



WHAT IS THE AFRICANIZED HONEY BEE?

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A NEW PUBLIC NUISANCE

The Africanized honey bee, popularly known as the “killer bee,” is moving into South Texas and the southern United States. Scientists are not certain how far north the bee will spread, but they do know that it will cause problems wherever it resides in large numbers.

This insect, which has been migrating from South America since the 1950s, looks just like a domestic honey bee, but it is not nearly as good natured. In fact, it has a bit of a quick temper.

The domestic or European 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 European or Africanized bees will defend its hive, but Africanized bees do so with gusto. These bees are more likely to sense a threat at greater distances, become more upset with less reason, and sting in much greater numbers.

MORE PEOPLE WILL GET STUNG

More people probably will be stung by bees wherever Africanized honey bees become established. Some individuals may get stung hundreds of times in only a few moments.

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.

However, 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 and do so usually only around their home.

The Africanized bee is a new insect nuisance, but it will not change the way people live and work and play. People in parts of Central and South America have lived with this bee for several decades without great difficulty.

BEEKEEPERS ARE THREATENED

Beyond public safety, the Africanized honey bee will have the greatest 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 melons and other commodities 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.

KNOW THE BEE’S BEHAVIOR

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.

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