

## So, how do we catch a swarm?

This is intended to be nothing more than a rough and ready guide! Every situation is different, but what we're trying to achieve is to get the bees into a secure box so that we can transport them. Anyone can do it, it just takes confidence and an understanding of what you are trying to achieve, so get to it!

Always keep in mind that ...

- Bees like to walk up hill
- They like to cluster when swarming
- They very much like to be with the queen
- They are pretty keen to be in a hive-like structure

So we can use this information to our advantage. The main aim is to get as many bees as possible, and hopefully the queen, into our box and turn it upside down with one edge lifted to allow access. The bees will now do the rest while you accept a cuppa for your good work and chat about bees. If using a cardboard box, ensure that the flaps are outside (tape out of the way against the sides), so that when you come to close the box later, there will not be any bees in the way and the queen will be safe from crushing.

## Take a look at Rob Francis's very nice swarm taking video.

This is a good preparation if you've never collected a swarm before. [here](#)

## How do we get the bees into the box?

Often, just placing an upturned box over a swarm is sufficient, but rarely practical, but one can shake them in, grab handfuls of bees, transport the whole swarm by cutting the branch that they are on (ask before cutting plants!), scrape them if they are on a suitable surface (car, window etc.).

Providing we get the majority into our container, you'll probably have the queen too.

Once a good number are in the box, invert it on your sheet near the other bees. Within a very short time, you will see the bees fanning to send out a scent trail to attract the other bees. Be warned!

Even if you have the queen, it's not unusual for bees shaken from a branch, especially if they have been there a while, to keep returning. That can be very frustrating!

If possible, keep the box out of full sun. If you have a swarm box, you may want to add a feeder with water (upturned honey jar with perforated lid).

## So, we have a box full of bees...

What next? If possible, the box should be left until evening to allow all of the bees to stop flying (we want all of the bees) and to form a quiet cluster. Gently secure the box (we don't want flying bees as we move them), with tape, string, sheet etc. and remove to the waiting hive.

## Decanting the swarm

This is bee-keeping, so of course there will be lots of methods! My preferred method is a ramp placed between the ground (lay out a sheet first) and the hive entrance (good reason for an alighting board). A sheet of 6mm ply will do. Evening is a good time. Remember how bees like to climb? Shake the majority of the bees onto the ramp and off they go! If you see the queen, grab her and mark her and maybe clip a wing. After a short while bees will be fanning at the entrance and front of the hive. Leave the box at the base of the ramp. If bees begin to cluster under the edge of the ramp, gently scoop them up and place by the entrance.

Why do I like this method? It's simple! You can assess the swarm size; check the condition of the bees; the queen is unlikely to be squashed when moving frames, reassembling the hive etc.; you

may get to see the queen.

## **What next?**

The next task of the bees is to convert the honey that they swarmed with into wax to produce cells for the queen to lay in. This requires heat! If the bees are out foraging, there will be less bees to form a cluster in which the wax will be produced. So, add some feed! Bear in mind that it takes about eight pounds of honey to make a pound of wax. A 1:1 syrup via your preferred method will do, this reduces forage time and simulates a nectar flow (encouraging egg laying). Allowing some to dribble into the hive will point the way to the feeder!

## **And now?**

Be prepared! Once the bees have been hived, the first thing is to prepare your equipment for the next swarm! Leave the bees alone, but add more feed if you wish. Did I say leave them alone? About fourteen days would be good before you take a peek to make sure that you can see some capped brood; it takes 9 days before a worker cell is capped and if the colony had foundation, time is required for comb to be drawn and the queen to start laying again etc. So fourteen days should be about right. Capped brood is easy to see and should take moments although it may be scattered and uneven. If none is seen, check for grubs and eggs. If none is found, you may have an infertile or unmated queen.