

## Background of AHB

Africanized Honey Bees (AHB) are descendants of hybrids between European Honey Bees (EHB) and bees from Africa, inadvertently released in Brazil in the 1950's. AHB arrived in California in 1994 and "colonized" the Coachella Valley in 1997.

## Facts About AHBs

### Africanized Honey Bees

- Are identical in appearance to the common EHB
- Venom is no more harmful than EHB; like other bees it can sting only once, then die
- Defend a greater area around the nest
- Respond faster to a perceived threat and send more "soldier" bees to investigate or attack and remain angry for a longer period of time
- Swarm frequently to establish new colonies



Africanized Honey Bee



European Honey Bee

## Recognizing Bee Activity

Honey bee swarms, whether EHB or AHB, pose very little threat because their behavior is not directed at defending a colony, but rather trying to locate a suitable site to begin a new colony. "Swarming" occurs when the colony becomes



Swarm photo by Raul O. Hernandez

overcrowded, the queen leaves the established colony with half of the workers, usually during spring or fall. The remaining bees quickly produce a new queen to replace the departed one. The swarm is typically found "resting" in unprotected settings, such as fences,

trees, or sides of buildings, while scout bees search for a new home. Once they have found a suitable place to settle down, the bees will swarm again to move to the desired location. Once the bees arrive at their new "home", they begin to build a multiple celled structure out of wax, called comb. As soon as there is sufficient comb, honey and brood are then produced. **This is called a nest or colony.** At this time, the attitude of the colony will change to a defensive posture.

Note: Swarms should be treated with respect by maintaining a safe distance of at least 50 feet. The same consideration should be applied when around "foraging" bees (individual bees collecting pollen, nectar, or water). These bees pose very little risk, but if agitated or provoked, they will sting in defense.

Bees, especially Africanized Honey Bees, are capable of "absconding". Absconding occurs when the colony is perceived to be in danger, and is usually connected with environmental conditions, such as weather or offensive odors. Bees in the colony "pack up" and abandon the site. They leave in search for a new home that will serve them better.



Bee Hives in a Water Meter Box

### Frequent Nesting Sites of Bees

- Holes or cracks in structure, foundations, perimeter wall, or in the ground (animal burrows)
- Unscreened or damaged ventilation units to structure
- Under roof overlap or tiles
- Utility boxes, including cable boxes, electrical and water meter boxes
- Debris, rubbish, tires, or wood piles
- Overgrown vegetation and tree rot holes
- Inside pet shelter or child playhouse

## How To Prevent Colonies

With the colonization of Africanized Honey Bees in the Coachella Valley, it is important to know what to do to prevent bees from establishing a colony or nest around your home or yard.

The best way to prevent bees from establishing a colony on your property is to deny them the ideal environment. Honey bees, like all other animals, require three things to survive: food, water, and SHELTER. Foraging bees visiting the garden are not a threat; the real danger occurs when a nest forms on your property and is allowed to thrive. "Bee Proof" your property against invading bees.

### Eliminate Shelter

- Fill or cover all holes 1/8 inch in diameter or larger in trees, structures, and block walls
- Caulk cracks in walls, foundation, roof, and separation area or gaps between joints on walls and where the chimney meets the structure
- Cover drains, vents, and irrigation valve boxes with fine hardware mesh cloth
- Remove trash and debris from property, such as tires or automobile parts, and store wanted items in secured and properly sealed storage units
- Fill or cover holes or animal burrows
- Cover woodpiles tightly

Imperfections in the structure should be fixed and maintained yearly by using caulking or insulation foam. Vents should be screened with 1/8 inch galvanized hardware cloth.

### Monitor Water Sources and Your Property Frequently

- Repair leaky faucets or irrigation systems immediately; if bees are present during the day, then make repairs at night
- Cover drains or pools when not in use
- Add 2 tablespoons of vinegar per 1 gallon of water to discourage bees from birdbaths or pet bowls
- Add a few ounces of pine-scented liquid cleaner in the water of evaporative coolers to repel bees

## What To Do if You Find a Colony or Swarm on Your Property

Do not panic. DO NOT DISTURB HONEY BEE COLONIES OR SWARMS. Note: Africanized Honey Bees are identical in appearance to common honey bees.

