

Letters: Save our swarms

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A Richmond News reader is urging people to help save bees. | azur13/Getty Images

Dear Editor,

On July 24th as I was pulling out of the driveway of my home in Steveston, I noticed hundreds of bees buzzing around a shrub next to the sidewalk. The Burning Bush, as it's commonly referred to, wasn't flowering and I'd not noticed bees there before.

The next day there were fewer bees around the shrub, but when I peered closer, nestled within the branches was a densely packed, swarming mass of bees the size of a large shoe.

My first thought was to call pest control. I know bees are endangered, but I didn't want a hive so close to the house, let alone next to the sidewalk where unsuspecting neighbours might walk by.

When I searched online for “pest control bees” I noticed the Richmond Beekeepers Association link “Got a Swarm? Please do not call an exterminator, call a beekeeper!”

From the pictures on their site I could identify what I had was likely a honey bee swarm. I was also pleased to read, “Our association manages a volunteer honey bee swarm retrieval service, free of charge.”

I sent an email to the contact address, and within minutes I had a reply from the coordinator on duty requesting a picture of the swarm. Within an hour, beekeepers Karen Milton and her son Mike arrived at my house. Completely covered from head to toe in their white sting-proof suits, they gently retrieved the swarm, and placed it in a case for transporting.

As Karen explained, when a hive becomes too congested a swarm may break away to seek a new home. The swarm forms a buzzing cloud of bees and may settle on a branch or other structure for a few hours or days, before finding a permanent hive location.

To make sure they had the queen in the case, Karen and Mike stayed for an hour watching where other returning bees were drawn to — the shrub or the case. By this time, two curious young boys from a few houses away had gathered to watch. Karen and Mike patiently answered all their questions. My favourite from one of the boys was, “Where’s the king?”

In addition to the prompt and helpful removal of the swarm, Karen gave me a large jar of honey. The next day she let me know that the bees were settling in nicely in the apiary at their new home.

Help save bees! If you notice a swarm, contact the Richmond Beekeepers Association.

Liisa Atva

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