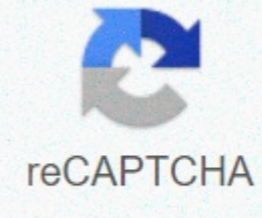




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Swarm traps and bait hives pdf

Australia is currently experiencing a golden age of backyard beekeeping. This is, without a doubt, one of the last golden ages of European honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) honey production – anywhere in the world. Nic Dowse of Honey Fingers, takes us through the importance of taking care of our bee populations, the basics of backyard beekeeping, and how to build your own swarm trap. Every other continent on Earth is plagued by Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), varroa mites (*Varroa destructor*) and a litany of associated bee diseases, while Australia remains CCD and varroa-free. Most Australians – in fact most people all over the world – don't realize this. This is a situation that cannot last, and makes for a bittersweet recognition of Australia's unique context. We live in a very important historical moment for honeybees, a moment in time worth reflecting on and responding to. Because when this situation ends, Australian beekeeping – and honey – changes forever. Honey Fingers x Mike Conole prototype swarm trap, mounted on the wall outside nora café, Carlton. Photo: Tom Ross/Brilliant Creek. The last golden age of beekeeping? If you want to help our bees out, now is the perfect time to become a backyard beekeeper. If you start beekeeping, you will tend to some of the healthiest, and happiest, bee populations in the world. It also means that when varroa mites arrive, more hives will be under the management of loving beekeepers in backyards, who can take the extra time and effort to

