

## Africanized Honey Bees and Animal Control Officers

Jamie Ellis, C.M. Zettel Nalen

By now, we are all aware of the presence of Africanized honey bees in Florida; however, many of us have never encountered them. As Africanized bee populations continue to increase throughout Florida, the risk of human/animal encounters with the bees also increases.

Africanized bees typically form smaller colonies than European honey bees. Consequently, they do not need a large space to nest. Hives often are found in man-made structures such as water meter boxes, sheds, cracked siding, gutters, and underground cavities (Figures 1 and 2). Africanized and European honey bees and their nests cannot be distinguished from one another by visual examination. If you find any type of honey bee nest, stay away and encourage your client to contact a trained and licensed Pest Control Operator (PCO) *immediately* to have the nest removed. For a list of certified PCOs by county, see the resources section of [www.AFBEE.com](http://www.AFBEE.com). It may be beneficial to carry some personal protective equipment (such as a bee veil) with you at all times, especially when responding to cases in abandoned buildings, sheds, junkyards, etc.

Unfortunately, many people do not realize they have an Africanized colony until the colony is disturbed by humans or animals, lawnmowers, cars, or other disruptive machinery. While we can do our best to avoid suspected nest sites, animals remain unaware of the danger. The best way for clients to prevent attacks is by careful monitoring of the property. Additionally, clients should never leave pets tethered or penned outside if bees are present in the area, as the pet will be unable to escape should the bees attack.

If you find yourself being attacked by African honey bees (or other stinging insects), the most important thing to do is run into an enclosed shelter if possible. If you have a pet with you at the time, shield them with your body and protect their face. Stinging bees typically target dark areas and carbon dioxide emissions; consequently, they often attack the victim's head. It is important to cover the head area when vacating the area to minimize the impact of the stinging bees. Whether you take shelter inside a house, car, or other enclosed space, the goal is to keep the bees out. Africanized bees will chase victims considerably farther than European honey bees, so *do not* jump into water, as the bees will wait for you to surface! Once inside, call 911 immediately and do not leave until the area has been cleared. In the event that an enclosed shelter cannot be found, run away from the nest as quickly as possible. Bees attack in mass when their nests are disturbed so it is important to get away quickly.

If a pet is stung, immediately scrape the stinger out of the skin. Even after the bee has detached from the stinger, the venom sac continues to pulsate and pump venom into the wound. Advise the client to take their pet to the veterinarian as soon as possible, after removing the stingers from the pet.

Sting treatments will vary by veterinarian, but a local vet can administer pain management and anti-inflammatory medication to soothe the stings. It is important to remember that no matter what type

of pet your client may have, when animals are in pain they can become agitated and aggressive. We always want to help our pets, but be aware of an animal's temperament during an attack so that you or your client may prevent serious injury.



A honey bee colony inside a water meter

Photo Credit: Jonathan Simkins



A honey bee colony discovered under a mobile home

Photo Credit: Jonathan Simkins