Evicting bees from houses

A Kessell

Department of Agriculture

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EVERY year, the Apicultural Branch receives a number of inquiries from harassed householders concerning methods of evicting bee colonies which have taken up their abode in houses. Cavity walls often provide cosy quarters for swarms seeking accommodation, while others establish themselves in chimneys, ventilators and under floors.

The quickest method of getting rid of the bees, but one which few beekeepers care to employ, is to exterminate the colony by means of poisonous gases. At one time the fumes from burning sulphur were widely employed but this method is apt to be dangerous as the fumes are just as deadly to human beings and animals. A much better method is now available in the use of proprietary Gammexane Smoke Generators, small cylinders about an inch high and three-quarters of an inch in diameter. When lighted these give off a dense smoke which, although not poisonous to humans, is deadly to insects. The smoke leaves a deposit of Gammexane on surfaces with which it comes into contact and this remains lethal for some time, killing any insects which settle on it.

**METHOD OF USE**

Seal off all entrances to the hives except one, to prevent the bees and smoke from escaping. In the case of bees which have taken up their abode in a chimney, place a flat piece of asbestos-cement sheeting over the top of the chimney so that the bees and smoke cannot escape. Also have on hand some material to block up the hole through which the generator will be inserted. The generator is lit by holding it at an angle of 45 degrees in the fingers of one hand while the match is applied to the edge. When the “smoke-bomb” begins to burn, it generates considerable heat so have a jam tin or tobacco tin handy and as soon as the generator commences to hiss and smoke appears place it in the tin and quickly push the tin through the hive entrance. Block up the entrance and allow the smoke to do its work. The bees die almost immediately except the flying bees which have been absent during the procedure. These bees may fly around for a couple of days but if they land on any surface which the smoke has contaminated they also will be killed.
The actual smoking of the generator only lasts a few seconds but the smoke will penetrate all the cracks and areas likely to hide bees and will clear away in about two hours.

In places where it is impossible to place the generator inside the hive the smoke bomb may be placed in a beekeeper's smoker and the smoke can be puffed into the hole.

There is little fear of ants becoming attracted to the empty hives, because the dead bees, combs and any honey in the hive will have been coated with Gammexane which will kill or repel the ants.

**ALTERNATIVE METHODS**

One alternative to the destruction of the swarm is to seek the aid of an experienced beekeeper who may be able to remove some bricks or timber from the wall of the floor and cut out the combs so that the swarm may be transferred to a box for subsequent establishment in a standard hive.

Fig. 1.—Diagram showing method of constructing the wire funnel trap

This method is not always suitable, but an experienced beekeeper may be able to apply a wire funnel trap. This method is easy and takes little time to set up; it saves all the bees and its only drawback is that it takes some time to complete the operation.

**Equipment Necessary.**—The operator will need bee proof clothing, a suitable veil and hat, a smoker and fuel together with hammer, nails, some short lengths of pine wood and a cone-shaped trap made from fly-wire as shown in the illustration.

The trap can be made by cutting a piece of fly-wire about 15 inches square and gradually working it into the shape of a cone. When the height of the cone is about four or five inches, tack it on to a light wooden frame, then attach the frame to a piece of three-ply with a hole about six inches square.

If there is more than one entrance to the hive select the one most used by the bees and block up all the remainder by nailing scraps of fly-wire over them. When all other possible entrances are blocked nail the funnel trap over the main entrance, with the cone pointing outward.
The next step is to place a ten-frame hive as close as possible to the point of the cone. The hive should contain two frames of bees with a queen and some drawn comb. If the hive has to be lifted to a high position, a block and tackle may be suspended from the roof so that the hive may be raised and lowered at will. Where this is impracticable a standard may be built on a ladder to hold the hive, or suitable supports may be fitted to hold the hives in position.

When the hive has been put in place the bees may be allowed to fly from the entrance. Using the sharpened end of a pencil, a small hole is made in the point of the wire cone. This hole should be just big enough to allow a worker bee to squeeze through and fly out without too much difficulty.

Eventually all the flying bees will get out through the funnel and, not being able to return, will find their way into the set hive. There is no fear of fighting in such a case as most of the flying bees will have just returned with supplies and a bee carrying food will be accepted by any hive.

Check up to see that the bees are not getting back into the wall through another hole, then when everything is working perfectly, sit back and wait. It may take six or eight weeks before all the bees, including the newly emerged young bees, have left the wall. At a later date the queen may sometimes be seen trying to leave the wall after she has discovered that no supplies are coming in to feed the young bees and all her flying bees have failed to return. It is advisable to remove and destroy the queen if possible, thus hastening the operation.

Inspect the funnel periodically towards the end of a month and note how many bees are coming out. When no bees have been seen to come out for some time, the funnel may be removed and the bees in the hive allowed to clean out the old wall hive. They will do this readily if there is no nectar flow at the time.

Let them rob undisturbed for two to three weeks then one night close up the hive entrance and remove the hive to a place at least two miles from the old site. If the new site is less than two miles away the flying bees may be inclined to return to the wall and become a nuisance.

It is best to fit the funnel trap at the beginning of spring when most hives will be short of supplies and sending out large numbers of field bees. This means that bees will leave the wall in large numbers in a fairly short time. By the time all the bees are out of the wall the main spring flow will be nearly over and the bees will rob out the old wall hive more quickly.
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