



Honeybee swarms and nests

By Bill Trend, Senior Apiculturist, South Perth

Swarms

The swarming process 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 overcrowded 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 it 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 leave the colony or move to a new location between 10.00 am and 2.00 pm on warm sunny days. During wet weather a swarm may stay in its resting place for several days.

Swarms and people

Most people who are unfamiliar with honeybees have a natural fear of them when they occur in large numbers. But 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 on 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 your usual activities.
- 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.



Keep clear of bee swarms until it is professionally removed.



A honey bee.

Do not hose the swarm with water, throw stones at it, smoke the bees or take any action to encourage the swarm to move.

Important Disclaimer

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Agriculture and the State of Western Australia accept no liability whatsoever by reason of negligence or otherwise arising from the use or release of this information or any part of it.

For more information visit our web site www.agric.wa.gov.au

These do-it-yourself remedies will provoke the bees, and encourage 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 on your property, the best course is to have it professionally removed. If you decide to do nothing the swarm may move to a new location or settle in the cavity wall of your house, an 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 best to exterminate the bees to avoid 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. The Department of Agriculture does not remove swarms or exterminate nests of bees.

Further information about bees is available by phoning 9368 3666.