

Auckland Beekeepers' Club

Swarm Collection Advice

Etiquette

- Remember that you're representing the club.
- Be reliable; turn up when you say you will or call them with an update if you're running late.
- Explain that swarming bees are not a threat and are at their most placid when swarming (they don't have brood or food to defend) and, their little stomachs are full of honey to take to their new home.
- Give them a jar of honey if you can.

Do

- Call the landowner/reporter; explain what you'll do and when you'll be there.
- Consider leaving the swarm box until dusk to remove from the collection site, when all bees are inside before removing. If you go away, tell the landowner or leave a note and your phone number on the box.
- Ask permission *before* cutting any branches.
- Explain that there may be a few bees remaining, it's not always possible to get every bee and any remaining bees will return to their old hive or die in a couple of days.
- Consider spraying the branch that held the swarm with air freshener to mask any pheromone and deter them from returning.
- Give the landowner your number in case there is a later problem i.e. lots of bees are hanging around the next day
- If you go onto a roof or it's a tricky extraction, explain beforehand that you're doing this on a voluntary basis and are not responsible for any damage and don't have public liability insurance.
- If this is your first beehive, register yourself as a beekeeper within 30 days with the AFB Management Agency. Afb.org.nz

Public places.

- Generally, if a swarm is found in a High-Risk public place it would not have settled in the position for too long, less than an hour. If they are going to be a 'high risk' to the public, you could remove them ASAP. Collecting most of the bees. Spray the area well with air fresher once bees have been contained. The remaining small number of bees should still remember where they came from. Leave a sign for the public to be aware they is some 'lost' bees.

Don't

- Don't make up facts, guess or lie to the homeowner; they will repeat what you've said to everyone they know, including the beekeeper who comes next year to collect another swarm.
- Don't take the queen and most of the bees and bail; you are there to clear away the swarm. *Remember that they called you in the expectation of taking away **all** the bees.*
- Don't put members of the public in danger of being stung.
- Don't take risks with heights. Get another beekeeper to assist with a ladder or use a bucket pole catcher (you can borrow one from the club)
- Don't charge the landowner for your services (unless it is very time consuming or tricky extraction, and then explain before you do any work)
- Don't leave them in a hot car. Open windows and/or put air con on full; take them directly to an apiary. A swarm will be packed in together more than in a hive and they will be unable to circulate air to breath and keep cool.

AFB

- The swarm could be contaminated, but not infected, with AFB spores. The bees are full of honey which could contain AFB spores, it's important that this honey isn't fed to brood. Create a brood break while the honey is being purged from the bees' stomach.
- One day old larvae need less than ten spores to get infected, each day after, it takes exponentially more spores. A few days later it takes millions of spores to infect a larva.
- Don't feed the swarm for 5 days.
- Put the swarm onto undrawn foundation, not drawn comb, for at least five days. This could then be disposed.

- After 5 days you can feed the bees and introduce drawn comb. If you do feed them - *don't feed them honey*. 2:1 sugar syrup is best for stimulating comb building
- Be wary of combining a swarm with another hive, it could infect the existing hive. Quarantine the swarm for 2 months before combining.
- You should consider operating hive quarantine with all hiveware used on new swarms for up to 18 months

Varroa

- The swarm is likely infested with varroa.
- Treat within the first week, before brood is capped. You will then kill all phoretic mites (adult mites on bees) and eliminate all mites in the hive without having to go through several brood cycles.

Absconding

Swarm season is in the spring. Depending on where you are and the weather it could be from early October until mid-January, although usually November and December. Later in the summer it may not be a swarm, but the bees may be absconding. The mechanism and ramifications are very different. The bees will be leaving a diseased hive and won't be full of honey.

There is an old English saying from the seventeenth century -

A swarm in May is worth a load of hay;

A swarm in June is worth a silver spoon;

But a swarm in July is not worth a fly.

Adapted for the southern hemisphere -

A swarm in November is one to remember;

A swarm in December, I won't condemn her;

But a swarm in January is worth bugger all.