

## Swarming or, what is that ball of bees doing in my tree?



Many calls come from people reporting honeybees hanging from their bushes and trees. They are concerned for the safety of their families and are wondering what to do. First of all, there is generally no cause for alarm. What you are seeing is a natural occurrence of a colony of honeybees. This is called a swarm. Yes, it is possible to be stung by these bees but generally they are fairly docile.

Most of the time if a person is stung it will be from getting a bee tangled in their hair or accidentally pinching one. A swarm happens when a colony of honeybees becomes too large for their current nest. This nest or hive can be from a beekeepers apiary or a naturally occurring colony.

Wild bees are commonly called feral bees. In reality all bees are wild because they cannot be tamed, only managed. However, a beekeeper's hives generally have a queen of known lines. Prior to the launch of a swarm, activity changes within the nest. The bees have built multiple queen cells on the lower parts of the honey comb to produce a new queen. The old queen ceases to lay eggs; she is slimming down in anticipation of flying with the swarm. The foragers have also reduced gathering activities and have begun to gorge on honey. Just prior to the new queen's emergence, the swarm will launch from the original nest leaving with the old queen and 35-70% of the original population. These bees generally settle on a limb, bush, swing set etc... Fairly close to their original nesting site. This is generally only a temporary resting spot while scouts are flying from the swarm and searching for a new suitable nest site. This swarm will generally only hang around for a short period, perhaps only a day or two, the scouts having returned to the swarm and leading them to the new site.

If you encounter one of these swarms please use common sense and don't reach for the Raid! Honeybees are a precious commodity and are vital to the food chain. You have options, you can do nothing and the swarm will move on or you can review the list on the right sidebar entitled "Local Beekeeping Associations". This will show you what counties they are in and by contacting them they may be able to get you in touch with a beekeeper that is willing to come and capture the swarm.

There is also another option you may want to consider -- Why not become a beekeeper? Beekeeping is a fascinating hobby and there is no sweeter honey than the honey that your bees make for you! There are many beekeeping clubs spread out across our state and there is probably one near you. Attend a meeting; gather some information and equipment and you are on your way.