### For Your Safety

- Allow ample space between you and the bees
- Discontinue work around the bees
- Do not try to remove or exterminate bees yourself. Do not hose down with water or "smoke out" colonies, this could agitate the bees
- Swarms generally move on in 2-3 days, if they are present longer, removal may be necessary
- For removal of swarms and colonies, call a state licensed pest control or bee removal company to remove bees.
- DO NOT ALLOW SWARMS TO ESTABLISH ON YOUR PROPERTY, as their defensive posture will change with the passing of time

## Work & Recreation Outdoor Safety

Because we live in a community that is "colonized" by Africanized Honey Bees, we need to be more cautious when hiking, hunting, fishing, biking, or working outdoors. Honey bees may nest in hollowed trees, under picnic tables, animal burrows, and many other areas. Be alert for flying groups of bees entering or exiting an opening and listen for buzzing sounds.

If you find a colony, leave them alone and keep others away. Do not throw rocks at, or shoot, or burn the colony of bees. If a colony is on or near a trail, at a campsite, or in an area frequented by humans, contact the Parks Department, or Forest Service.

## Dos and Don'ts

- **Do** keep dogs under control. If your dog treads through heavy brush and disturbs a colony, the bees are bound to follow your dog and find you.
- **Do Not** wear dark clothing when hiking or working outdoors. Bees target dark objects. Bees see red as black; whites and neutral colors are ideal.
- **Do Not** wear heavy fragrances while working, hiking, or picnicking. Strong odors may attract or upset bees.
- **Do Not** operate power equipment around bees. Loud noises and sound vibrations may provoke the bees nearby.
- **Do Not** jump in water if your are attacked by bees. Run from attacking bees. Keep escape routes in mind. Do not run through brush and hide, AHB will enter brush and attack.
- **Do** remove stingers by scraping them out with a fingernail. If you are "marked" by an initial sting, others are certain to follow. Get to safety first, and then scrape stingers out.
- **Do Not** wait for symptoms to persist. If you are allergic to bee stings or if you have been stung more than 15 times or feel ill, seek medical attention immediately.

## Emergency Care and Medical Response

If you suspect you may be sensitive to bee venom, it is important to seek medical attention. See your physician for more information.

## What To Do if You Are Attacked

If you accidentally disturb bees or are attacked, **RUN AWAY** immediately. Find shelter in your home or car.

Because bees target your head and neck areas, try to cover these areas while fleeing the area. **DO NOT** block your vision. **DO NOT** swat the bees or flail your arms, just get away fast.

If you see someone being attacked by bees, encourage them to run away and get into shelter by shouting instructions. Do not attempt to rescue someone if you know you are sensitive to bee venom or if you do not have protective equipment. If you get within 200 yards, you risk being stung as well.

## What To Do if You Are Stung

Get to a safe place. Once you are safe and cannot be attacked by bees, remove stingers immediately. When a honey bee stings, it leaves the stinger in the skin and dies subsequently. Remove the stingers by simply scraping or scratching them out. **DO NOT** tweeze or pinch, this will only increase the amount of venom to enter the wound. If you are feeling ill, or if you have any reason to believe you may be allergic to bee venom, **seek medical attention immediately.**

## Other Stinging Insects Confused as AHB



Carpenter Bee



Paper Wasp

Color photos from "Insects and Their Relatives", by Maurice Burton

## Who Should You Call For Information?

If you are uncertain about "how to bee-proof your property", call the Coachella Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District for information on what you should do. If you have a swarm or colony on your property, call a state licensed pest control or bee removal company immediately. For Pest Control listings, refer to the telephone book directory.

COACHELLA VALLEY  
MOSQUITO AND VECTOR CONTROL DISTRICT  
43-420 Trader Place  
Indio, CA 92201

Coachella Valley Mosquito and  
Vector Control District

# Living with Honey Bees



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"Vectors are insects or rodents that transmit diseases to humans and domestic animals"