

# Swarm season starts: bees just doing what comes naturally - Don't Panic!

Submitted by: British Beekeepers Association (BBKA)

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Come spring-time, honey bee colonies start to build-up their numbers and if they run out of space in their hive, they swarm. The public should not be alarmed if they see or come across a swarm of honey bees. They are doing what honey bees do 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.

With honey bee numbers under threat we can ill afford to lose swarms; beekeepers are anxious to collect them and give them a new home in one of their empty hives. 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.

The public can help by contacting a beekeeper through the BBKA's Swarm Watch Hotline by calling 07896 751205. More information is available on the BBKA website ([http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/do\\_you\\_have\\_a\\_swarm.php](http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/do_you_have_a_swarm.php)).

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. A recent survey of over 2,000 adults in the UK suggests that over a quarter, 28 per cent, of respondents would be 'worried' if they saw a swarm, and a further quarter would be 'terrified'. And while a third said that they 'would do nothing', others confessed that they would 'run like hell' or 'scream'. As long as the swarm is not provoked it will not do you any harm but it is important that they be 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.

A further issue relating to swarms is that people mistake groups of other types of bees or wasps for honey bees. Around three quarters of calls to the British Beekeepers Association are actually about wasps' nests, bumble bee sightings, or other flying insects and this confusion is quite an issue for the BBKA, a small charity run mainly by volunteers. People can check if what they have seen is a swarm of honey bees or not by going to its website: [http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/do\\_you\\_have\\_a\\_swarm.php](http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/do_you_have_a_swarm.php)

If people really want to help beleaguered honey bees further and get a little involved themselves, they can join the Adopt a Beehive scheme, [www.adoptabeehive.co.uk](http://www.adoptabeehive.co.uk), which raises money for honey bee research and to help develop beekeeping skills.

Adopt project leader, Nicky Smith says: "The Swarm Watch Scheme can help save honey bee colonies. And the more well trained beekeepers we have and greater understanding the public has of honey bees, the better it is for these vital, hard-working and fascinating creatures".

Ends

Notes to editors:

Research Information: BBKA commissioned Opinium Research to conduct an online survey of 2,012 UK adults aged 18+ from 20 to 22 March 2012. Results have been weighted to nationally representative criteria.

The BBKA Swarm Watch number covers 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 bumble bees 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.
- Your local swarm coordinator [http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/find\\_a\\_swarm\\_coordinator.php](http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/find_a_swarm_coordinator.php)
- 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](http://www.adoptabeehive.co.uk) ([http://www.bbka.org.uk/about/adopt\\_a\\_beehive/](http://www.bbka.org.uk/about/adopt_a_beehive/)).

About The BBKA

With more than 23,000 members and growing, 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](http://www.bbka.org.uk)

About Adopt a Beehive:

Adopt A Beehive is the official fundraising scheme of the BBKA set up to raise money for research and education to support the honey bee [www.adoptabeehive.co.uk](http://www.adoptabeehive.co.uk)

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