

Beekeeping in East Texas



At the March 23, 2019 meeting of the Tyler County Forest Landowner Association, Master Beekeeper Mr. Terry McFall shared his knowledge and experience.

Beekeeping is the maintenance of bee colonies, commonly in bee hive boxes. There are 40,000 – 60,000 bees in a colony and the goal is to keep the colony one bee short of a swarm.

A colony of bees consists of three kinds of bees: queen, worker bees and drones. The honey bee queen is the only sexually mature female in the hive and all the female worker bees and male drones are her offspring. The queen may live for up to three years or more and may be capable of laying half a million eggs or more in her lifetime. The queen is raised from a normal worker egg but is fed a larger amount of royal jelly than a normal worker bee.

When harvesting nectar from plants, honey bees will exhibit plant species fidelity; i.e., they visit one type of plant until its availability is exhausted. An average worker bee makes only about 1/12 teaspoon of honey in its lifetime. In order to produce a pound of honey, 2 million flowers must be visited. A hive of bees must fly 55,000 miles to produce a pound of honey. One bee colony can produce 60 to 100 pounds of honey per year.

When a bee finds a “hot spot” of flowers, it shares that information with other members of the colony by performing a waggle dance. This figure-eight dance

communicates both the direction and the distance to patches of flowers yielding nectar and pollen, to water sources, or to new nest-site locations.

The leafcutter and mason bees, which are native to the United States, are better pollinators than honey bees, but store little honey.

African honey bees, first introduced into Brazil in 1956, are still spreading. They are currently in Jefferson and Hardin counties, where their interbreeding with local honey bees has produced aggressive Africanized honey bees. If the queen of a hive is an Africanized honey bee, it may be desirable to requeen the hive with a non-Africanized queen to change the hive's characteristics.

A landowner should expect to devote 1 – 2 hours a week to maintaining 20 bee hives.