

Bee-ware

Much to the delight of area farmers, the honeybees are back in swarms.

One birder is less elated, complaining in a phone call last week that honeybees were chasing hummingbirds away from her hummingbird feeder.

What could she do? What, indeed?

Cullen Crisp, proprietor of Fall Creek Farms

Farms

and a fan of honeybees, offered possible answers.

"That sounds like a swarm of bees that's looking for a place to call home," Crisp said. "If she wants to call us, we can come out and set up a hive near them. Or we can put out a special box. Hopefully, the queen will go in, and we can take the bees back and create a hive."

And if it's not a swarm?

"If it's a handful of bees or a dozen, they're just after the same thing the hummingbirds are after, the sugar water," Crisp said.

"If that's the case, she could take the feeder down for a while and then put it back up. She could also move the feeder to a different spot, though there's a pretty good chance the bees would find it."

The birder might also consider diluting the sugar water differently, Crisp said.

"There's a hummingbird feed powder you can buy in bird supply stores," he said. "Or she can use less sugar in the water when she mixes it for the feeder. That may be the answer."

Fall Creek Farms now has 15 bee hives.

"The bees are extremely busy working the strawberries," Crisp said. "I'm going to move a hive next to the cantaloupes as soon as they start blooming."

"We're making some more hives now. If we start getting calls about swarms, we'll go get those bees and make them part of our collection."

According to the Texas A&M Extension, bees are more plentiful this spring than last year.

That's an indication, Crisp said, that urban and rural dwellers are beginning to realize we need bees to pollinate crops.

"People are not so quick to use pesticides or call the exterminator," Crisp said. "If they see a hive, they take steps toward protecting it."

"Bees' overall health during the winter probably played a big role."

According to Texas A&M:

Bee swarms occur most often during the early spring when new queens decide to spread their wings and take part of the mother colony with her to a new nest site.

Bee swarms are families of homeless bees in search of new places to settle.

The problem with swarming bees doesn't have to do with danger from their stings. Bees in swarms are much less likely to exhibit aggressive behavior than bees which have a nest to defend.

The problem with swarms is that there are not a lot of acceptable nesting sites in urban neighborhoods -- at least not acceptable from our human perspective.

If a nest settles in a backyard tree it could pose a hazard to gardeners or children.

If they can find a way inside, bees willingly take up residence in the walls or ceiling of homes and other human structures. If this happens, the nest will have to be removed, preferably by an experienced professional, often at significant cost.

If nests are not removed, after time the accumulation of wax, honey and dead bees may produce objectionable odors and attract pests like mice, ants, cockroaches, and other scavenger insects.

For more information about bees in and around homes, call the Hood County AgriLife Extension at 817-579-3280.

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The bees
are back
...and in
high
numbers

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Fall Creek Farms proprietor Cullen Crisp tends his honeybees

Factotum

- Bee swarms are families of homeless bees in search of new places to settle.
- Bees in swarms are much less likely to exhibit aggressive behavior than bees which have a nest to defend.
- A nest in a backyard tree could pose a hazard to gardeners or children.
- Bees can take up residence in the walls or ceiling of homes and other human structures.
- If nests are not removed from homes, honey and dead bees may produce and attract pests like mice, ants, cockroaches and other scavenger insects.