



AFRICANIZED HONEYBEES B-SMART INFORMATION AND SAFETY RULES

WHERE DID THE AFRICANIZED HONEYBEES (AHB) COME FROM?

The first colonies of Africanized honeybees or so-called "killer bees" arrived in southern Arizona in the early summer of 1993. This bee, first introduced in Brazil in 1956, escaped into the wild and its descendants have been moving slowly toward the US ever since.

WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

Africanized honeybees look similar to the domestic or common European honeybees, and only a highly trained specialist, using sophisticated laboratory equipment, can tell them apart. Just like their mild-mannered cousins, the Africanized honeybees establish colonies of up to 40,000 individual bees. Both types of bees will swarm, a process social insects use to produce new colonies; however, each Africanized honeybee colony typically swarms four to eight times annually compared to an annual rate of less than one swarm per five colonies for European honeybees.

WHY ARE THEY CALLED "KILLER BEES"?

Africanized honeybees have received a great deal of notoriety because they defend their hives (or colonies) so diligently. Compared to European bees, the AHB are more likely to sense a threat at greater distances, become more upset with less reason (even with minimal or no provocation) and sting in much greater numbers. Individual stings from the AHB are not more powerful or painful; in fact they are slightly less potent than the European bee, but victims of attacks may be stung hundreds of times. Away from the hive, they are no more aggressive than other bees or wasps. Swarms which have not established a colony are not as likely to attack because they have no brood to defend. They will not form large swarms and hunt for you as suggested in some movies.

HOW DO I AVOID THE AFRICANIZED HONEYBEE?

Honeybees, wasps and yellow jackets sting to defend themselves or their nests. If you can avoid disturbing them in any way, they will not sting. To avoid approaching a nest by accident, listen for the steady buzz produced by a colony and look for flying insects. European honeybees are usually found in the standard hive box; however, the Africanized honeybees are not as particular about where they establish a colony. Look for them to nest in cavities such as holes in the ground, crevices in rocks, hollow trees, discarded tires, saguaro cactus cavities or water meter boxes. Homeowners commonly encounter colonies when doing yard work. Don't climb a tree, kick over a log or roll over a rock without checking first for bees. If you do see a colony, don't stand in front of the entrance or in the flight path. Treat honeybee colonies as you would a venomous creature such as a snake or a scorpion; be alert and stay away.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO PREVENT ATTRACTING BEES?

When hiking or hunting, wear light colored clothing. Wear white socks, pants and long-sleeved shirts if possible. Avoid wearing shiny jewelry and leather, which may annoy bees. Bees may be sensitive to odors such as perfumes, soaps, after-shave lotions and hairspray. These odors either attract or provoke bees. Sun tan lotions, oils and sunscreens may have odors that increase your chances of an attack, so if used, use sparingly. Sunscreen use is recommended in Arizona due to the high risk of skin cancer, so consider a product with little or no odor when making your purchase.

Avoid excessive motion when near a colony. Bees are able to detect movement and are much more likely to respond to an object in motion than one that is stationary. Avoid flailing your arms or swatting at bees. Don't panic if you spot a bees' nest, just move away slowly and deliberately.

WHAT IF I AM ATTACKED?

The best strategy to minimize stings once a colony of Africanized honeybees begins to attack is to run away as quickly as possible until the bees stop following (up to 1/2 mile). Because the bees tend to target the sensitive areas around the eyes and head, cover your head as much as possible by pulling your collar up over your ears or your shirt over your head and around your face, without blocking your vision, while you run. Get inside a house, car, or other closed building. Don't worry about bringing a few bees in with you, just get indoors. If shelter is not available, run into high brush and zig-zag as much as possible. If you are trapped for some reason, cover up with blankets, sleeping bags, clothes, etc.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SEE SOMEONE ELSE ATTACKED?

If you see an attack, chances are you, too, will be attacked. The victim should be running away and so should you. Try to steer a clear path away from the area and tell the victim to follow you. Do not try to rescue a trapped victim without something to protect both of you. Blankets, sheets and clothes can be used. Protecting a victim against more stings could save their life.

WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER I HAVE REACHED SAFETY?

When a honeybee stings, it leaves its stinger in your skin. This kills the bee, so it can't sting again. Once you are away from the bees, remove all stingers from your body. Do not pull them out with tweezers or your fingers as this will only squeeze more venom into the wound. Scrape them out using your fingernails, the edge of a credit card or a dull knife. If you received a great many stings and are feeling ill or if you have any reason to believe you may be allergic to bee stings, seek medical attention immediately. For a medical emergency involving attacks dial 911.

WHAT DO I DO IF I FIND BEES IN MY YARD?

Wild bees, as well as honeybees, are almost always present around flowering plants gathering nectar and pollen and should be left alone. A swarm of several thousand bees may separate from an established colony and may, during this transition, settle at a resting site. They are rarely defensive unless provoked since they have no hive to defend and may move off shortly. If a colony has established itself in your neighborhood, or a swarm has not moved off, keep everyone away and call an exterminator. Prices differ among exterminators and the complexity of removal varies, so obtaining cost estimates would be useful.