

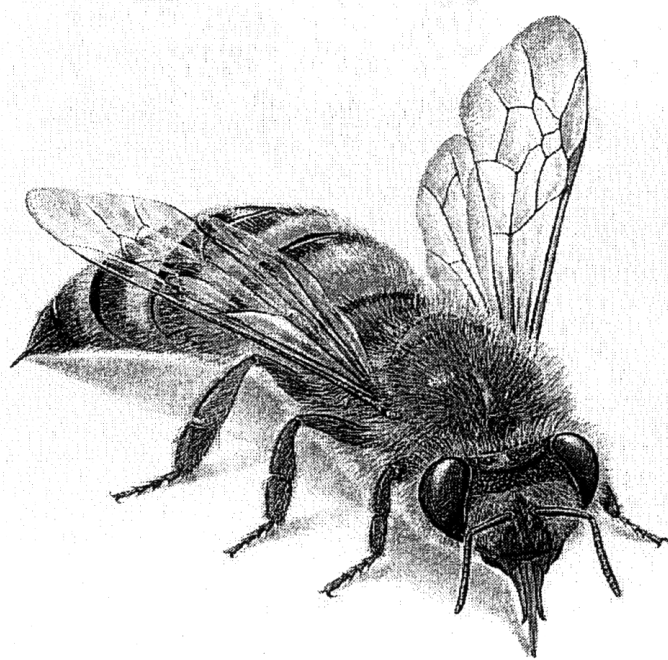


PEST CONTROL BULLETIN No. 15

EUROPEAN HONEY BEE

(*Apis mellifera*)

Actual size = 1/2 inch



The Beneficial Bee

Honey Bees are known worldwide as beneficial insects, producing large quantities of honey as well as being almost indispensable as pollinators for many agricultural crops. The agricultural industry uses bees for pollination services that support a multi-million dollar industry made up of commercial and hobbyist beekeepers. Feral colonies, European bees that have escaped to live outside of domesticated hives, also pollinate native vegetation and home gardens. Two parasitic mites have recently attacked the bees, causing a dramatic decrease in the number of feral Honey Bees. Because of the great value of Honey Bees, the Mosquito and Vector Management District makes every effort to prevent them from becoming a nuisance or hazard to residents while avoiding harm to the bees.

Description

Different subspecies of Honey Bees vary in morphological characteristics such as color, body size, and wing length. European varieties are slightly larger than their African counterparts. But because the differences are almost

larger than their African counterparts. But because the differences are almost undetectable to the naked eye, only trained professional entomologists using highly specialized techniques can make a positive identification. European and African Honey Bee subspecies interbreed freely, producing offspring with the hyperdefensive behavior of the African queen or drone parent.*

The Colony

An average Honey Bee colony may contain as many as 60,000 bees. They store honey, processed from flower nectars, in wax honeycombs that may weigh up to 200 pounds. The honey may be used either immediately as a source of energy or to sustain the colony when flower nectar is not available.

The Swarm

When honey reserves are high and the colony becomes overcrowded, the colony will “swarm” with the original queen taking a few drones and about half the workers to set up a new colony. The remaining bees will soon produce a new queen to replace the one that departed.

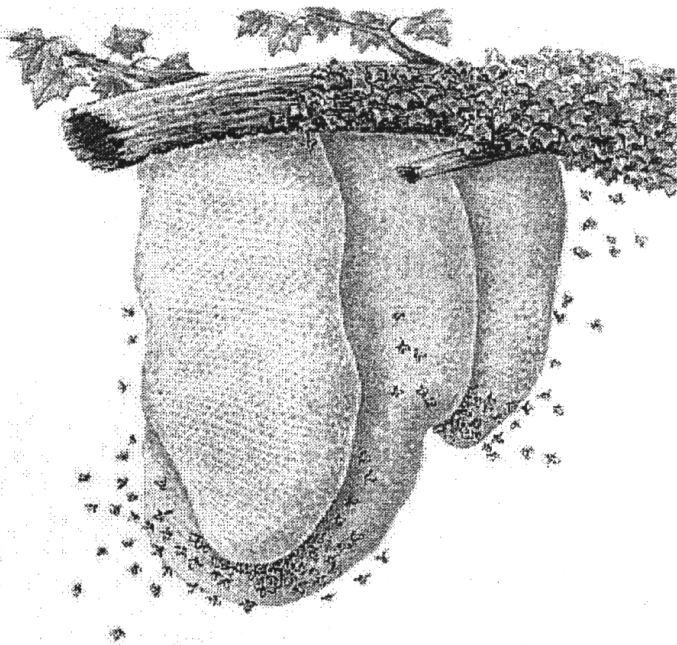
Swarms are generally not dangerous because they are searching for a suitable site for a new colony rather than defending an established one. They may rest for a day or so on a shrub, tree, or structure while scouts search for a suitable site for a new colony. Often they leave an area if the scouts do not find a sheltered space for a nest. But swarms should be treated with respect; stay at least 50 feet away from the bees. Even individual Honey Bees busy foraging for nectar and water should not be disturbed or threatened. After the swarm settles in a site that suits the scouts, workers begin to construct honeycombs and raise their brood. They then become more defensive and easily disturbed. Guard bees will attack any perceived threat, including pets and human intruders.

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Bees Around the Home

If Honey Bees find an entrance, even one as small as one-quarter inch in diameter, they may begin building their nest in an attic, wall void, or foundation.

They can be discouraged from setting up a colony in a home or other structure by taking simple steps to keep them out. Bee proofing involves sealing accessible openings with caulking, expanding foam, 1/8 inch mesh wire screening, or sheet metal.



The Sting

Remove the sting as soon as possible by scraping it off with a fingernail, credit card, or knife blade. Avoid squeezing the poison sac between the fingers because this forces more poison into the skin. The sting can be painful, but usually produces only temporary swelling and itching. However, a few persons (about one in 10,000) are especially sensitive to hymenoptera (ant, bee, or wasp) venom. Anyone who is known to be sensitive, who feels ill after being stung, or who has numerous stings should seek immediate professional medical attention.

Bee Control

Do not attempt to remove a swarm or colony yourself. If a person or pet is being stung multiple times, call **911** for emergency assistance. If Honey Bees are in a public area, near a school, or in a building or yard, call the **Mosquito and Vector Management District (MVMD)** or the **Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioners Office** for advice. One of these agencies may be able to provide names of professional beekeepers and licensed pest control operators who will remove the bees for a fee. Most of these operators are also qualified to remove bees from inside a structure. Make sure that the operators remove all of the honey and honeycombs from the premises, even if walls must be opened. Otherwise, a new Honey Bee swarm coming into the area will be attracted to the scent of honey and the problem will recur.

**For information about Africanized Honey Bees, ask for the free brochures: "Preparing For Africanized Honey Bees" (in English or Spanish), "Bee Smart!; A children's guide to Africanized Honey Bees" (English only), and "Bee Stings and Your Pets and Livestock" (English only) or check out our webpage on the internet (see below).*

MOSQUITO and VECTOR MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

of Santa Barbara County

DISTRICT OFFICE: 2450 Lillie Ave. ♦ MAIL: P.O. Box 1389
Summerland, CA 93067

TELEPHONE: (805) 969-5050 ♦ E-MAIL: mvmdistrict@mvmdistrict.org

Take a Look at our Public Information Website: www.mvmdistrict.org