

# Honey Bee Swarms

## What is a swarm?

Swarms compromise hundreds or thousands of flying honey bees which quickly form a tight cluster around their queen. Once settled on a tree, shrub, wall or post, scout bees investigate places to live. When a suitable place is found, the swarm will leave for their new home. Swarms may hang around for several days until this happens.

## Why do bees swarm?

Swarms are nature's way of colony reproduction. In simple terms, half the bees, and the old queen leave the hive to search for a new home. Honey bees generally swarm in the Spring and early Summer, although swarms can occur right up into Autumn.

If the swarm is not causing a nuisance then leave it, gradually the bees will cluster in a bush or tree and remain there for up to three days. During that time scout bees will be sent out to look for a new home.

## Are bee swarms dangerous?

Although a honey bee swarm may look and sound threatening, do not be concerned or panic; bees within a

swarm are not dangerous if they are left alone. Before the swarm leaves their original home, they gorge themselves on honey, as they will need all the food reserves they can carry to survive as they build a new home. This makes them very docile. Also, bees will generally only sting people to defend their home. Since a swarm has no home, they have no reason to act defensively. Very few people are seriously harmed or killed by bees in the UK.

## What does a swarm look like?

Swarms look different at the various stages of formation. When they are in the air they appear as a cloud of bees.

When rested in a cluster they can be found in all sorts of places and have been found on bicycle saddles, traffic lights, corners of buildings and on a branch/hedgerow, as pictured here.

## How does a beekeeper collect a swarm?

By providing the bees with what they perceive as a suitable home; this is likely to be a mini hive (known as a nuc). They will shake, drop or coax the bees into the container, which, being dark, will attract the queen inside. Once the queen has settled inside, all the other bees will gradually return to her.

Normally, the beekeeper will leave the container slightly open, to allow all the bees to cluster inside, and then, after dusk, when the bees have stopped flying, he/she will wrap the container in a sheet and take them off to their new home.



## Do other bees swarm?

Neither Bumblebees or Solitary bees swarm. Bumblebees may be found in nest boxes, under compost bins, decking and in grassy banks. Solitary bees of which there are over 200 species have a myriad of nesting sites the most common of which are in the ground and holes in mortar.

Sometimes you may see clusters of bees hovering outside a nesting site/hole but this is not a swarm.

## Who to call when you find a swarm?

The British Beekeepers Association members volunteer their services to collect swarms. There will be a Swarm Collector near you to find them please go to [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk) click on the swarms button and follow the steps.

## General Points

This leaflet is one of a series intended to help beekeepers and non-beekeepers. If you believe the contents of this leaflet are relevant to you, please seek further advice from an experienced beekeeper or your tutor.

**Further details are available on our website visit [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk)**

