

Chasing swarm of Japanese honeybees

Japan's beekeeping industry consists of two types of bees, the imported Western honey bee and the native Japanese honey bee. Western bees were introduced to Japan in the late 1800s and overtook the beekeeping industry due to their higher honey yield.

However, traditional beekeeping is still practiced in Japan to this day with our native Japanese honey bee. One of the key differences with keeping Japanese honey bees is how we obtain new colonies. The breeding of queen bees is quite challenging with Japanese honey bees, so there are no commercial queen bees for sale and it is not possible to purchase a new colony. Instead, beekeepers capture swarms in the spring. Today we are going to be following this swarm of bees that absconded from their hive around noon the day before. A new hive was prepared in hopes that the swarm would settle there but the swarm took off again so we decided to track them. It seems like the range of the swarm is roughly 10 meters. swarms of Japanese honey bees often nest in hollow cavities.

Capture

The swarm is congregating in a ditch. It looks like the swarm is trying to settle into this concrete block. The concrete block is leaning against this metal pole and there are quite a few bees inside. This doesn't really seem like an ideal place for the swarm to settle. It is important for the cavity to be enclosed to protect the bees from the elements and predators. A pile box provides a safer home. The water coming out from the pipe next to the irrigation canal will splash all over the colony. The concrete block also is not large enough and will leave the colony exposed to the wind and rain. It is also too close to the ground, so it will be difficult for the colony to grow and expand.

Transfer

A pile box hive can provide a safer home for the swarm, so the bees are being captured by scooping up as many bees as possible for the transfer. Capture the bees using a new brush for easy transfer to the pile box hive. The swarm is still a bit restless but if the queen bee is inside, the rest of the swarm will soon follow and settle into their new hive.