

# COUNTRY BIRD & GARDEN



OLD STAGE HONEY

Fall 2015

## Robbing — A Happy Ending

I heard about “robbing”, but it was just a story until I experienced it first hand.

I always lift the back of my hives when I go through the bee yard to check if they seem to be storing enough honey for their winter survival. Two hives that were heavy last week were now very light. I opened the hives and there was barely a drop of honey in there! Meanwhile, outside the front of the hives, bees from other hives were fighting their way in past the guards, something like a shark feeding frenzy.

So, I reduced the entrances on the hives under attack to the smallest opening on a typical entrance reducer. No good. Three and four bees were squeezing in at a time and the robbing continued. So I reduced the entrance so that only one bee could

barely fit in at a time. That might have worked before the robbing started, but at this point it was not enough to stop the marauders. They had a taste of stolen honey and they wanted it all.

So off to the internet I went in search of a solution. Not a whole heck of a lot out there on this from any university resource, so I resorted to reading one of those bee blogs. It suggested covering the hive in a wet sheet for three days, and by then the robbing behavior would cease. Well, for three days I ran over to the bee yard and re-soaked the sheets to keep them wet. Since it was about 99F and breezy, those sheets were not staying wet for very long. After day three, I removed the sheets and the robbing resumed just like before.

Now desperate, I asked a



friend if I could move the two weak hives to her back yard for three days. Not a fan of the idea of bees in her yard, but she was going on vacation anyway and I told her they would be gone before she returned. After three days I moved them back to the original site, and again, the robbing resumed.

Clearly three days away was not going to work, so I closed up the hives one night, and moved them to another friend's farm. After about six weeks of recuperation at the new site, and constant sugar water feeding, the bees were heavy enough to return to the original yard, where they seem to be doing fine.

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## European Brown Hornet — Bee Eaters

At first I thought I was seeing things...what appeared to be a huge sci-fi honey bee was carrying off one of my little honey bees in its talons. I was looking into the sun, so I dismissed it. But then I saw it again, this time snapping up a honey bee in flight. Then another one, preying on the bees hovering around the hive entrances. Three or four of these 2-inch monsters were giving my hives a work

over. Their constant feeding has been known to eradicate honey bee hives.

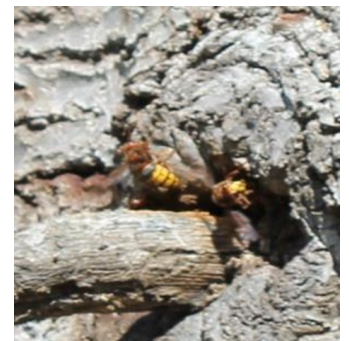
I suppose I have been fortunate prior to this never to have encountered the European Brown Hornet. However, in my line of work I have observed that conditions in any given year favor the development of one insect in abundance over previous years. Depending on that

year's unique conditions (too hot, too wet, too dry, etc), I have experienced “a cucumber beetle year”, a “Colorado potato beetle year”, a “spider mite year”, and this year... a “European Brown Hornet year”.

The solution is to find the nest and destroy it. These hornets make paper nests similar to wasps, but they are often concealed within hollowed

### Special points of interest:

- HOW TO STOP ROBBING
- EUROPEAN BROWN HORNET



2” European Brown Hornet

out trees or logs, making them difficult to find. Both nests that I have seen to date were inside hollowed out logs, pictured above. The trick is to visually follow the hornets flight path back to the nest after it has abducted a bee. To date, no such luck in my affected bee yard. I have been able to watch a hornet take a bee up into the leaves of a tree and munch on it, but have not sighted one leading me back to the hornets' nest.

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