BEE AWARE

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News and Notes from The Texas Apiary Inspection Service

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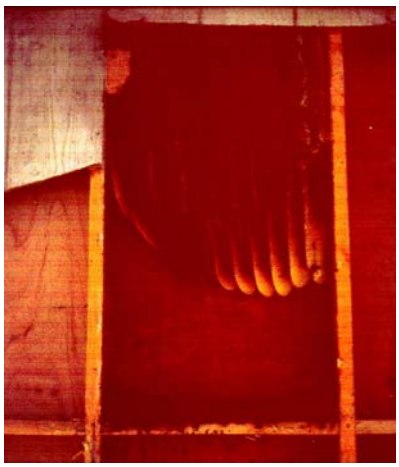
Swarming season is here again. This is a natural condition which occurs in a bee hive. A swarm consists of the old queen, a few drones and around 50% or more of the worker bees within the colony. Generally, they will leave the hive suddenly as a unified group and fly a certain distance and land temporarily on some object such as a tree branch or pole. Later, they may move on to another site selected by the scout bees or stay at the present location. This distance from the original nest may be 100 feet or up to a mile. Swarming typically occurs during a particular season such as late spring or early summer. This depends upon climate conditions within a geographic area such as rainfall, warm temperatures, nectar and pollen sources. In Texas, March to May is considered the swarming season and April is the peak period.

Home Owners:
A swarm may enter your property and select a certain area for their nesting site. This may be an area inside the walls of your house or in a tree in your backyard. At first, they may be very gentle and so you decided to leave them alone. However, this is the time to contact an exterminator or pest control service and have the bees removed. The swarm of bees (now in your home) will draw comb quickly and start filling it up with honey and pollen and the queen will start laying eggs. Later in the season, around August, the nest may store about 100 pounds of honey between the walls and build the colony strength to 30,000 - 40,000 bees. NOW you have a major problem! The bees are crowded and start stinging people in the area and neighbors are complaining. Not only will you need an exterminator to kill the honey bees, but you will need someone to cut the comb and remove the nest from between the walls. This becomes an expensive project which makes you very unhappy.



Beekeepers:

Many factors contribute to swarming and in my opinion are one of the major problems for the hobbyist beekeeper. Colonies with queens over a year old are much more likely to swarm than one with a young queen. Therefore, [1]re-queening a hive will help reduce this problem, but the colony may also be crowded and needs more room for adult bees. Generally, the beekeeper will be able to recognize this sign by a mass of bees gathering at the entrance. Adding [2]hive bodies or deeps filled with combs or foundation will help reduce the crowded condition. Another warning sign of swarming conditions is having [3]primed queen cells. Prompt action is needed when you find large numbers of queen cells that are enlarged, and have larvae present. These queen cells need to be destroyed or you will need to divide the hive into two colonies. In making divides, use small size brood patterns and make sure the hive has sufficient bees and stored honey and pollen to get it started. Using sealed brood in the new hive, you will reduce the number of bees in the parent colony and increase the number in the new colony.

Note: AHB has been detected in Armstrong County.