



HONEYBEE SWARMING



Swarming benefits

- breaks varroa brood cycle
- a natural honeybee impulse to reproduce

Disadvantages

- a lost swarm loses workforce and honey harvest
- antisocial: the swarm may end in a roof or chimney pot?



Photo: Chappie McChesney

Swarms

Speed: 12kph and more - just faster than you can run!

Size: up to tens of thousands, from the size of an orange to a basketball

Types: primary and secondary/cast + absconders

When: mostly late spring and around mid-day

Weight: can be up to 5kg

Honey: may carry up to 2kg honey

What triggers a swarm?

Three main theories:

- decreasing queen pheromone
- congestion
- excess of brood food

Now generally believed to be first two. But swarming is a natural impulse anyway!



Photo: Steve Holmes

Swarm demographics

It's not just young bees, nor just older foragers, it's a good cross-section, drones included.



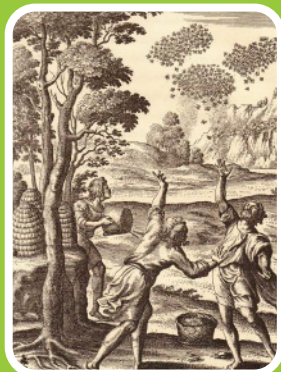
Image courtesy of Mike Galt

A swarm in May is worth a load of hay

A swarm in June is worth a silver spoon

A swarm in July ain't worth a fly.

Folklore says that a swarm can be caught by tanging (banging on pots or pans) to make it settle. Not widely believed today!



Folklore: Bees will not swarm before a storm.

Primary swarms

Primary swarms:

- contain the old queen
- are larger than secondary or cast swarms
- tend to settle first on nearby branches before departing for new nest site.



C



D

To catch primary swarms, pin Vita's Honeybee Swarm Wipe on a suitable branch or post in the apiary.



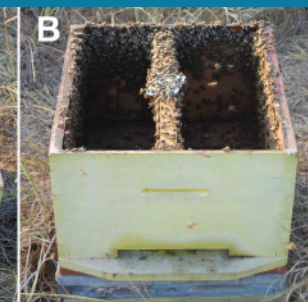
Secondary or cast swarms

Secondary or cast swarms

- depart a week or more after primary swarms.
- contain one or more virgin queens
- are more easily tempted into nearby bait hives.



A



B

To catch casts, use Vita's Honeybee Swarm Wipe in bait hives.

Vita's swarm wipe to lure swarms

Folklore:

If a swarm of bees lands on someone, they will become a leader. In Poland, a king was once chosen because bees landed on him during the election process.



Photo: Peter Edwards

Skep:

In many countries it's the traditional and still effective way of collecting a swarm.

Swarms in flight

Watch out for stalker bees that guide the swarm. They fly quickly at the top of the swarm, then drop, slow down, go to the back of the swarm, and then rise up again to streak forward.

Is your swarm healthy?

If you don't know the source of your swarm, do you know if it is healthy? If in doubt, let the swarm convert the honey it has carried into wax. Then dispose of that wax. Consider a short varroa treatment.

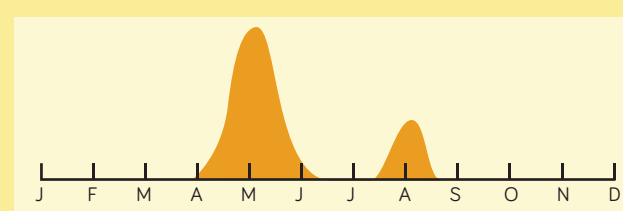


Photo: Paul Hammond

Swarming times

Swarming times differ across the world. Here's a North European pattern:

- peaks in spring, but may also happen in late summer to replace poorly mated queens
- usually depart 10am - 2pm
- often towards the end of a spring honey flow.



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