



Farmnote

Honey bee swarms and nests

Farmnote 38/2001

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Swarms

Swarming is part of the natural reproductive life cycle of honeybee colonies. Colonies are stimulated to swarm during spring when warmer weather, together with an abundance of nectar and pollen, provide ideal conditions for the colony to increase rapidly. The colony soon becomes over-crowded and is stimulated to reproduce by swarming.

The old queen, together with the field bees, leave the hive and cluster on a nearby object, usually a small tree or shrub. The swarm will often remain for a day or two while scout bees (worker bees) search for a new home or may move to another location.

In the parent colony, new virgin queens emerge from queen cells and fight to the death. The fittest queen will survive and usually mate, and continue to maintain the colony.

Although bees swarm mostly in the spring, from September to November, some colonies may swarm during the summer and autumn. Most swarms depart from the colony or move to a new location between 10:00am and 2:00pm on warm sunny days. During wet weather a swarm may stay for several days.

Swarms and people

Most people who are unfamiliar with honey bees have a natural fear of them when they occur in large numbers. However, swarming bees are very docile and are not inclined to sting provided they are left alone and a few common sense precautions are taken.

- Should a swarm decide to settle in your property keep children and pets inside for half an hour or so, until the flying bees have clustered on to a bush or other object.
- Once the swarm has formed a cluster, usually about the size of a football, and most of the bees have stopped flying, it is safe to be outside pursuing one's usual activities.
- However, keep clear of the swarm until you can arrange to have it removed.
- Always wear footwear to protect your feet in case the odd bee has settled on the ground.
- **Do not hose the swarm with water, throw stones at it, smoke the bees or take any action to encourage the swarm to move.** These "do it yourself" remedies will

aggravate the bees, encouraging them to sting in defence. Such actions will also make it more difficult for a beekeeper or licensed pest control operator, to remove the swarm.

Removal of swarms

When a swarm has settled in your property, the best course is to have it removed. If you decide to do nothing the swarm may move to a new location or settle in the cavity wall of your house, old drum, shed or a similar dark place and establish a permanent nest, which can be expensive and more difficult to remove.

Generally, such a colony is not aggressive unless provoked but at times it may become more aggressive due to adverse weather conditions or a scarcity of nectar and pollen. In any event, it is desirable to exterminate the bees to prevent the likelihood of being stung.

Do not attempt to remove swarms yourself. These activities should be carried out by licensed pest control operators listed in the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory. Agriculture Western Australia does not remove swarms or exterminate nests of bees.

Further information about bees is available by phoning 1300 136 016.

Further information

- Farmnote No 07/99 '[General guide to backyard beekeeping](#)' (Agdex 481/20).
- Farmnote No 13/97 'Avoid trouble from bees' (Agdex 481/20).

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