



Africanized Honey Bee Information In Brief

Africanized Honey Bees are the same species as the familiar European honey bees (EHB) used to produce honey and pollinate crops, but a different subspecies. They are called "Africanized Honey Bees" (abbreviated AHB) because they are the result of interbreeding between European bees and bees from Africa inadvertently released in Brazil in the 1950's. They have also been referred to as "Killer Bees" in the media because of their increased defensive behavior.

Where they came from

The southern part of Africa. They were brought to southern Brazil, and have since spread as far south as Northern Argentina, and northward throughout South and Central America, and Mexico. They entered the United States in southern Texas in 1990, Arizona and New Mexico in 1993, and California in 1994.

Where they are now

As of April 1999, there have been finds in most areas of Imperial, San Diego, Riverside, Orange, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino Counties. In these areas, the density of Africanized bees is likely to increase, and they may continue to spread northward in California.

How they are recognized

Many people expect AHB to be larger and very distinctive, but in fact they look nearly identical to the (EHB) honey bees we have long had in California.

Honey bees are about 3/4 inch long, brownish, and a little fuzzy. Their nests are normally hidden in cavities. Less fuzzy insects with bright yellow and black markings, or with grey paper nests are probably wasps, not bees. Larger bees are not honey bees.

AHB can be distinguished from EHB by measurements under a microscope, and by analysis of their DNA. The California Department of Agriculture identifies Africanized bees as they enter new areas. After an area is well colonized, though, it is assumed that all honey bees not under the care of a beekeeper should be treated as Africanized bees.

Beekeepers will continue to keep European honey bees in their hives (the familiar white boxes) so these are not a threat if well maintained. In fact, EHB provide the best defense against AHB, by providing competition, and genetic dilution since new AHB queens may mate with EHB males.

Problems they cause

Stinging: Africanized bees defend their colonies much more vigorously than do European bees. The colonies are easily disturbed (sometimes just by being nearby). When they do sting, many more bees may participate, so there is a danger of receiving more stings. This can make them life threatening, especially

to people allergic to stings, or with limited capacity to escape (the young, old, and handicapped), and to confined livestock or pets. Once disturbed AHB will continue the attack for a long distance.

Swarming and nesting: Africanized bee colonies are likely to be more common than European bees have been, and they swarm more frequently. They nest in places European bees did not, including small cavities near the ground like water meter boxes or overturned flower pots.

What you can do

Most people will probably never see a colony of Africanized bees. However, the following things may reduce the impact of these bees have on you.

Beeproofing: Look for cracks and holes in your house that might lead to wall voids or other cavities a colony could occupy. Screen or caulk these holes, or fill the cavity with insulation, and bees will not move in. Clean up debris (tires, pots) that might provide nesting sites on your property.

Be alert: Look before disturbing vegetation. Many bees coming and going from a single spot (not just many bees at flowers) may indicate a nest.

Get help: Contact trained and equipped personnel (see "bee removal" in the Yellow Pages) if you discover a honey bee colony. Don't try to remove them alone.

If stung: First, get away-run to shelter of a car or building, and stay there even if some bees come in with you (there are more outside). Do not jump in water (bees will still be in the area when you come up). Once safe, remove stings from your skin-it does not matter how you do it-as quickly as possible to reduce the amount of venom they inject.

Africanized Bee facts

Deaths in US from AHB stings

No.	When	Where	Who	How
1	August, 1993	Texas	82-yr-old man	40 stings
2	June, 1994	Texas	98-yr-old man	50 stings
3	October, 1995	Phoenix AZ	88-yr-old woman	>1000 stings
4	October, 1995	Phoenix AZ	66-yr-old man	66 stings
5	April, 1997	Casa Grande, AZ	72 yr-old man	?

First discovery of Africanized bees by state:

Texas	October 1990
New Mexico	October 1993
Arizona	June 1993
California	October 1994



California AHB

Revised 27 Apr 99

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