

AFRICANIZED HONEY BEES



GENERAL INFORMATION

The Africanized Honey Bee (AHB), also known by its notoriety as the "killer bee," is now established in California from the Imperial to San Joaquin Valleys. The AHB arrived in California in 1994 some 40 years following its introduction into Brazil and accidental escape into the jungles of South America.

The extent of the AHB's eventual range in California and elsewhere in the United States is not certain. However, ongoing experiences with coping with AHB's have taught us that the bee will be a fearful enemy wherever it is encountered in numbers. Unlike its docile close relative, the European Honey Bee, this strain of the honey bee is quick tempered and will aggressively defend its colony (hive) from all intruders.

The domestic bee has lived in harmony with human beings for hundreds of years. It has been bred for gentleness and good honey production. By contrast, the Africanized bee is a "wild" bee that is not comfortable being around people or animals. Any colony of bees will defend its hive, but Africanized bees are very defensive. These bees are more likely to defend a greater area around their nest, become more upset with less reason, and sting in much greater numbers.

The Africanized bee's "killer" reputation is greatly exaggerated, but it does have some basis in fact. In isolated instances, people and animals have been stung to death. Most often, the person who died was not able to get away from the bees quickly. Animal losses have

occurred for the same reasons. Pets and livestock were tied up or penned when they encountered the bees. Africanized bees do not roam in giant swarms looking for victims to attack. Like most animals, these bees react defensively only when they feel threatened.

Beyond public safety, the Africanized honey bee may have impact on beekeepers. Commercial beekeepers could go out of business if Africanized bees drive out or breed into their domestic colonies. Because honey bees provide 80 percent of the pollination required by agricultural crops, a reduction in the number of beekeepers could lead to reduced yields in food crops as well as a decline in honey production. Beekeepers are working closely with state and federal agencies to minimize the impacts of the Africanized bee.

Your best protection against the Africanized bee is to understand how it behaves and react accordingly. Bees "swarm" to establish new hives in the spring and fall. Bees are most active then. You may find bees setting up housekeeping where you live literally overnight. Individual bees gathering pollen on flowers or masses of bees clinging together in swarms generally will not bother you. However, bees are more likely to be defensive after they have established a colony and started raising young.

The Africanized Honey Bee is a "wild" bee that becomes annoyed easily around people or other animals. Africanized Honey Bees defend their nests with more vigor and in greater numbers than the European Honey Bees commonly found in southern California. Any colony of bees will defend its hive, but Africanized bees are very defensive. These bees are more likely to sense a threat at greater distances, become more upset with less reason, and sting in much greater numbers. When bees defend their colonies, they target furry and dark-colored objects that resemble their natural enemies, such as bears and skunks. Therefore, when bees are disturbed, your pets are likely to be stung. Animals that are penned or tied up near honey bee nests or hives are especially in danger. There is a great physical similarity between the Africanized and European Honey Bees.

DOS AND DON'TS

Do look for bee colonies around your property regularly. Honey Bees nest in a wide variety of sites, such as animal burrows in the ground, water meter boxes, or in overturned flower pots. Sometimes honey bees nest in the open trees or shrubs. Look for active bees and listen for a buzzing or humming sound in the ground, in trees and shrubs, or in block walls. If you find a colony of bees, call a local bee keeper or private pest control contractor specializing in bee control or removal.

Do keep pets and children indoors when using weed eaters, hedge clippers, tractors, power mowers, chain saws, or any equipment until you are sure that there are no bee nests around your area. Honey bees are sensitive to unusual odors, such as cut grass, and to loud vibrations. Attacks frequently occur when a person is mowing the lawn or pruning shrubs and trees, and inadvertently strikes a bee nest.

Do keep dogs under control when hiking. A dog bounding through the brush is more likely to disturb bees than one following quietly.

Do Not pen, tie or tether animals near known bee hives nests. Keep animals away from apiaries and bee nests. Bees may seem harmless, but don't take chances.

Do Not disturb or tease bees, and **do not** try to remove bees yourself. **Do not** shoot at, throw rocks at, or pour gasoline on bee nests; this will only irritate the bees. Also, do not attempt to control them with aerosol pesticides.

What to do if your Animal is Stung:

Try to get the animal away from the bees without endangering yourself. Call your animal inside your house or car, or release the animal if it will not harm itself or others nearby. Do not attempt to approach a person or animal being stung without some sort of protection for yourself (such as a beekeeper's suit or the inside of a car), because the bees are likely to attack you as well. Remember that an injured animal may bite or attack unexpectedly. If you release penned livestock, be aware that an unrestrained animal may run into the road and be hit by a car, or may run away. And, if the animal runs to you with irritated bees following it, you are likely to be stung, too.

If possible, douse the animal with a shower of soapy water, which will kill any bees clinging to it. A mixture of common pet shampoo and water knocks bees down and drowns them.

Covering the animal with a heavy blanket may also discourage the bees.

Once the animal is away from the bees, look for stingers. When a honey bee stings, it leaves behind its venom sac and stinger. The honey bee dies after it stings; however, the stinger may continue to inject venom. Do not pull them out with tweezers or fingers because you will squeeze more venom out of the venom sac and into the animal. Rather, scrape at the stingers with a fingernail or credit card to remove them.



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