

# Status of Africanized honey bee is improved

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Ordinarily, most people know what to do for a bee sting — scrape out the stinger to reduce the venom injected and apply baking soda in a little water to ease the pain.

Lately, however, one might worry. Recent stories about a new strain of "killer bees" might raise the question: "Was it one of them?"

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) answers: "Don't worry." The ferocious insects featured in magazines and newspapers, on television and in movies are fiction. The real bees behind the fiction are not that ferocious. And they've not been seen closer than 2,500 miles from the U.S. border.

The real bees are the result of matings between wild bees brought from Africa and European-type domestic bees raised in South America. Because of their heritage, the new strains of bees are called "Africanized" or "hybridized." All of the new strains look like domestic

honey bees, but they are better adapted to semitropical climates where they are topnotch honey producers.

The new hybridized strains arose through a combination of intent and accident. Honey bee queens from Africa first were brought to Brazil in 1956 to be interbred scientifically with the local domestic honey bees. Swarms from 26 experimental colonies escaped along with their African queens. They thrived in the wild and spread rapidly.

Brazilians quickly learned that Africanized bee strains need special handling because they are unusually aggressive. When they are disturbed, they attack in larger numbers, keep up the stinging longer, and chase the intruder farther than most domestic bees. Although the sting of Africanized bees is no more venomous than that of domestic bees, the attack of an Africanized swarm is definitely more frightening

and painful — but not more deadly.

Brazilian beekeepers found that around Africanized bees, they had to wear coveralls and gloves, in addition to veils, even though the extra clothing is quite uncomfortable. By adapting their procedures, however, commercial beekeepers were able to get along with the Africanized strains and profited from their higher productivity.

A further disadvantage of the Africanized strains is their tendency to migrate large distances. All types of honey bees leave their hives in swarms at some time. This swarming occurs with domestic honey bees mainly when a colony gets too large. The queen leaves with about half of her bees to find a new home. The remaining bees develop a new queen.

In addition, Africanized bees also take off when conditions in their environment don't suit them. This special trait is called "absconding swarming." It differs from reproductive swarming in that swarming domestic bees rarely move

more than a mile. Observers believe Africanized bees abscond on flights of 50 miles or more. So far, absconding swarms of Africanized bees have moved northward as far as Venezuela and westward into Peru and Bolivia. They also have moved south into Uruguay and Argentina.

American beekeepers have two major concerns about the Africanized strains. First they wonder how long the bees will take to reach the United States and

what can be done to delay their arrival. Second, they want to know whether the hybridized bee expected here would be troublesome and what countermeasures can be taken to minimize any trouble.

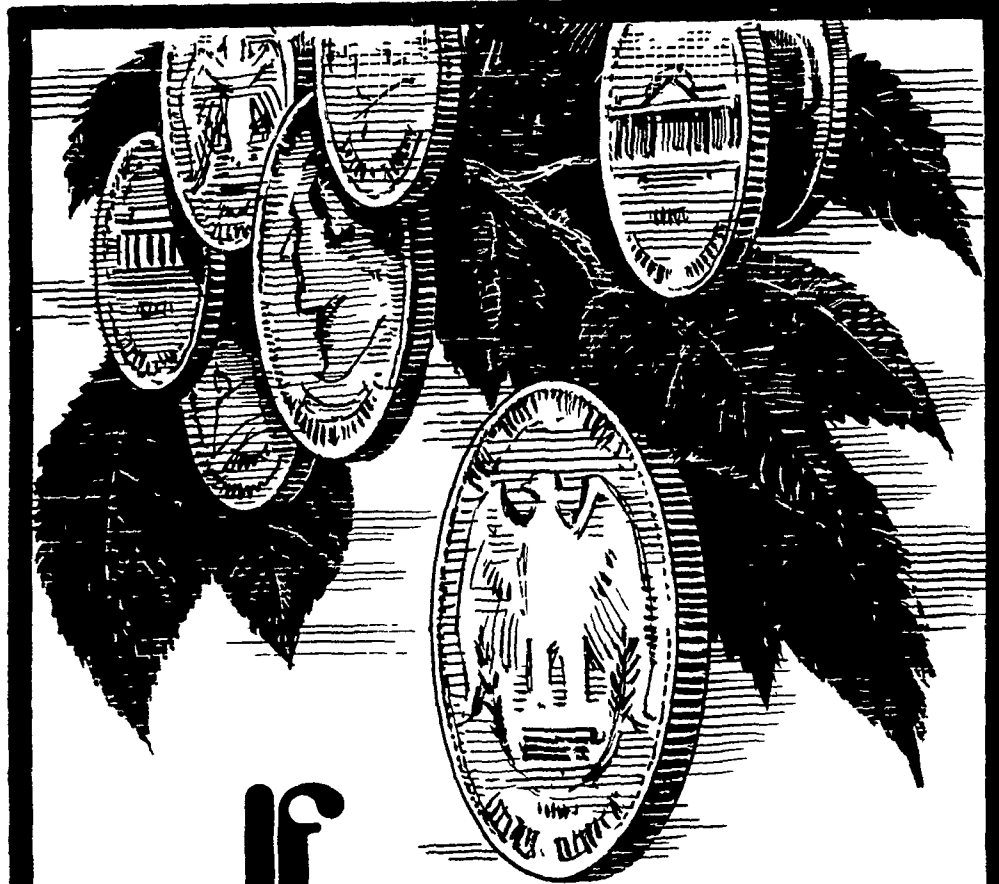
An exact arrival date is hard to set. If Africanized strains continue to migrate at their present pace, they could move naturally through Central America and Mexico into the southern United States in 10 to 15 years. Or they could "hit-

chhike" by ship or plane and get here much quicker.

To deny the bees a free ride, Congress passed an amendment to the Honey Bee Act in 1976 to prevent bees, including their eggs, larvae, pupae, or semen, from being imported into the United States. Bees from Canada are excepted, because Canada is equally anxious as the United States to keep out Africanized strains.

The bee ban is enforced by

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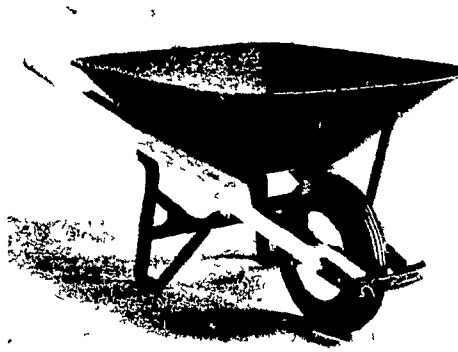
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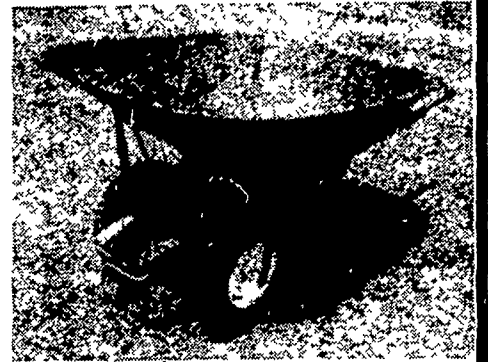
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