

Africanized Honey Bees

An Africanized Honey Bee (AHB) looks like any other honey bee, brown or black and covered with hair. Only an expert can distinguish between Africanized and other honey bees by DNA testing or microscopic examination.

A “swarm” is a temporary group of bees not situated in a hive. A swarm may be as large as a football with all the bees clumped together to protect the queen. It may stay a few minutes or a couple of days. Most swarms are not particularly defensive and will not chase a person since they do not have hives to defend.

Bees away from the hive collecting pollen, nectar or water from trees or flowers present the lowest hazard from stinging. If you leave them alone they will leave you alone. A “hive” is a permanent family of bees in a location with a queen, workers and drones, each performing its job. Any type of bee in a hive poses the most threat, since it will sting to defend the hive from an intruder.

AHBs are more quickly disturbed by noise and vibration, and they respond to threats more quickly and in greater numbers than other honey bees. A sting from an AHB is no more painful or dangerous than a sting from any other honey bee; however, AHBs tend to sting in greater numbers than other honey bees. This is how they earned the “killer bee” reputation – not the severity of the stings, but the number of different bees attacking an intruder. As with all honey bees, an AHB stings only once and then dies. As a group, AHBs can inflict 10 times more stings than domestic honey bees because they react to stimuli more quickly and in greater numbers. Cases have been reported where people have been chased by AHBs for a quarter-mile. When hiking, be as cautious of AHBs as you are about poisonous snakes, scorpions or wasp nests. To avoid AHBs and other potential dangers, never climb a tree, kick a felled tree or stump, roll a log or turn over a large rock without checking to see if bees are coming and going from the area. When walking in remote areas keep an escape route in mind since it is possible to outrun attacking bees.

If you become the target of an AHB attack, 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. 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.

Do not try to grasp stingers 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, a credit card or the edge of a dull knife. It is also important to remember that one sting from *any* bee can be harmful or fatal if an individual is allergic to bee venom. People allergic to bee venom should always carry a first aid sting kit with them and should see a doctor immediately if stung.

Problems with bees on private property must be dealt with by the property owner who should contact a professional bee keeper. Call 9-1-1 for emergency response when people or animals are being attacked or if the bees are within 300 feet of an educational or health care facility.

