

AFRICANIZED HONEY BEES

What does an Africanized honey bee (AHB) look like? How can I tell an AHB from a European honey bee (EHB)?

An AHB looks like any other honey bee, brown or black and covered with hair. Because the only way to distinguish between AHBs and EHBs is by microscopic examination and DNA testing, for safety purposes you should treat all bees as if they are AHBs.

What are foraging bees?

Foraging bees are individual bees collecting pollen, nectar or water from trees, bushes or flowers. These bees are busy and present the lowest hazard from stinging. If you leave them alone they will leave you alone. Bees are an important part of our local ecology and agricultural operations.

What is a swarm?

A swarm is a group of bees not situated in a hive and includes a queen bee, workers and drones. These bees have left an established hive and are in search of a new one. A swarm may be the size of a football with all the bees clumped together. It may stay a few minutes or even a couple of days. Most swarms are not particularly defensive and will not chase a person since they do not have hives to defend. Unless they are provoked, they most likely will not sting.



What is a hive?

A hive is a colony of bees that live in a honeycomb with a queen, workers and drones with each performing its job. The hive has honey chambers and brood chambers where new bees are hatched. Bees in a hive pose the most threat for stinging since they will defend their hive if disturbed.

Why do bees sting?

Honey bees sting when their nest is threatened by invaders. AHBs are irritated by noise and vibration and tend to defend their hives more quickly and in greater numbers than other honey bees.

Is there a difference in the sting of an AHB and an EHB?

One sting from an AHB is no more painful or dangerous than a sting from any other honey bee. Africanized honey bees tend to sting with less provocation and in greater numbers than other honey bees. It is important to remember that one sting from any bee can be harmful, even fatal, if the person stung is allergic to bee venom. People allergic to bee venom should always carry a first aid sting kit with them.



How many times can AHBs sting?

Like all honey bees, AHBs sting only once and then die shortly thereafter. However, as a group, AHBs tend to inflict more stings than domestic honey bees because they react to stimuli more quickly and in greater numbers. In similar situations, AHBs inflict ten times more stings than domestic honey bees.

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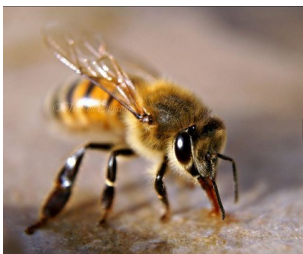
Will AHBs chase someone?

Cases have been reported where people have been chased by AHBs for 1/4 of a mile. The bees usually stop if they cannot detect an intruder, or if there is no longer a threat to their colony.

How can I avoid being attacked?

People unfamiliar with beekeeping should always stay away from all bees and swarms, regardless of the kind of bee. If you see a swarm or hive of bees, it is best to walk away.

Be cautious of AHBs the same way you are about poisonous snakes, scorpions or wasp nests. To avoid AHBs, never climb a large tree, kick a felled tree or stump, roll a log, or turn over a large rock without checking to see if foraging honey bees are coming and going from the area. When walking or hiking in remote areas, keep an escape route in mind since it is possible to outrun attacking bees.



What should I do if I accidentally disturb a colony of bees?

Run! Run in a straight line and find shelter in a house, car or under a blanket as soon as possible. Never stand still, crawl into a hole, or get yourself in a position that is difficult to leave.

Bees tend to sting around the head and face. Stings received around the nose, eyes, ears, mouth and neck can be very disorienting and cause you to stumble.

Whatever protection you can pull over your head should not block your vision. Even if there are a few bees under your cover, do not slap at bees because movement attracts and incites them. A few bee stings are not life threatening unless you are allergic.

What should I do after an attack?

Most importantly, remove any stingers quickly and see a doctor if necessary. Do not try to remove stingers with tweezers or your fingers as this will only squeeze more venom into your body. The best way to remove a stinger is to scrape it off with your fingernail or the edge of a dull knife.

People who are allergic to bee venom should see a doctor immediately. If medical care is not available, persons allergic to bee venom should use a first aid kit containing one or two shots of epinephrine (adrenaline) with a doctor's prior permission. This can prevent some reactions to bee venom.

Monitoring your own responses to bee stings is difficult and unreliable, so you should see a doctor who is familiar with venom reactions. If possible, bring the bees that stung you to the doctor's office.

Who should I call regarding AHBs?

If you are in San Bernardino County, call the Department of Public Health Division of Environmental Health Services (DEHS) at 800-442-2283 for information. If you have an emergency, call 911. DEHS recommends hive relocation rather than destruction if possible.