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What's A Buzz.....How To Save A Bee Tree **By Gregg Maxfield, ODNR Division of Forestry**

Many Ohio woodlot owners have probably seen a tree in their woods with bees flying in and out of a hole in the tree's trunk. This is a sure indication that a colony of honeybees has taken up residence inside the hollow tree trunk to form a nest.

Tom and Betsy Webb knew that the shagbark hickory tree at the corner of the small woods near their house in southern Hancock County had a beehive in it. They had seen bees flying in and out of the hollowed branch stub on the tree trunk all summer. On September 2, 2011, a strong west wind blew the 14-inch diameter tree over. Tom and Betsy have a strong interest in gardening and the outdoors, and knew the importance of wild bees for pollination purposes. They decided to give it a try and save the wild hive in the tree. The honey in the combs would serve as the only food supply for the bees to get them through winter, so it was important to get the section of the tree with the bee hive in it back up vertical before the honey drained out.

Tom got his chainsaw and very carefully cut the section of the tree above and below the entrance hole in the trunk. He cut the bottom of the trunk square so the section could be placed back up in a vertical position. Unfortunately the hive was longer than Tom estimated, and he cut through the upper part of the nest, exposing part of the honeycomb. It must have been a pretty docile nest as Tom said he was only stung twice while cutting through that section.

It was important that the cut section not be in direct contact with the ground, so Tom placed a piece of plywood on the ground next to the tree. That night, with gloves on his hands, his collar pulled up on his coveralls and a ball cap on his head, Tom attempted to push the cut section up onto the piece of plywood. It must have been a little too much movement for the bees as they began swarming out of the hole in the trunk. As the bees became active, Tom quickly dropped the section and began running down the road swatting his head. Betsy and I, who were watching from a safe distance thought, "Ooooh, this is not good." A few minutes later, Tom came back and reported he had been stung "a few times" in the face, neck, and wrists, more like 20+ times. I told Tom that there was a nearby Tree Farmer who worked with bees a lot and that I would give him a call to see if he had any ideas on how to get the section stood back up.

It seems that many tree farmers, in addition to having well managed woodlands, have special interests or hobbies in natural resource related areas. Putnam County Tree Farmer Dwight Wilson has been working with bees for nearly 40 years. He regularly has a booth for the Northwest Ohio Beekeepers Association at forestry field days throughout Ohio. Dwight is always willing to share his expertise. He offered to come over with his

equipment to help set the bee hive vertically. The next morning, Dwight showed up with three bee suits, gloves, and a smoker. After donning the bee suits, Dwight, Tom, and I approached the cut section that contained the bee hive. The bees were very tightly clustered at the entry hole and the log end that had been cut off, protecting their queen so nothing could get in. It did not look like any of the honey combs had broken, which was good news.

Dwight lit the smoker and lightly smoked the entrance hole and the section of the hive that was exposed. With the protective bee suits and gloves on, the three of us carefully pushed the cut section up onto the piece of plywood. Dwight made it a point to orient the log so that the entry hole was facing the same direction that it was as a standing tree.

Dwight lightly smoked the short section that had been cut off from the top of the main stem, and carefully placed it to match up the cut sections as closely as possible. As a final step, some 2x4s were used to secure the now vertical section of hollow log to a nearby apple tree to prevent it from falling over.

The bees were buzzing around after all of the maneuvering of their nest, but seemed to be in good shape. Tom and Betsy are happy to report that the bees overwintered well in the rescued stem, and they are anxiously awaiting warmer weather to see how the hive made out. They were very appreciative of Dwight Wilson's expertise and use of the bee suits.

The Webb's experience is a good reminder that whether you are cutting down a tree or working with bees, it is important to have the proper protective equipment for the job.

In addition to gardening and keeping an eye on the rescued bee tree, Tom and Betsy Webb own a 30-acre woodland in Hancock County that is enrolled in the Ohio Forest Tax Law program.

Gregg Maxfield is northern district forester for the ODNR Division of Forestry out of Findlay.

[SIDEBAR

Information on bees and beekeeping can be found at the Ohio State Beekeepers Association web site at: <http://www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org/>.

Dwight Wilson is president of the Northwest Ohio Beekeepers Association. Their chapter site is: <http://nwoba.honeyrunapiaries.com/>.

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