



East Texas Beekeepers Association

May Report by Jim Biles

May 6, 2021

If you stay in beekeeping long enough, you'll likely develop skills in a number of areas. In the sciences, it's useful to know some biology, meteorology, immunology, entomology, virology, nutrition, among others. When I started beekeeping, botany was not something that seemed very interesting to me, or really all that relevant. The bees knew where to forage, and my interest started after the bees built up nectar into honey.



I changed my mind one evening at the ETBA Q&A session. It was early spring, and Mr. Brantley asked the audience to share what blooms they were seeing that the bees would be foraging on. After an awkward silence, he picked on me and asked me directly. My response was, "Well, I've seen several white ones, a red one, some that are pink," This was obviously not the answer he was looking for, and he proceeded to explain how important it is to the beekeeper to understand honey bee forage.

Soon after, I did some beekeeping with Matt Thomas. Matt would sometimes stop his truck to examine wildflowers by the side of the road, to identify the flower and see if bees were on the bloom.

From this I learned to spot common blooms important to bees and use this knowledge to influence my beekeeping. As an example, I've learned that the bees will forage on clover and vetch (and other early season flowers) in April, which makes a great-tasting honey. I've located some of my best hives near an abundant supply of these florals, and learned to pull honey after the clover stops blooming (normally from late April to July, depending on the kind of clover).

A couple of years after this, the Texas State Beekeepers sponsored a new initiative called Real Texas Honey. To jump start the program, the Real Texas Honey organization used grant money to analyze honey from around the state for floral source. I participated and received an analysis of all of the florals in my honey, which was very enlightening. There are labs that will analyze the pollen in your honey, but for a fee.



Please make it a habit to know what flowers your bees are on. If you sell honey or give it away, you will undoubtedly be asked what flowers influence the honey taste. You will also find it useful to identify good apiary locations and enhance your honey bee management.

*** (photos compliments of Bryce Seneca, professional photographer; my cousin)*

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Next Meeting
May 6th

United Methodist Church
405 West Main in
Whitehouse
6:45 PM
On the Web:
www.etba.info

Club President ~ Melissa Maeker



Swarm season is upon us and I still get excited when I receive a phone call. I have also been delighted to “give” some of those calls to beekeeping friends that are closer to the swarm. As much as I love to catch a swarm, I also love that other newer beekeepers can catch swarms, too. What fun! In my first few years, I would catch a swarm, put in a hive and be disappointed when they absconded the next day (about 50/50). I was told by a beekeeper to put a queen excluder between the bottom board and the hive body when putting a swarm in the hive to keep the queen from leaving. I remove the excluder after a few days once they have started to build comb. This seems to work much better. Although I have not been called on a swarm yet, I did catch a swarm with one of my swarm traps. It was a small ball of bees, but they had already drawn half a frame of beautiful white comb and the queen had already laid in it! I still have one up and hope to catch another.

In mid-April, I requeened most of my hives. Hives that had been combined last Fall were successfully re-split. I am starting the season with 17 hives. My attempt to raise queens with the Nicot system was not very successful. 20 queen cups put in the starter. Only 9 were drawn out but when I went back to get them, only 5 were still viable. Only 2 were successfully mated. Raising queens is hard. I am still pondering if I will just try grafting next year or the Nicot system. Luckily, I was able to obtain enough ripe queen cells from Meagan to finish out what I needed. Hopefully, in early May, I will check my hives and find young, laying queens.

I had the privilege of teaching our Beginner Beekeeper class on April 10th with Jim and Meagan. It felt like a great success. I enjoy sharing knowledge with eager new beekeepers...and can talk about bees for hours. Special thanks as well to all that helped (Tish Kennedy, Jennifer Palmer, Jenifer Babyak and Joe Laws). I still remember my excitement as I started beekeeping. May we never lose our love for this special insect.

