

A year in review from the Apalachee Beekeeper's Association

The Apalachee Beekeepers had a very buzzy 2011. Our association hails from the Tallahassee Area (Leon County) and surrounding counties such as Jefferson, Wakulla, and Gadsden. This year we were off to a busy start preparing our Introduction to Beekeeping Short course - a one day weekend event in February. This year was probably the best short course to date. We had roughly 80 pre-registrations (thanks to promotion extraordinaire Elaine Suber) and had to cap off total participants at a little over 100 people. This year we focused on developing informative breakout sessions where participants rotated around eight stations learning about bee nutrition, how to construct woodenware and frames, pest management, etc. This format allowed for people to ask questions in a small group setting. Lunch time entertainment included one of the world's best beekeeper's fashion shows (perhaps the only existing beekeeper fashion show).

We continued representing our organization at several events in the area: the Earth Day Jam, Food Day (a new national movement) and the Leon County Agriculture Extension Office Fall Open House to name a few. The highlight of these events was serving tupelo and wildflower honey on top of freshly baked Belgium waffles. Our monthly book club continues to strengthen and the book chosen this year by book club leader, David Hall, was Natural Beekeeping by Ross Conrad. The book club also serves as a pivotal feature in the development of a mentoring program where 'newbees' can match up with more experienced beekeepers.

One of the biggest developments this year was the construction of a hands-on teaching apiary at the site of our monthly meetings (male worker bee Bob Livingston made this a reality). In the hour prior to our monthly meeting, members volunteer to lead beehive inspections for the newbees. Those who participate in the open hive demos then join the meeting energized and inspired by the stingy insect we have all been drawn to learning more about.

This year we had a great selection of outside speakers make presentations at our meetings. These included Dave Telesco (bear management

coordinator for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission), Jerry Hayes, Dr. Lambert Kanga (FAMU entomologist), Florida honey queen Jayla Gillaspie, Dr. Jaime Ellis, and Dr. Tom Seeley from Cornell university who recently wrote the book entitled Honey Bee Democracy. On months without outside invited speakers our members covered critical topics. Thanks to Tony Hogg, Bob Livingston and Susan Drake, for covering some of these topics.

At the same time we developed a teaching apiary at the site of our meetings, we decided to dissolve our larger association teaching apiary near Lake Talquin. Although we had a great turnout for events such as the construction of a bear fence, the distance to the apiary made regular inspections somewhat cumbersome. We thank Bob Jackson for keeping it going as long as he did.

Our volunteer base was either over-worked and/or taking a vacation when National Honey Bee Day came around and we missed the boat on organizing something for this great day; however we have time to plan for 2012. We did however arrange a nice October Picnic which included, eating, socializing, checking the bees, and smoker lighting competitions over at the extension office. For the first time in Apalachee Beekeeper's history a male holds the current crown for smoker lighting champ, however probably not for long.

In November we hosted a Welsh Honey show at the North Florida Fair, organized by Charles Futch and Susan Drake. We had many wonderful entries this year and beautiful ribbons for the winners. The fair is a great opportunity to educate a great number of people about honey bees at the booth.

The end of our year finished off with a holiday party and election of new officers. We also implemented a welcome packet/committee organized by Lisa Lazarus. Being such a busy organization, people coming to our meetings for the first time, sort of get overlooked in all of the hustle and bustle. Hopefully no more with the Apalachee Beekeeper welcome party. Here's to a great new year for our association and all of the other wonderful associations that contribute to the vigor of the Florida hive.

*-Submitted by Heather Gamper
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