Honey Bees in House Walls

David Shetlar, Barbara Bloetscher, and Jennifer Andon
Department of Entomology

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<tr>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
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<td>Honey bee</td>
<td>Apis mellifera Linnaeus</td>
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The honey bee benefits the economy immensely; they are exceptionally valuable to human welfare. Honey bees produce millions of dollars worth of honey and beeswax, as well as pollinate commercial fruits, vegetables, and field crops that we depend on for food. However, by establishing a colony in a house, building, or hollow tree next to the home, honey bees may become a nuisance or hazard to humans. Some people have severe allergic reactions to the sting of a honey bee. Honey bees should not be killed unless they pose a hazard.

Identification

Honey bees were first introduced from Europe in the early 1600s. Often called the European, Western, or Common honey bee, this domesticated bee has a stout, black and brown to golden brown striped body with a slightly constricted waist, and chewing-lapping mouthparts. Honey bees are often characterized by the dense hairs covering their bodies and the pollen baskets located on their hind legs. German yellowjackets can resemble honey bees, but the yellowjackets have smooth and hairless bodies. Honey bees are only capable of stinging once, while the more aggressive yellowjackets and wasps can sting multiple times.

Bees in Buildings

An established honey bee colony will sometimes divide itself by swarming. The new swarm, consisting of the older workers (several thousand) and their queen, may cluster for a while on a tree limb or bush near the old hive before entering a hollow tree, home or building void, or other permanent cavity for the purpose of establishing a new nest. There is no need to fear a swarm; honey bees are usually docile when full of honey and without a home to defend.

Honey bees living within a building do not cause structural damage, though if abandoned, their waxy comb and honey will melt and foul wall board, siding, and insulation. Occasionally, foraging bees may enter rooms of a building rather than using their outside entrance. If the nest is accessible, call a beekeeper for removal. If a beekeeper is unavailable or unable to remove the colony, contact a licensed pest management company who has experience with this task. Unfortunately, removal of an established colony may require moving siding, soffit, or roofing. This is why some beekeepers refuse to remove a colony and professionals will charge for this service and repairs.
Removal or control measures are best accomplished in late winter or early spring when the number of bees and the amount of stored honey are low. If the entire colony is accessible and removed, fill the void with insulation and seal and paint all entrances to avoid reestablishment. When a colony is further inside the structure and cannot be removed, insecticides in the form of a dust may provide satisfactory results. Sprays and aerosols are usually not effective because the nest can be several feet away from the entrance hole, whereas the products are blown straight into the hole and quickly absorbed by the structure.

Keep in mind that pesticides applied at the bee entrance may agitate the bees and cause them to enter the house or building! A repeat application may be necessary to reach the queen and the remaining foraging adults. Monitor the exit/entrance hole after treatment to determine if any foraging bees are still active. Plug the outside hole when no activity is seen in five to seven days of warm weather. Avoid applying insecticides during the day when bees are actively foraging. Be sure to remove dead bees as well as the comb to prevent reinestation, as the odor of honey comb and wax is attractive to other honey bees and insects. Older nests can have substantial combs with honey. Complete removal is recommended, as soon as the honey bees have been removed or killed.

**Removal by Trapping**

Honey bees can be removed effectively by trapping; however, the process takes four to six weeks. While it may solve the problem of removing the bees and removing the honey, it may not be appropriate if the bees are located in an area where people are very active.

To trap, place a wire mesh cone (18 inches long with 3/8-inch opening at the apex) over the nest entrance hole. Place a hive containing a queen and a few workers as close as possible to the “trap.” The bees can leave the building, but they cannot get back in and will settle in the decoy hive. In three to four weeks, check for bees exiting the wall. If activity is minimal, restrict entry into the wall for approximately two more weeks, and then plug the hole. Remove the trap and allow the bees in the decoy hive to go back into the building to retrieve their honey. Two weeks later, remove the hive and close up the nest entrance. Destroy the honey if the colony has been poisoned with an insecticide. Trapping is usually not practical and results may be unsatisfactory. Few beekeepers are interested in trapping. Established colonies (those with comb) cannot be collected easily like the free-hanging temporary swarms and are much more labor intensive to remove.

A list of local beekeepers can be obtained from the EMS or police department as well as a local beekeeping club. An online list can be found at [http://www.agri.ohio.gov/divs/plant/apiary/apiary.aspx](http://www.agri.ohio.gov/divs/plant/apiary/apiary.aspx).