



Honeybee is Important Non-native Species

Photo courtesy of Bruce Avera Hunter, National Biological Information Infrastructure

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All seven species of honeybees belong to the genus *Apis*, which is the true honeybee genus. Interestingly, none of these true honeybees are native to Alabama or even the United States. However, since brought to America in 1622, honeybees have been a part of the everyday lives of Americans. From the honey and wax they produce, to their pollination of many plants we depend on for food or just enjoy having in our yards and gardens, these insects are truly a species we both need and admire. Unfortunately, it is possible for them to cross the line and turn into a backyard invader.

Honeybees in Alabama live in colonies usually located in hollow trees or some other type of cavity. The bees will swarm in the spring and early summer if they need to find a new nest location. This swarming period is caused by different reasons, such as limited space in a hive or the age of the present queen. During the swarming period, the queen will leave the hive, taking approximately half the colony with her in search for a new hive location. Meanwhile, the portion of the colony that remained will raise a new queen from the larva that has been left behind. The worker bees that leave the hive with the old queen are usually very gentle due to the

large quantity of honey they consumed when preparing to swarm. After a suitable cavity has been found, everything will go back to normal for the bees. The big question is if it will be at or in someone's house.

There are three times a person may come in contact with a honeybee: when bees are out gathering nectar from flowers, during swarming periods, or by encountering a hive. The first and most common way is when a honeybee is gathering nectar. The best way to deal with this is to avoid the bee. Also, remember that any sugary or fruity food or drink can attract bees. This happens more commonly in late summer when nectar from flowers is less abundant.

During the swarming period bees may land on a branch or other objects and stay a few hours or a few days. Although this may look intimidating due to the number of bees, the bees should be very gentle and pose little threat if just left alone. If the bees are in an area where they still need to be removed, a local beekeeper is usually happy to come and retrieve the hive. If no beekeepers can be contacted, it is recommended that a person call a professional such as a county extension agent or exterminator to assist with the problem.

People also come into contact with honeybees when they encounter an active hive. The bees at a working hive are more protective than most other bees. However, they are still not the mindless killers as portrayed in movies. Even so, caution does need to be used around hives.

The best way to deal with bee hives is to prevent them from ever being built in a person's yard or house. This can be done by filling all cavities around the home and sealing any cavity entrances. An example of this is filling a hollow spot in a wall with insulation, and using caulking to seal any holes that may allow bees to enter the house. This should be done before the spring warm-up when swarming usually occurs. If a hive is built in or around the home, it is recommended that a professional be contacted to give advice on removal.

Honeybees are a very important part of our everyday lives. They also require caution when they are encountered. Only an estimated one in 400 people are stung by honeybees each year in the U.S., but some people can have allergic reactions. Those individuals should exercise additional cautions and carry necessary medical supplies. ♣