

PRESS RELEASE

23 May 2013

Swarms of honey bees

BBKA gives guidance on what the public can do to help

Despite greater awareness by the public of the huge contribution honey bees make to our food supplies through pollination, not to mention the honey they produce, a swarm of bees still has the propensity to scare. The public should not be alarmed if they see or come across a swarm of honey bees. They are doing what honey bees do naturally and are not remotely interested in humans. In fact before leaving their hive the bees fill up their stomachs with honey and are rather mellow; their sole intention is to find a new home to build-up a new colony. As long as the swarm is not provoked it will not do any harm but it is important that the bees are collected by an experienced beekeeper. If left to their own devices they may choose to set up home in the nearest convenient spot which could be a chimney or other inaccessible place.

The long winter and late cool spring this year may delay the start of the honey bee swarming season by around four weeks but as soon honey bee colonies are big enough to run out of space in their hives they are likely to swarm. The BBKA urges members of the public to learn how to spot a honey bee swarm and to know what to do when they see one. This is especially important this year when every swarm not collected by a beekeeper could mean the death of that colony in a year when winter losses are expected to be bigger than ever. We need to gather all the swarms we can to build up bee colonies again.

Jane Moseley, BBKA General Secretary, gives some advice: "Honey bees swarm as nature's way of increasing the number of colonies. With honey bee numbers under threat we can ill afford to lose swarms. As long as it is safe and practicable, beekeepers are keen to collect them and give them a new home. Swarms left uncollected are unlikely to survive, which means lost honey production but even more importantly, fewer of these hard working insects to pollinate crops, including our favourite fruits and vegetables.

"However, people often mistake groups of other types of bees or wasps for honey bees.

Three out of four calls to the British Beekeepers Association are actually about wasps' nests, bumblebee sightings, or other flying insects and not honey bees. The BBKA website has pictures and information to help people to determine if what they have seen is a swarm of honey bees or some other type of insect. Check here http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/do_you_have_a_swarm.php for more information. The public can help by contacting a beekeeper as soon as possible on sighting the swarm – details of the nearest volunteer swarm collector can be found on the [BBKA website](#) .”

Ends

Notes to editors:

The BBKA website shows details of swarm collectors in England. Information about what to do in [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) or [Northern Ireland](#) is available on the websites of each of their national beekeeping associations.

BBKA's Key Facts About Swarms

Why do bees swarm?

- Honey bees swarm because they are looking for a new site to form a new colony. It is a natural and positive means of population increase.

What is a swarm?

- Each swarm contains a queen bee and around 20,000 worker bees
- Wasps and bumblebees don't swarm, so if you see a swarm it will be made up of honey bees.

When do bees swarm?

- The swarming season is from April to July, but the peak is from early May to Mid June.

Keep calm and carry on!

- Swarms are not dangerous unless disturbed or aggravated (for example if sprayed with water). Left alone, swarms are harmless.
- Because they only rarely survive in the wild, honey bee swarms need to be captured by trained personnel/beekeepers and placed in beehives where they can form a new productive colony. This needs to be done as soon as possible because once the swarm takes up residence it may be difficult to remove them safely, for example if they choose a chimney or other inaccessible place in a building.
- Your local swarm coordinator can be found here

http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/find_a_swarm_coordinator.php All are volunteers.

- Alternatively, contact the local council or police station who can also offer advice.

How to help honey bees

- Beekeepers are essential to maintaining a healthy UK bee population, but beekeeping is not for everyone. So the BBKA (British Beekeepers Association) has set up a scheme called Adopt A Beehive. Members of the public make an annual donation of £30 to the scheme which supports research and education into beekeeping and bee health. Supporters receive a welcome pack, a quarterly newsletter and regular updates from the regional beehive they have adopted. More information is available at www.adoptabeehive.co.uk.

About The BBKA

With around 24,000 members, the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) is the leading organisation supporting honey bees and beekeepers within the UK. It aims to promote and further the craft of beekeeping and to advance the education of the public in the importance of bees in the environment.

www.bbka.org.uk

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