manage their hives and their bees through this challenge. This is particularly important in the Australian context. Dr Ken Walker, curator at the Melbourne Museum, notes that in the US, for example, 70 per cent of bees are kept domestically, and 30 per cent are wild. This means that the majority of bees are under management and undergo various handling techniques and treatments for the mites. Every year, beekeepers learn new tricks, choose hygienic (disease-resistant) queen bee populations, and – in some apiaries – the survival rate of beehives improves (in many apiaries, unfortunately, bitalen continues to decrease). In Australia it is the other way around – the majority of our bees are feral. 70% of our bee population is wild. When varroa arrives, most Australian wild bees – bees that provide a lot of free pollination services for our farmers – will suffer greatly as a result of the diseases that mites carry and spread. And the fallout will have serious consequences for food production, food security, our economy and overall well-being. Do you have bees? So, how do you get put up as a beekeeper? You can buy bees from an established beekeeper, or join a beekeeping club and put yourself on a list for a caught swarm. Or, if you're DIY type and fancy some hunting and gathering in the city streets, or on your buddy's bush block – you build some some Traps. Carpenter Mike Conole collects materials and tools in preparation for the DIY swarm trap. Photo: Tom Ross/Brilliant Creek. What is a swarm? Swarming is the natural reproductive agent for honey bee colonies. Think of a honeybee colony as both: a) lots of individual bees (say 30,000-100,000 sterile female worker bees, a couple hundred male drones and a fertile queen) and b) a superorganism. The superorganism is all these individuals – who live cooperatively as a social intelligence – and their honeycomb infrastructure. If you think of a bee colony in this way, then it makes sense to say that the queen, as an individual bee, reproduces by laying eggs. And the bee colony, like a superorganism, reproduces by swarming. So, swarming is the natural way of reproduction for honeybee colonies. How? A new honey bee colony is formed when the bee queen leaves the colony with a large group of worker bees – the swarm. In the main swarm, about 60 percent of the worker's bees accompany the Queen to the new location. This swarm can contain thousands to tens of thousands of bees. When it lands, it clusters into a ball and can vary in size from a grapefruit to a basketball (or even bigger). This cluster is in a temporary location, often just tens of meters from the original hive site - on a tree branch, under an eave, on a fence. The bees use this temporary base to take in their surroundings and scout out potential locations for the colony's new and permanent homes. This ball of bees is quite visible and is often caught by beekeepers – or destroyed by pest control. How do bees choose a new home? Scout bees head out from this temporary site to discover, and inspect, appropriate permanent excavations. If they find something of interest, they fly back to the colony and perform a waving dance on the surface of the swarm. This dance is a visual language seen by many of the worker bees and indicates the direction, and distance, of the potential new home (bees do a similar dance when communicating the location of food sources). Other scout bees who watch this dance then head off to take a look and, if they like the look of it, they return to the swarm and perform a similar dance. If they don't like it, they don't repeat the dance, and instead focus on locating or inspecting other locations. Many potential new homes are listed, many dances are danced. The most appropriate and popular websites (and dances) are repeated over and over again and spread through the swarm as a viral marketing campaign. The shortlist becomes smaller and smaller until one place – and its accompanying dance – is frantically repeated all over the swarm surface. This is the critical mass; Breakpoint. Energy levels are popping and the swarm collectively decides it's time to fly off to their new home. This decision-making process usually takes some This is dance democracy, swarm intelligence... hive mind. Scout bees, it turns out, are actually very picky about suitable home locations. Bees show quite specific preferences for the characteristics of their new homes and thanks to the good work of scientists like Professor Thomas D. Seeley, we now know what these preferences are. By designing suitable housing for the bees, we can attract scout bees. We may be able to offer them an alternative to establishing themselves in unsuitable places – such as schools, or compost vessels, or inaccessible double-ball walls – where pest control is often called upon to destroy the colony. A simple DIY version of the ideal swarm trap. Photo: Tom Ross/Brilliant Creek. Professor Seeley's ideal swarm trap Swarm traps, or bait cups, attract bee swarms and can be used whenever swarms are expected – spring and early summer. The optimal volume of a swarm trap for Apis mellifera (the European honey bee) is between 14L and 40L (the size of a standard hive body). Larger swarms may prefer larger traps, smaller swarms prefer smaller traps. An opening of about 3-5cm on the underside of the hive is required as an entry. This hole can be crossed with two nails (or similar) to prevent the entry of birds or small animals. The trap also needs similar large holes placed on top of the structure to allow good ventilation. These should be covered in a net to stop other bees and insect pests coming in (an input is easier to protect), and means that there is only one (bottom) input to block during transport or relocation. Although bees can live in a variety of situations they seem to orient themselves towards high places. Therefore, choose high points on the terrain with abundant shade (such as groves of tall trees, or a shaded spot on a roof, or under an eave) for your swarm trap location. Place your swarm trap on a post, stand, tree or build at least 2.5 m high. Bait hives should always turn away from prevailing winds but get morning sunlight if possible. In the southern hemisphere it is to orient the entrance to the east or north. Professor Seeley's research showed that bees were not too fussy about the shape of the trap - a cube, a cylinder, a blob are all good. The volume, orientation, location and entrance holes to the trap appeared to be stronger determinants of the suitability of the hive. This makes sense – in North Africa and parts of the Middle East traditional beehives are horizontal cylinders. In Europe, beehives were once logs – vertical and horizontal – then scap (domes), then boxes. Bees will set up in different volumes. A swarm trap needs a removable section (like a lid) to allow inspections and swarm removal. Some traps are large enough to accommodate a protracted (finished) honeycomb that acts as an enticing. If you are a bee, it great, and you can smell it from quite a distance. Comb appeals to the bees' innate preference for efficiency – it takes a lot of honey (energy) and time to build comb from scratch – so why not find somewhere that already has some that are ready to go? Frames also make swarm relocation easy - you can simply transfer a frame from the trap to a beehive. But this is not mandatory - or the only decoy. A swarm can also be shaken, or brushed, from a trap and into a hive. And commercially available pheromone gels, which mimic queen bee pheromones, are sometimes irresistible to scouting bees. The use of essential lemongrass essential oil (just a little smear inside the hive, or near the entrance) is very popular with natural beekeepers at the moment. Even the use of propolis as bait (propolis is a by-product made from plant material, often called bilim), scout bees become curious and warrant an investigation. A ventilation hole on the swarm trap. Photo: Tom Ross/Brilliant Creek. In conclusion, this is what bees want in real estate: – a north facing entrance, with some direct early morning light if possible – located high from the ground (2.5 m and above) – very visible – shaded from warm, afternoon sun (one tree, one eave – not in full sun all day) – 40L is ideal the ideal volume (avoid volumes less than 14L or greater than 100L) – entrance hole of about 3-5cm diameter – entrance located 5cm from the floor of the trap (not on top) – with drawn-down comb – lemongrass oil, pheromone or similar bait – Professor Seeley's 'ideal' swarm trap, a version of which is photographed here, is a timber box, 350(L) x 350(W) x 370(H)mm, with a 30mm round hole at the bottom of the front Become a beekeeper! Catch a swarm! But first educate yourself and buy the appropriate equipment. Find a mentor, join a club, do a course, buy or borrow the right kit, read beekeeping books. This swarm trap was designed by Mike Conole (pictured) in collaboration with Fingers Honey, to meet Prof. Seeley's ideal dimensions. We used: Cutting and materials list 1. Five pieces of 18mm ply offcuts, each with the following dimensions: Two sides: 334 x 334mm Front: 370 x 334mm Back: 490 x 370mm Base: 370 x 370mm 2. Weather stop (strip attached to the back as detachable lids slide below): 370 x 25mm 3. Entrance hole 35mm diameter (shovel piece to fit) 4. Ventilation hole 20mm diameter (shovel piece to fit) 5. Hanging point on back (for bolt or similar in wall) 20mm diameter (shovel piece to fit) 6. 2 x netting (fly wire will do) to cover valves 7. 19 x countersunk 35mm screws (you can pre-drill 3mm holes) Note: These measurements are guides only. Remember that bees will make a home in different large volumes. Stay within the guidelines described in this article and adapt dimensions and techniques to your skill level, access to materials and your Style. If you can't cut materials to size, you can take these dimensions to a plywood supplier, or cabinetmaker, who will do it for a fee. We encourage you to ask for offcuts – they may be cheaper to buy than whole sheets, and this project is perfect for extra pieces that end up on the shop floor. If you want your trap to last more than a couple of seasons, it's a good idea to seal or paint it to limit warping. Use water-based, low VOC paints or sealant if possible and never paint inside a trap. Nic Dowse is the founder of Honey Fingers. In the warmer months, when bees hunt nectar, Honey Fingers is an urban beekeeping company. In the cooler months, when the bees are inside eating their hard-earned honey, honey fingers are a collaborative studio practice. In addition to her work with Assemble, Rachel Elliot-Jones is one of the founders of the Melbourne/Zurich-based curatorial and publishing platform many many. This spring/summer, Honey Fingers and many many join forces to present Swarm Trap – a series of programs and events aimed at raising awareness of Australian bees, beekeeping and beeculture. Keep an eye on the Swarm Trap website for trap-building workshop announcements and other ST-related news. A big thank you to Tom Ross for taking all the photos, Mike Conole for his ninja fingers and NORA for hosting a swarm trap above their inner city garden beds, just a few feet from their kitchen. Having a go at catching a wild swarm that might, one day, make honey on the NORA menu is all about bee-friendly, community connections that make a swarm trap encourage – swarmtrap.com.au. swarmtrap.com.au.

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