

**Stahlman Beekeeping  
Notes for 2022  
The Best things in life  
are free**



**Issue # 6 February 5, 2022**

I have been thinking about how to approach items in this week's article. I have been reading several books by Tom Seeley the past week – I always find something that triggers an idea in books I read. Seeley not only discusses the biology of honeybees in the wild but has written extensively about swarms. I am taking to heart the fact that some wild bees are surviving without intervention by people. Seeley has some ideas on why this is happening.

- Surviving feral colonies are usually located one to a square mile. [In New York State where he did his research] Those feral colonies in an area unable to gather enough food for survival do not survive. Stronger colonies rob from weaker colonies.
- Colonies spread out some distance from each other are less exposed to pests and diseases.
- Those feral colonies with resistance genetics survive while those that do not -- die!

Seeley has written a lot about wild bees. The New York area where he does his research supports on average one feral colony per square mile. That colony may swarm one to three times during a season. Based on that information, I am thinking about how many swarms are going to issue in my own neighborhood from all the hives established here.

Many beekeepers put up what is called a swarm trap prior to swarming season. Bees that enter a swarm trap are free bees!

Wild bees are not subject to our state regulations for keeping bees. They are not kept! Many a beekeeper has watched a swarm from their own hive escape! Once the bees escape to seek a new home, they have no owner unless the beekeeper is lucky enough to get them or permission to capture the swarm on property owned by someone else.

Several swarm catching principles: from ([The Lives of Bees](#) by Thomas D. Seeley)

- Honeybees choose where to live by selecting lofty entrances. Some recommend that 8 to 10 feet above ground is better than a lower location for the trap.
- Honeybees coat the walls, ceilings and floor of their nest with propolis called a propolis envelope.

- Nest size selection indicates that bees reject too small cavity sizes and too large cavity sizes. Research studies (many of them) indicate the best size is between 24.4 and 43.5 liters. These measurements can be converted to 6.4 to 11.5 gallon sized nesting sites.



The size of the nest opening seems to be regulated by the bees. Seeley indicates that the bees can control cracks and openings by sealing them with propolis.

One thing to consider if you are building a swarm trap is keep the opening small enough to keep squirrels out of the nesting box.



Swarm traps can be purchased or built.



This is a purchased molded fiber trap. A swarm commander vial swarm lure is shown above. This type of swarm trap is fastened to a tree

with ratchet straps.

This type of trap requires steps to transfer bees from it to frames. I am including a few photos to show this transfer process. The trap being removed from the tree requires the bees to be enclosed when the trap is moved. A bed sheet does the trick as shown in this photo.





**Comb is cut from the trap and moved to a frame.**

**A swarm trap with frames is a much better choice in my opinion.**

## **Build You Own Swarm Trap**

**One can build a swarm trap easily. It doesn't have to be fancy. Using 5 frame nucs usually result in scout bees finding them unsuitable. A good attractive swarm trap can be more successful if old brood comb is used as a lure.**

**Some tips:**

- **Check out old ice coolers that will hold frames. Some of these can be found in thrift shops for almost nothing. Drill an opening for the bees to enter, support four to six frames in it, and devise a way to get it up in a tree some 10 feet or so. A pulley system helps getting the trap down for inspection.**
- **Follow the simple rule: Attract scout bees. An attractive trap can be created by painting the inside with propolis/bees wax or insert a swarm commander lure. A rough interior and exterior may be very desirable to honey bees.**
- **A friend of mine built a swarm trap from old pallets. He tore the pallets down and used the boards to make a very rough box about 16 inches deep and six frames wide. The size he built was ideal. It had cracks which he tried to seal up, but the bees had several entrances to get into it besides the 1 ½ inch hole he provided. [See photos below]**

- Do you have bees in your neighborhood? Set out sugar water in a small dish to see if bees are attracted to it. If you see bees visiting the sugar water, you can most likely attract a swarm.



**The result: A big swarm several weeks later.**

This swarm trap was built by Cary Orange who lives in Raleigh, N.C. Cary spent time studying literature on swarm traps. He was assigned to me by the Wake County Beekeepers as his mentor.

He brought up the project in our early discussions and about the only thing I could add was – put old comb in the trap.

Note: The eye – bolts in the lid and the drywall screws used to fasten the cover. Cary had designed a pulley system to get this trap up into a tree far higher than a regular step ladder would have allowed. Also note the cross-nailed entrance.





The trap was lowered to a table and a new hive box set beside the swarm trap. I do want to point out something very special about



Cary's management of bee hives. Note that this new hive body is painted white on front and the sides and back are grey. His hives are placed in his front yard. He could look out his front window to enjoy the bees and grey paint helped hide the bees from being observed by people passing just 30 feet away.

This was the swarm. We smoked the bees down so few bees are seen on the top bars.



He used both deep and medium frames in the trap. We did have to cut the new comb built below the medium frames by the swarm. This new comb was placed in frames. Had we used deep frames only, this most likely could have been avoided.

**The important point is:** He got a swarm! The bees selected his trap because it met the needs of the scout bees that found it.

- A lofty entrance
- An attractant – old comb
- Adequate room for the colony to grow and survive. Some say 10 gal or slightly more.

Special point – Cary made sure that he could control the weight of his trap. The pulley system is a lot better than climbing a ladder to lower the trap.

- The build-up of bees from a swarm happens quickly once the queen starts egg laying.
- Once bees occupy the swarm trap, the bees need to be transferred to bee equipment ASAP.
- The trap can then be placed back up the tree and it might possibly catch another swarm.