



Honey bee swarms

Honey bee swarming usually occurs on warm sunny days, most often in late spring and early summer in New York State. It is a natural phenomenon that allows honey bee colonies to reproduce. Under the right environmental and colony conditions, the queen leaves the hive with 40-70% of her offspring. This group of thousands of bees temporarily clusters on a tree branch, the eaves of a house, or in another structure, where they remain until they build a collection of bees selecting where they will start their new colony. The swarm cluster is usually about the size of a soccer ball but can be larger or smaller. Typically, bees are flying and from the cluster, which can result in one going for construction from above to the site. Once they choose their new home, they take off together and fly to it, possibly several miles away. While a swarm is clustered in the tree limb the colony can be caught by a beekeeper. Keeping a swarm should be done as soon as possible.

If you catch a swarm of honey bees, please contact a beekeeper in this directory.

There are over 500 beekeepers in New York who are trained to safely remove swarms. Beekeepers help assure the honey bees will find a home in an apiary rather than a farm building, barn, or other structure. They can be slow honey bees and give them the best chance of survival. Honey bees face many enemies here in New York State, so calling a swarm catcher instead of a pest controller can help preserve these colonies.



What should I do if I see a swarm?

First, do not approach the swarm. Although honey bee swarms are typically very docile, there is always a risk of being stung. Instead, it is best to observe from a distance while noting the following characteristics of the swarm:

1. Approximately how big is it? For example, is it the size of a grapefruit? A basketball?
2. What color are the bees?
3. Do what structure are they clustered? How high up is the swarm?
4. Do you see any moving materials, or only bees?
5. How long have you noticed it has been there?

If you are able to safely do so, it is very helpful to take a photo of the swarm. Many swarm catchers ask for a description or photo so that they can verify that their insects are indeed honey bees.

Second, use this directory to find the swarmcatchers in your county and who will take your report. Call more than one swarm catcher if you do not get through in one immediate. Because swarms can disappear in as little as a few hours, time is of the essence. Offer to send or email a photo to the swarm catcher. This will help them prepare for the equipment and strategy. It is important to discuss ahead of time with beekeepers what you can expect of their visit when they plan to arrive, if they will require removing your vegetation, and if there is a cost associated with this visit.

Some beekeepers remove established honey bee colonies, wasp nests, and carpenter bees

Many beekeepers in this list will also remove wasp nests or carpenter bees and will perform extractions of nuisance honey bees. The latter is a service where a beekeeper removes an established honey bee colony from a structure. If a swarm cluster your house within about 100 feet of a structure, a beekeeper will begin to build comb and then, beekeepers who perform extractions ("cut-outs") will remove these bees and their nesting material. It is important for the wrong material and will attract more and more bees and will cause irritation more so time. The directory will inform you whether the beekeeper is skilled at performing extractions or removing wasps, in addition to removing swarms.

Please refrain from spraying honey bees with pesticides. If intervention is absolutely required, it is prudent to ask the pest controller for the use of a vacuum hose and/or a vacuum sucking agent such as empty water.

Including an exterminator, it is necessary to remove the dead bees and debris of the colony to avoid attracting more swarms, pests, or damaging components of the building. The complexity of removing swarms, such as situations involving, downing of an individual colony, and other requirements more than can be done by a beekeeper. It generally involves keeping a building to remove the bees and debris, some extractions repair the building afterward, while others do not.

Photo: Beekeeper working on a nest. Photo by: Ryan Hagerman, photographing a honey bee colony entrance. Photo by: Emily Hagerman.

Distinguishing honey bees from other insects

There are a number of wasps and bees that are easily mistaken for honey bees. It is important for the swarm catcher or exterminator to know the species involved. Some beekeepers in the directory are capable of removing a variety of species.

Honey bee swarms are a collection of thousands of bees that gather in a tight cluster. These bees are brown and black in color and are fuzzy. They have no wings and are very docile. The following photos are of honey bee swarms on various structures.



If honey bees have decided to make a home of your house or shed, they will begin constructing between horizontal eaves and will fill those eaves with honey, pollen, and sometimes bees. These colonies are considered "established." A beekeeper who performs extractions is trained to remove these colonies by constructing a nesting partition. They do not live in the ground and they do not create paper or mud nests.



Wasps are often confused with bees, but they can be recognized by their different physical appearance and their nests. Unlike honey bees, wasps are almost completely hairless. Their colonies are typically constructed of yellow and black, white and black, or orange and black. Their facilities are up to 100 feet in height, and can range from a few individuals to hundreds. They often live in paper nests made of a grey, papery material, in mud nests, or in the ground. The following photos are of some wasps and their nests.

What to do when you find a swarm of honey bees

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