

## IN BRIEF

### SPACE INVADERS!

*Claire Hall*

It all happened so quickly! They flew in out of the blue taking up residence at DEC Kensington and the speed at which they worked was quite astounding. The invaders were feral European honey bees. They almost filled our compost bin with honeycomb in a few short days. Where did they come from and what could we do about it?

The story starts in 1846 when the European honey bee (*Apis mellifera*) was introduced into Western Australia from England to pollinate food crops. Unfortunately, swarming bees escaped from managed hives and spread into native bushland. The availability of suitable habitat and plenty of food (both native and exotic) enabled feral honey bee numbers to increase significantly.

Feral honey bees are very aggressive and tend to swarm. They have many negative impacts including competition with native birds, mammals and invertebrates for nectar, pollen and nest hollows. They are recognised as being a factor influencing the distribution and abundance of the forest red-tailed black cockatoo, Carnaby's cockatoo and Baudin's cockatoo. Feral honey bees cause physical damage to flowers, adversely affecting pollination and seed setting of native species, and they aid the spread of weeds. Water sources can become polluted when bees drown in tanks and troughs.



Feral bees have little value for commercial honey production or for pollination of crops and pose a disease risk to the commercial apiary industry. DEC is working together with the Water Corporation to develop a Feral Bee Control Strategy which could be utilised to control feral bees in Western Australia without affecting the beekeeping industry.

Feral bees are a major problem in urban bushland. A feral bee control program which began in the Canning River Regional Park in 2006 identified and controlled 323 feral bee colonies.

Back to our bees in the bin, we needed to control them not only because of the risk of people being stung, but to prevent the bees spreading to other areas. A pest controller was called in to remove the bees.

If you have a problem with feral bees there is a list of apiarists prepared to remove feral swarms on [www.naturebase.net/content/view/910/913/1/2](http://www.naturebase.net/content/view/910/913/1/2) or contact a licensed pest controller.