For a review, your hive inspections are to 1) enjoy your bees! And 2) watch their progress through the season. If you find a problem, you can help the hive by providing needed resources. For the new beekeeper, this sounds great but also can provoke profound uncertainty. I would complete a hive inspection not always understanding what I was seeing. What if I miss something and I lose the hive? Was there a queen? Only after 6 years am I decently competent to find a queen. The first year I rarely saw a queen. Do you HAVE to see a queen when visiting your hive? No, you do not although I still love trying to see her and admire her beauty. So, what do you want to achieve in your hive inspections? Let me outline your general objectives:

1. Start observing your hives as your approach. What does the traffic look like at the entrance? What is the volume of traffic compared to your other hives? Compared to your last visit? You are looking for trends. Since we are in May, you should be seeing increasing traffic. Are you seeing pollen baskets? Or are they bringing in nectar (they are most likely bringing in both)

2. After smoking and opening the hive, how calm are they? A queen-less hive is said to “roar”. I did not understand that until I observed in one of my own hives. The sound is different. Are the bees immediately agitated? Or calm? How is this different from last time? They will be different depending on many, many issues that you may never understand. Look for the pattern.

3. If you do not find the queen, do not worry. Look for evidence she is there. Do you see eggs? Then she has been on that frame in last 3 days. Hopefully, you will see a mixture of capped brood and open brood and eggs that show a balance of all three stages. You are also looking to see good stores of nectar and pollen.

4. Mr. Counts teaches the rule of 8. If your hive has 8 frames drawn (for a 10-frame box), then it is time to add another box. Keep an eye on your hive as they can rapidly grow in population during the month of May. If you get behind and they feel too crowded, they may decide to swarm. If you are about to go on vacation, you might choose to add a box before 8/10 frames are drawn.

Having more than one hive also allows the ability to compare. I like to keep a log of my hive inspections. I should keep detailed notes on how many frames of brood. More likely, I note a vague impression of what I see (good, great, ok or bad). Keeping a log allows trending for the year. Your log does not have to be fancy. I just grabbed a spiral notebook and started writing. Date each entry (it is fun to read at end of year).

God Bless! Melissa Maeker



The May Program.....

This month, due to the recent resignation of our club ambassador we have decided to postpone this months auction benefiting the queen/ambassador program. When we are able to host another auction we will let you all know. This months speaker will be Roger Farr. He is a master gardener and in the master bee program. He's also heavily involved in TBA and we look forward to all the knowledge he will bring in his presentation: The Birds the Bees the Flowers and the Trees. See you there!

See you there!

Meagan, Program Director



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Happy 
Mother's
Day

Sunday, May 9th

Practical Experiences in the Beeyard by Stan Brantley

May is an important month for all area beekeepers. “A swarm in May is worth a load of hay”, as the old saying goes. It is swarming season from now to July. Some swarms will appear as late as Thanksgiving so don't stop looking for swarms hanging in the bushes and trees as you are out and about on your daily routine.

I do not suggest you attempt to hive a swarm in a screened bottom board box UNLESS you close the screen off. I believe the screened bottom does not offer the security the swarm needs to feel safe. Also, if the temperature is high, you will have a better chance of the swarm remaining if you provide shade for them. A plywood cover on the hive top for a week or two could keep them from leaving a hot hive box.

Nectar is beginning to flow at an ever increasing rate and the bees will be looking for a place to store it. You must observe what your bees are doing and add supers before they store honey in the brood area and limit the area for the queen to put her eggs. Think of it this way, there are about 7000 cells in a deep brood frame. If the queen lays all her eggs on one frame, she could fill it in about three days. Once she has placed an egg in a cell. It will be 23 to 25 days before that cell is ready for her to use again. Do not let the area the queen has for laying become congested or the hive will probably go into swarming mode and you will lose the honey production capability of that hive for this season.

Honey comb in the supers will usually have a lighter color in mid-May. You may want to pull and extract early completely capped frames. This should give you some of the lighter colored and best tasting honey of the year. After extracting, return the wet frames to the hive for the bees to fill again. The wet frames excite the bees into working harder and producing a second crop from the Chinese Tallow and other later spring blooming plants. Wet supers should be returned late in the day to prevent starting a possible robbing situation. The hive bees can clean the smell of the wet honey frames overnight and by morning there will be less cause for robbing to get started.

New colonies can be started in May with little difficulty. Although there is a nectar flow going on, I suggest feeding the new hive a sugar syrup mixture until they have drawn out eight of the ten brood frames in the box. Once the brood frames are drawn, put on a queen excluder and add a super of drawn comb, if you have it, or foundation if you do not. You may or may not be able to extract any honey from this new hive due to the shortness of the remaining flow season, but you should have a well-established hive by the end of the season for next year's production.



