

**REV. BIRKMANN WRITES
AN INTERESTING ARTICLE**

I will write now of a novel experience in natural history which I had some few days ago right here in Harris County.

Ten days ago we had a storm, a hurricane they called it in the papers. We however suffered no damage. Hufsmith is in the northern part of the county, and we were only skirted by the storm. We were fortunate in getting rain after a pretty long drouth. The rain brought new life to plants and animals, even the insects in the ground got busy and began to come out and breathe some fresh air.

I am especially referring to a great swarm of wild bees that for several days had a holiday in the air and, for a change, made their borrows in the sand.

Now, wild bees are not honey bees that are occasionally found in the woods, but by this term are meant all species of insects that are related to the honeybees, for instance, the bumble bees and the carpenter bees and many others. In Lee County there are several hundred different species of wild bees. The bumble bees are the only ones of the "wild bees" that live in colonies, all the rest live in pairs, each pair has its own burrow or nest. Some burrow in wood, or in stems of weeds, others dig into the ground, where they lay their eggs and have their brood, some once a year, others twice.

Now I am coming to my subject more closely. Some days ago my son, with whom I am now staying, tells me that he has seen a lot of bees or wasps in the air and they are making a great ado and hubbub flying in all directions, and not only over a small area, but for quite a distance the noise is heard and the ground is full of newly dug holes. Next morning when the day grows warm, we go out and I found all this to be true, and not the half told. I could not see the insects on account of my poor eyesight, but my son tells me all I want to know. He tells me the bees are flying, some of them only a half foot from the ground, others fly higher, so as to get over the weeds, still others are pretty high up, all of them flying fast and like so many little furies, making all the noise passible to them. You could hear them at some distance, the sound was similar to that heard in the telegraph wires at times, but much louder, and to listen to them for awhile would make me a little nervous. The question was: What is all that about? What are these hundreds of thousands of bees after? And the ground was, as stated, full of holes. Fresh earth was lying beside these holes, you could see the bees had just opened them. My grandson Roger probed some of them with a switch, and found them going down several feet, others not quite that far, the diameter of the holes being about half an inch. The size of the female bee is about that of a queen bee in the hives. The male is much smaller, insignificant in appearance. It seems to take no part in the digging and procuring a home for his family.

Roger caught about a dozen of these bees for me and I have sent specimens for determination to Prof. Cockerell of Pantler, Conn., who is a great authority and student of the bees, knows

all of the thousands of bees in the world, and has collected and described many of them in scientific books and periodicals. I suppose that the species of which I am writing is one new to science, at least, I have never before observed it in Lee County. And if it should prove to be a known species, I think that their habit of building so many homes near one another, and of swarming in such great numbers, and with so much noise and fury has not been observed before. I have never before seen anything like such a great area occupied by the bees, and never before heard such sounds produced by thousands and thousands of these insects.

I stepped off the ground, it was about 700 feet in length, and 230 feet in width, I counted (or rather Roger did) 39 holes in ten feet square (100 sq. ft.), and 46 holes in another ten feet square. According to this reckoning there were about 80,000 holes and counting one pair of bees for each hole, there would have been one hundred thousand individual bees. All of the same kind.

This spectacle lasted for about four or five days, according to my observation. After that time, there were only a few specimens to be noticed. They are in their burrows now and the females will come out occasionally to gather food for their offspring.

What food? I don't know, and I don't think that anyone knows. Bees don't collect animal food like the wasps do, but I suppose their subsistence is on sweets which they get from plants and flowers.

G. Birkmann.

(This is a very interesting article, and the editor is glad Rev. Birkmann is yet able to find delight in nature, as he did for so many years at Fedor.)