

Bee swarms – what to do?

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Swarms

Swarming is part of the natural reproductive life cycle of honey bees.

The swarming season is usually between September and December but on rare occasions colonies may swarm at other times.

Warmer weather, combined with an abundance of nectar and pollen, stimulate the colony to increase in population. This causes overcrowding which prompts some bees to swarm so that they can reproduce.

Swarms usually emerge from the colonies between 10.00 am and 2.00 pm on warm sunny days.

The old queen, together with about half of the bees from the colony, leave the hive and cluster on a nearby object such as a fence or a small shrub. The swarm may remain for a few hours or 1–2 days while scout bees (worker bees) search for a permanent nesting site. Once found, the swarm will move to this site and establish a new colony.

Bee swarms are not normally aggressive because they are gorged full of honey and are homeless, which reduces their defensive behaviour. A swarm will become increasingly defensive, if provoked, the longer it remains in a given location.

In the original colony, a new queen emerges and continues to maintain the parent colony.

Swarms and people

People who are not familiar with honey bees often have a fear of them.

Swarming bees are generally not inclined to sting provided they are left alone, but the following precautions should be taken.

- If you see a swarm settling on your property keep children and pets inside the house until the

flying bees have clustered onto a bush or another object.

- After the swarm has clustered and most of the bees have stopped flying, it is normally safe to be outside the house.
- Keep children and animals well away from the swarm.
- Arrange to have the swarm removed (see 'Removal of swarms' below).
- Wear footwear to protect your feet in case bees have settled on the ground.
- Do not attempt to move the swarm by hosing it, poking it, throwing stones at it, smoking the bees or taking any action to make the swarm move. This action will only aggravate the bees and encourage them to sting in defence.
- Interfering with the swarm will make it more difficult for a beekeeper or licensed pest control operator to deal with the bees.

Removal of swarms

It is easier to have a swarm cluster removed from your property before it moves to a permanent location, such as a wall cavity, where it will be more difficult and expensive to remove.

Do not attempt to remove a swarm yourself. A local beekeeper may be able to assist in dealing with a swarm.

Beekeepers in your area may be listed in the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory under 'Beekeepers' or 'Apiarists'.

NSW Department of Primary Industries is not permitted to disclose contact details of beekeepers. But local council officers may maintain a list of local beekeepers who will remove swarms.

Swarms that have established in homes should be destroyed by licensed pest control operators who are listed in the Yellow Pages of telephone directories.

NSW Department of Primary Industries does not remove swarms or exterminate feral colonies of bees.



Many amateur beekeepers will collect swarms in their local area as a community service. The beekeeper will need to know the exact location of the swarm, its size and how long it has been there. They will need to be able to get a bee box to the swarm and may leave the box there for a day or two. They will probably collect the bee box at night. Check to see if they charge any fee to cover expenses.

The Amateur Beekeepers' Association of NSW provides information on swarm collectors (listed by postcode, mainly in the larger metropolitan areas) and other general information on beekeeping at their web site

www.beekeepers.asn.au

Further reading

The following information is available at:

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/honeybees

Nuisance bees (Agnote DAI-119)

Nuisance bees – Report form

Bee swarms and their control (Agnote DAI-125)

Beekeeping code of practice for NSW (Primefact 893)

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