

Special Feature Bee Happy

The murmur of bees on a sunny afternoon - hang on, that's no murmur and they are swarming right outside the open kitchen window. Help! Batten down the hatches, call Pat!

Time to Call Pat

Pat Collins is a highly knowledgeable bee-keeper, he arrived within minutes and identified our unexpected guests as honey bees and yes, he could take the swarm. He thought that they were probably from the hives in the fields off New Road and that this was an old Queen, displaced by a younger one and forced to set out for new territory, taking all her troops with her.

Off Pat went, returning an hour or so later with his bee-capturing kit. There was some professional looking stuff - a smoke gun and Pat's white bee-keeper suit, but he was also carrying an orange dog - towel, a cardboard box which had contained a Hoover, and a bright yellow duster mop! Clearly a very domesticated man, but what did he want a duster for? By this time, the swarm had transformed itself into a tight ball and lodged itself in the weeping Buddleia tree, nectar galore to send them into a June swoon. Pat recounted the saying: *Bees in May, make hay, Bees in June, silver spoon, bees in July, let them fly!* So, being a June afternoon, we were in with a chance. Apparently the later the swarm, the greater the chance of an un-mated young Queen, no good for setting up a new hive.



All became clear, the yellow mop, as you can see, was to knock the bees into the cardboard box, (apparently just the right size to entice the Queen). Pat says bees see yellow as safe, black as a threat, and white OK, hence the suit.

Like all Queens

I was getting ready for a swift retreat when Pat reassured me, that of the three types of bees, those who feed and mate with

the Queen, the worker bees and the scouts, only the scouts sting, oh well that's alright then!

After puffing smoke at them to suggest a fire from which they needed to escape, Pat knocked the nest into the box, but many bees remained in the bush.

We waited to see if he had the Queen in the box. Surely easy? After all, she is a magnificent creature, much bigger than the others and with regal red legs. Where was she? Then some of the bees began to stand on their back legs on the floor of the box, signalling, Pat explained, to those in the Buddleia that they had the Queen.

All done? but, not so easy. Like all Queens this one was particular and she didn't like the look of her temporary home. Suddenly all the bees flew off, eventually re-swarming in the apple tree. Pat, returning later, safely captured them to re-house in Milton Road. Thanks Pat, for a fascinating education into the life of bees, you are truly the "bees knees"!

Liz Clarke-Watson