If you wish to have double brood chambers, add a second brood chamber of foundation directly above the bottom brood box on about the 4th of July and feed 2:1 syrup until all the frames in the second brood box are fully drawn.

To prevent your bees from bothering your neighbor, you need to establish a watering place early in the season so your bees will become accustomed to using it rather than flying to your neighbor's property to get water. The bees use water to help cool the hive and to liquefy any crystallized honey left over from the winter stores. As we move into summer, bees will use more water, so ensure that it is readily available.

Bearding of bees in hot weather is a normal function. They sometimes cover the front of the hive or hang in clusters from the landing board. This helps move body heat out of the hive on hot afternoons. However, if you see this type of activity in April or May, it may be caused by congestion in the hive. You should consider splitting the hive to try and prevent a swarm issuing forth.

**The Got Questions?**

The group will be open 6:00-6:30 before the meeting. Join us if you are a new beekeeper or have some beekeeping questions. If you have not joined us before, ask someone to point you to the Got Questions? Room. We will try to help you find some answers.



Hello Beekeepers!

If you are waiting to pick up your bees before calling yourself a beekeeper, you won't have to wait much longer!! I apologize for not having an article last month, but now that splitting is over, I have a little more time. It is still bustling here at CNC Honey Farms as now all of the customers are scheduling and beginning to pick up their bees. The winter storm has caused us to run a little later than usual for this time of year. With people now starting to pick up their bees, I wanted to talk a little about our pick-up process and just some things you can expect during your pick-up.

I have been working as a full-time beekeeper for a few years now. With this passage of time, the wonder and excitement that new beekeepers possess had begun to wear off a bit for me. It is nice to be reminded of it as I see people picking up their bees for the first time. To hand a person the first frame of bees they have ever held is quite an experience. Most customers come suited up in their brand-new suits bursting with questions and excitement. It is wonderful. I cannot speak for all places available for picking up bees, but at ours, we will go through the hive with the customer, show them honey, pollen, brood, and maybe even catch a glimpse of the queen. We will show you fresh eggs, capped brood and give you a general rundown of the hive. This process is excellent for new beekeepers to help them begin their beekeeping adventures. We do have repeat customers and those that are not brand new to beekeeping, but it delights me how they still love to go through the hive and talk about bees.

With pick-ups beginning, I would like to share some tips for those that are picking up bees for the first time. The first tip is to please ask questions. Some people are so eager to ask questions, yet others, I think, fear that it makes them appear inexperienced. If you do not understand or are unsure of something, ask. Everyone that has started in beekeeping has had to learn the hard way at least once, so we want to help if we can. Second, beekeeping is not a science. Jamie Ellis once said that the only science in beekeeping is biology. There is no one right way to do something. In fact, there are many correct ways. When you come out to our farm, we will have things set up in the way that works for us, but that does not mean you have to keep bees precisely the way we do it. Find what works for you and your goals for keeping bees. Third, what you have seen on YouTube is not the same scenario you are entering when you come to pick up your bees. It would be best if you had a suit and proper footwear. A lot of videos nowadays have people working bees in flip-flops and shorts. While I am not saying this is wrong, it is not something I recommend when coming to pick up your bees—also, not wearing a suit does not make you appear tough and experienced. Fourth, make sure you have suits for everyone traveling with you. There are many family-friendly farms where you can pick blueberries and pick out your Christmas tree as a group. These places are great, but you should not plan bee pick-ups in the same way. Everyone who comes should be appropriately protected from bees, not just by the vehicle you are traveling in. Bees have a unique ability to slip into cars in that split second the door is open. Many people now transport their bees in SUVs, and no one can guarantee that bees will not escape into the car from the box.

I could go on; the endpoint here is that we want to make sure everyone is safe while picking up their bees this year. Speaking of this brings me back to the first point; ask questions. If you are unsure of something, there is always a beekeeper that wants to help. We all love bees, and that is why every beekeeper started in the first place.

We should all remember that excitement of our first hive, and I hope that yours will be a great one too.



