



WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE CATCHING A SWARM

Swarms are generally very docile as they are “homeless” and have no brood to protect. They also usually don’t cost money to obtain, so may seem a lucrative option.

You might be lucky enough to have a swarm move into a swarm catch box that you have placed in a strategic position, hoping that a colony will move in.

However, because of the various risks associated with swarms, it is best to quarantine a swarm before introducing it to your apiary.

Because you do not have any idea of the genetic history of the bees in a swarm, here are some considerations around catching swarms:

- a) **A SWARM OR AN ESTABLISHED COLONY?** – You may hear of a swarm in somebody’s tree, but once you get there, you notice sheets of honeycomb, brood and honey stores, plus lots of bees that are not hanging in a cluster. This is an established colony and is much trickier to capture than a swarm. Unless you know how to do a removal, do not attempt it. This type of removal requires a level of skill that most new beekeepers have not yet developed.
- b) **SAFETY** – Catching a swarm may seem easy, but it does take a certain amount of skill to ensure that the practice of capturing the swarm does not upset the bees and pose a risk to the public. It is not recommended that an inexperienced beekeeper tackle this alone.
- c) **TEMPERAMENT** – nobody enjoys working defensive bees! Bees generally have varied temperaments. Swarms have an unknown history, and you could catch yourself a problem if the bees are extremely defensive!
- d) **ABSCONDING** - swarms could be from wild (feral) colonies and may have genetic swarming tendencies, so are likely to swarm again. Also, because they are not established with brood or honey stores, they may not take to the hive you place them into and leave as quickly as they arrived.
- e) **UNKNOWN ISSUES** - Swarms occur for different reasons – pests, disease, seasonal changes, congestion, old queens, no food stores, genetic predisposition, With a swarm you have no idea of the history.
- f) **DISEASE** - You may be catching swarm which has disease such as AFB, or EFB or Varroa Mite. You could be bringing home much more than a swarm of bees.
- g) **QUEEN’S AGE & PERFORMANCE** - In a primary swarm, the old queen leaves the original hive and takes 1/3 to half the colony with her. It is best practice to requeen every caught swarm. If you don’t have another hive to access viable eggs from, make sure you know where to purchase a new queen from. Depending on how early in the season you catch a swarm, queens may not be readily available.