Press Release

Woodend
Bee Friendly
Society

What Nobody Knows About Our Honey Bee!

The common bee that everyone cherishes in their gardens is a foreigner!

- ✓ We value honey bees.
- ✓ We accept honey bees.
- ✓ We profit enormously by getting the honey it produces and we benefit from its billion dollar contribution to crop pollination.

But…it doesn't belong here! Introduced into Australia in 1822 Apis Mellifera is now endemic and regarded as part of the landscape.

What nobody knows is the damage the honeybee has caused by its presence in Australia during the past two hundred years.

How is this damage caused?

Every spring honeybee colonies divide. They split, and where there was one colony there are now two! The bees that leave the old hive must find a new place to live and suitable sites are scarce. The honeybee is particular and a bit aggressive in setting up a new home. Tree hollows, wall cavities, chimneys, nesting boxes and compost bins are all possibilities. The problem is that throughout the bush and in urban areas tree hollows are prime targets especially in old Eucalypt trees. Bees often out-compete native birds and small marsupials.

Nobody knows the extent to which the honeybee has had a damaging effect on our natural environment. This is especially so in regions like the Macedon Ranges that still have considerable forested land.

Managed beehives in the care of apiarists are not the problem. Like any other skilled profession managing livestock, beekeepers have strategies to reduce the propensity of honeybee swarms escaping into the wild.

The environment problem is mainly from feral colonies already in the bush and from backyard beekeepers who are inexperienced in managing the Spring swarming phenomenon.

An innovative response to this damage!

The Woodend Bee Friendly Society has decided to do something about it. The Society is planning a study in the Spring of 2023 to gather bee swarm data. We want to know the extent to which honeybee swarms are still impacting the natural environment with a view to possible future strategies to address the problem. We also want to develop management skills to enable our members to capture swarms before they escape. Since feral colonies of honeybees can harbour disease the data we obtain has the potential to help to control outbreaks.

The Swarm Monitoring Project will run in the Spring of '23. Already the Woodend Men's Shed is beginning to make over a hundred bait boxes for the Project.

The success of the Project will depend on how many and how widespread bait boxes can be deployed in the Macedon Ranges region. If you would like to be a participant in this ground breaking research and be an observer, please email wbfs@mrsg.org.au for further details.