. Summer squash is one great source for not only pollen but also a good nectar source.

There is more to come; stay tuned.