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BACKYARD BAIT HIVE

Donna Lynk

BACKYARD BAIT HIVE

If you build one they will come, eventually.

Through the garden arbor, the swarm trap hive hangs in a cedar tree, ready for occupancy.



At least, I hope they will. This past Spring I decided to get a jump on swarm capture. Our bees love it high. They cluster 20 to 30 feet up in huge cedar trees behind their colonies. There was one exception. It was on April 1, 2008, when one of our colonies clustered in a wax myrtle bush. I was able to capture it alone, without ladders, poles, or risk to life and limb. But that was April Fools day.

The usual procedure involves the man I love, perched at the top of a 12 foot ladder, wielding a large new trash can suspended on a rather flimsy 15 foot spinnaker pole. Both man and pole are more at home sailing on a Hobie Cat.

Over the years we have captured over six of our own swarms, and found great homes for them. At least that many got away. We consider this our contribution to the restoration of a severely depleted feral honey bee population. I also consider swarming a key component of my Integrated Pest Management Program. A brood cycle interruption, translates to a *Varroa* brood cycle interruption, giv-

ing the bees an edge. Swarming provides us with new young queens, and we have always had plenty of honey. I may also mention, in some form of perverse dynamic, in the years I have reversed brood boxes, I have had more swarming than the years when I didn't.

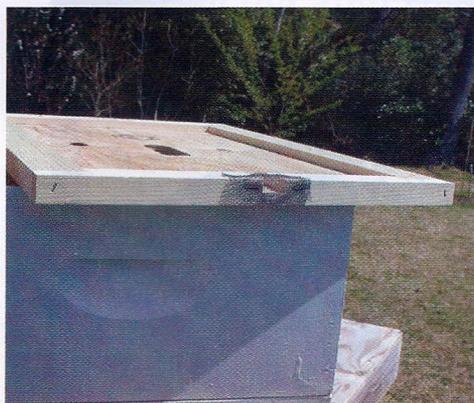
So this year, we decided to 'just say no' to ladders and poles. This year we built a Swarm Trap Hive.

FOR RENT: Lovely Two Story. Fresh white paint. Peaked Copper Roof. Sleeps 25,000 with plans to expand. Screened Bottom Board. First and second floor Hive Boxes imbued with the homey aroma of well used brood boxes. Frames of fragrant Small Cell Foundation. Some open frames, ready for wax construction. Swarm Pheromone Lure, creates an ambiance of Scout Bee Discovery and Approval. Prime location. Elevation at 10 feet, in an aromatic Cedar Tree. South facing. Plenty of Shade. Catches the coastal breeze. Secure Robber Screen in place, the equivalent of a gated community. Will trade for Honey and Pollination. Only Gentle,

Productive Bees need apply.

We started this experiment in early Spring. Having researched various swarm traps, I hit upon the idea to assemble a scaled down complete hive to lure a prospective swarm. We would strap it tight and suspend it in a cedar tree. The theory: once inhabited, we would simply close the robber screen at night. Next day we could easily lower the hive, and place it upon a waiting hive stand with little or no fuss. The swarm hive would be perfectly compatible with our existing eight frame equipment in the apiary.

Starting from the screened bottom board, I chose two used-for-brood hive bodies in good condition, hopeful that the aroma would inspire confidence in the new tenants. The first brood area was filled with frames, some with foundation, a few empty. Bees love the challenge of empty space. Or so I have heard. Frames with Small Cell Foundation were employed instead of drawn brood comb.



The inner cover with a screen over the opening, allows air to flow but no unwanted visitors.



Frames with foundation and without are added to the first brood box.



The pheromone lure has been nailed to the back wall of the second brood box. Robbing screen is in place, ready to be lashed to the hive body.



In position and ready for hoisting, the swarm trap is ready to take to the trees.



Thar' she hangs, ready for occupancy, one day, someday.

Wax Moths would have been tempted to squat, and chew and otherwise render our cozy nest a mess.

Next step, installing a pheromone lure purchased from Brushy Mountain Bee Farm. Purporting to mimic the pheromone of jubilant scout bees having located the perfect cavity, the lure was nailed, with high hopes and great expectations, to the inside wall of the upper brood box. A new inner cover was placed upon the body with the upper entrance slot screened. I do this on all my colonies to prevent entrance from unwanted visitors, such as yellow jackets.

Crowning the top, a peaked cop-

per roof to match our other colonies. The shape of the peaked roof also made the strapping and hoisting process more efficient. These copper tops are a little more expensive, but now I have a spare, should I need one. Finally a robbing screen was tied over the entrance, to allow for defense and safe moving. The hive was then well strapped and tied tight. Hooks were tied to the top for suspending the hive from the hoisting ropes.

And so the day came. The tree was perfect. My husband climbed the ladder once more, to install the block and tackle system. We moved the Swarm Hive into position with a

wheelbarrow. Now it was heave-ho time. Up she went, quite easily. The hoisting rope was tied off. We stood back and basked in the hope of smooth swarm retrieval. The swarm hive was lovely, gently swaying in the breeze, out of bee line vision from the apiary, yet close enough for swift discovery. It was, to my mind, most inviting.

There was nothing left to do but wait. And so, we waited. We waited for the inevitable swarm. And what do you know? For the first year since I began the keeping of bees in 2005, not one single swarm. Nothing. Nada. Instead, our bees were bearding up and up. At one point the beard on our oldest colony reached above the queen excluder. We were not unique. Other beekeepers were reporting similar behavior: no swarms, lots of bearding. Was it the result of a sustained cold Winter, ending abruptly into full blown Spring? Who knows?

For myself, I have always felt that the keeping of bees is an ongoing experiment. Sometimes you get lucky with experiments and the answer is 'yes.' Sometimes the answer is 'no.' And sometimes the answer is 'not yet.'

So be it. That is fine. We can be patient. Our Swarm Trap was intentionally built to last. We can use this system over and over again, for years to come. We will have to replace the lure. Easily done. No more ladders. No more poles. Just bees, gentle and productive. **BC**

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