

# The Cut Lunch Cocky returns – but so did the bees

By the Cut Lunch Cocky

“Go away please bees, it is not a nice place for a nest. See how wet it is,” I said, giving the hose an extra flick against the wall, hoping to persuade what I thought were the bee scouts, that their inviting tree hollow was unfortunately exposed to frequent easterly downpours. Despite my best efforts though, the bees were determined.

“Ahhh Cut Lunch,” said Annette on Thursday afternoon, when I had come home early from my studies for some quiet time with my wife. “I think we have a problem with some bees.”

I looked at the half dozen bees in the kitchen trying to get back outside and then looked outside to see even greater numbers trying to take up residence in our 150-year-old timber slab, kitchen wall – and was inclined to agree with her.

Closer inspection found dozens of bees

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exploring every single nook and cranny in our outside wall, obviously under the mistaken impression that such old timber just had to be part of an old tree trunk, full of enticing hollows. If it is just an advance exploration party, I thought, I may be able to discourage them. So I quickly got the hose and started a torrential downpour over the most likely looking holes. For a while, I thought I may have succeeded, but the bees were still there an hour later.

I'll fix you, my little striped friends, I thought, and gathering up handfuls of newspaper, I gingerly stuffed them quickly into the cracks, during a quiet moment in the flights. Going off to catch up on some of the more important maintenance jobs around the property, I was dismayed to come back to find Annette in the act of removing the bits of paper.

"What on earth are you doing?" I energetically enquired.

"Saving the poor little bees," she replied. "They will suffocate in there."

"Exactly," I said, "and then they will no longer be making a nest in our walls and making a nuisance of themselves."

"But there is a worldwide shortage of bees," Annette said. "You can't kill them, you have to ring the council to get someone in to remove them. That's what the website said."

"Yes darling, but that is for swarms of bees. Had you rung them when the thousands of bees were buzzing around this morning, they could well have come and removed it, but now that it has taken up residence inside our heritage timber slab wall, they will have to dismantle half of the house to do so!"

"Can't they just coax them out," she asked?

"Not that I know of," I said. "It is a bit

like trying to prise a country footballer out of a bar. Once the queen bee has taken up residence, she doesn't ever have a good enough reason to stick her head out of the door again!" I proceeded to stuff the newspaper back into the gaps. "The only way is to starve them to death."

Annette, just as determinedly pulled the newspaper out again. "You are not going to starve those poor bees," she said. "There is a worldwide shortage of them!"

"We-e-e-ll," I thought. "I guess I could always kill them with a detergent solution. I have heard that works pretty well."

"Nor are you going to do that," she said, stomping her foot. I left her with her rare bees and went off to do something more productive.

On Saturday, there were a few times when I had thought that the bees had found their new quarters too cramped and had moved on, but they were still there on Sunday. I didn't understand where they were finding the space to set up a new hive, as I was pretty sure that behind the timber slabs was a solid brick wall. At least that was what it looked like from the inside.

### To bee resigned to your fate

By Sunday night I was resigned to two things: Firstly, the bees were not going to go away; and, Secondly, I wasn't going to be spoken to ever again if I killed them.

There was nothing for it, but to start dismantling the house.

Of course I waited until dark (I'm not that stupid) and then attacked the outer wall with whatever tools I had to hand.

The hoe was a bit too flimsy and failed to move anything but its own handle. The spade bent as I was trying to lever off the slab and the claw hammer hadn't a hope in hell of getting the eight inch nails out. The crowbar would have been ideal, but it was somewhere else and it was dark.

I eventually remembered that there was a mattock lying around the garden, that I had recently (and abruptly) rediscovered while slashing some of the long grass.

For once Annette was helpful and sang out from her bed that she thought it was still out by the plum tree. I took the camping lantern and managed to find it. It was sturdy enough and eventually the piece of wood, behind which the bees were entering, came free.

I sprang back, expecting a swarm of guard bees to come rushing out, but all was quiet. Cautiously creeping forward, I could now see that the wall was not solid, but was an old stud type wall, with an interior sheet of fibro carefully plastered over to look like a 100 year old solid wall.

### Bee bugged

There was certainly plenty of space for the bees to make a nest. Curiously though, there were none to be seen. I had removed the wrong slab. The bees had gone into the gap and then gone left, rather than right. Be bugged!

Unfortunately, Annette had been talking for years of doing something different with that wall of the dining area and maybe putting in some French doors or a full length window. Despite my pointing out that no-one made French doors that were only 1800 cm tall and designed to fit into the uneven side of a 100 year old Australian slab hut, she was undeterred.

I just knew that if I removed the next slab across, there would be enough missing from the wall for her to see the possibilities of a full scale kitchen/dining reno.

Sure enough, as she left in the morning with a cheerful goodbye, Annette added, "Oh, by the way darling. If you get that next slab off, don't put them back up again yet. I've got a few ideas..."

"Bloody bees!"



Roy the beekeeper wondering whether there is any more of my previously sound external wall that he can remove.



A close up of the pesky little critters.