

Bees in Buildings

We have had so many calls about Bees in chimneys and buildings that Cathy has written a summary for you.

Bees swarm mainly in May and June, and initially they hang in a tree or hedge for a few days. Their first settling position is usually within 200 yards of their original hive so, if you know a beekeeper locally, the swarm will probably have come from one of his / her hives. It's worth offering the swarm to that beekeeper in the first instance as he/she might not realise that they've swarmed.

Once settled on a branch or similar scout bees head off to find a new home and, once found, the whole swarm and Queen move in. If you see a swarm moving into your property – chimney or similar – the best course of action is to light a very smoky fire to drive them out before they settle – minimise the flames but as much smoke as possible. Too many flames and bees with burned wings start dropping into your fireplace. This method will NOT work with an established colony.

The colony start building comb immediately and within a few days the Queen will start laying. The bees are good parents and so once the Queen has started laying young bees, they are very reluctant to leave. As the hive grows it expands into available space. In chimneys, they often start to build in a side vent that may lead to an old bedroom fire, or just under the pot where the bricks arch away, to keep the comb dry. Bees live for about 3 to 5 years in the same place, however the old comb can become attractive to other bees and a new swarm will move in.

In a building they follow the space they have found. Speaking to a retired Beekeeper, who has been removing them for years, he finds they can go around bends, up and under floor space, one took him 8 days to remove, it was so big, honey was leaking through the plasterboard. The sooner they are removed, the better. I

f you spot a swarm hanging in a tree, call a beekeeper via

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/find-a-local-swarm-collector>

More information about Bees in Buildings can be found in more detail at the link below

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/bees-in-buildings>

'You would need to ensure that the person employed is working safely and has experience of 'cut outs' AND importantly carries adequate PLI (public liability insurance). This might be a specialist bee removal operative, an experienced pest control operative or a builder with experience of working with honey bees. Ensuring the comb, honey and all of the bees are removed from the property is important to ensure no damage is caused by wax or honey remaining. Here are links to some organisations and companies, who may be able to help with established honey bee colony removals from buildings.'

If removal is difficult, it can be easier, and a pleasure, simply to live with them coming and going. They are not usually a problem if high up, as they will fly out foraging and will not be the slightest bit interested in you if left alone. If the chimney is disused, you can seal off the inside entrance to keep bees out of the house. Wax is flammable, so if you plan to use the chimney this danger is something else you will need to consider.

At the moment there doesn't appear to be anyone who is experienced at cutting swarms out of buildings in the Exeter area, so the link above has contacts further afield. I have sent out an email and I have a person who might be happy to look at porches and fascia boards.

Sometimes it is not possible to access the bees without building work or in the case of chimneys, scaffolding, some comb can be 12 foot down the chimney, so hard to reach, even with a Bee Vac.

If a suitably qualified company cannot help then the next option is pest control. We suggest Darren Smith from Isca Pest Control, he is very concerned about bees and will contact us if he thinks they can be saved.

<https://www.iscapestcontrol.co.uk/>

The poison used is active for 6 to 9 months, so the site has to be blocked off with mesh. When you look at the site you will be able to see how achievable this is. This may not be possible in a chimney without scaffolding. We have had cases where the poisoned hive was accessed by other honey bees as the entrance was not closed - a North Devon builder was fined £2000 in 2021.

Cathy, our Secretary, is happy to chat to you about the bees, her contact details are on our 'Contacts' page.