

THE AFRICANIZED HONEY BEE . . . What to Expect

BACKGROUND

Africanized honey bees—noted for their aggressive stinging behavior—are descendants of escaped African bees imported into Brazil in 1956.

After becoming established in Brazil, Africanized bees advanced up the east and north coasts of South America and then moved into Central America.

PRECAUTIONS NEEDED NOW

Although the arrival of these bees into the United States is not expected until the end of this decade, accidental introductions can occur, as happened in Kern County in July, 1985.

As a precautionary measure, it is important for you to report all multiple bee stings to your county agricultural commissioner. They will then investigate to see if the bees have Africanized characteristics.

HOW AFRICANIZED BEES DIFFER

The Africanized and domestic honey bees closely resemble each other, differing only in size, as the Africanized bee is slightly smaller.

The most important difference is their behavior. The Africanized bees have an easily-triggered defensive instinct.

KEY BEHAVIOR DIFFERENCE

When disturbed, Africanized bees attack in larger numbers and pursue over a greater distance for a longer period of time.

This defensive behavior along with reports from South America of deaths due to bee stings have earned them the name of "killer bees."

Individually the sting of an Africanized bee is no more venomous than that of a domestic honey bee.

The danger is that the Africanized bees attack in so much larger numbers that the victim receives a great deal more venom than from domestic bees.

That's why it is essential that all cases of multiple bee stings be reported to your county agricultural commissioner so the bee colony can be checked to see if it is Africanized.

BEE STINGS DIFFER FROM WASPS

Figure 1A

When any bee stings, it loses its stinger. These are easy to see. Wasps, however, leave no stinger.

Bee stingers can be found in the victim's flesh and clothing. The venom sacks may still be attached to the stinger.

Figure 1B

The stinger may still remain, as the victim may have only removed the venom sacks. By looking closely, the remaining stinger can be located.

NORMAL REACTION TO BEE STINGS

Although many people are highly allergic to bee venom, most people can absorb several stings with only itchy, uncomfortable swelling resulting.

REPORT MULTIPLE BEE STINGS

Call your county agricultural commissioner—listed under county government offices in your local telephone book.

Thank you for your assistance. Such precautions are necessary to ensure the protection of California's residents from future attacks by Africanized bees.

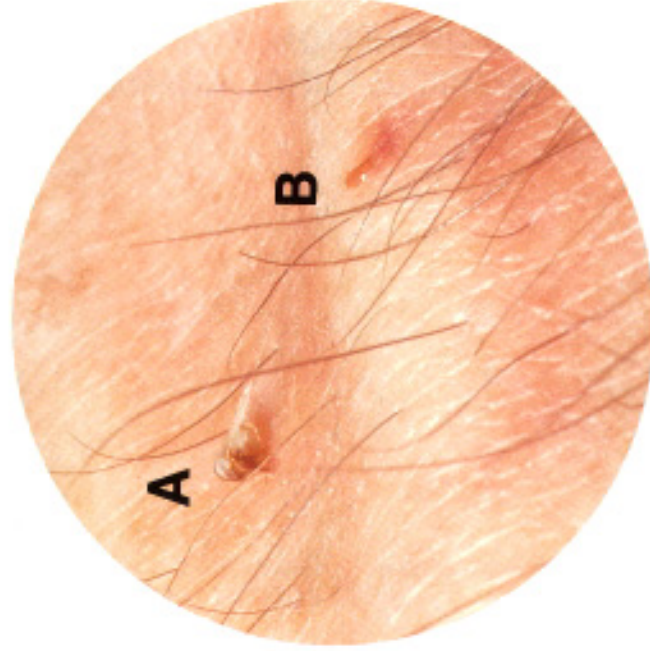


Figure 1. Bee stinger in hand.

- A. Bee stinger with venom sacks attached.
- B. Bee stinger without venom sacks.