

Bees, yellow jackets creating a buzz



Toogee Sielsch with El Dorado County Vector Control looks at bees that drowned in a hot tub in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Susan Wood

By Kathryn Reed

The overriding reason to be in a hot tub is to relax. Just the opposite happens when bees buzz around just inches from your face and then want to make the body of water their continual drinking fountain.

Then there are the yellow jackets that have such good sniffers they know where the barbecue is – or any protein that is outside – within a quarter of a mile.

Those bumblebees and honeybees, well, they are just spreading love as they pollinate.

Now is the season for the worker bees and yellow jackets to proliferate. While they are more in abundance now, the prediction is it won't be a bad year for them.

Toogee Sielsch with the El Dorado County Vector Control while on a stroll through Cove East this week talked all about these winged critters.

Because there were a couple hard freezes in the spring he does not anticipate the yellow jacket season being bad, especially compared to a couple summers ago when it seemed like there was a constant hum in the basin. That was when eating outside was near impossible without sharing your meal with the little buggers, all under the threat of being stung.



Honey bees are getting under a hot tub cover and then drowning.
Photo/LTN

There are five species of yellow jackets in the basin. They are part of the wasp family and aren't actually bees. In nature they are primarily feeding on aphids. They are also a low level pollinator.

The biggest problem is so many people are allergic to their sting. This can become a public health issue and why vector control gets involved.

“We use a powder they crawl through. They spread it to their friends,” Sielsch said of how his department gets rid of yellow jacket nests. Even then, the crew is cognizant of proximity to water and other environmental concerns. He said 600 nests would be a rough estimate of how many were treated during the prolific summer.

“We would never treat primary pollinators,” Sielsch added.

Honey bees and bumblebees aren't usually going to sting someone. They would have to get pretty aggravated to do so. The problem with yellow jackets is they don't lose their stingers and can keep after a person. It's only honey bees that drop their stinger. And it's only the females that sting.

The good things about the traps that are sold at stores is that they are specific to attracting and then killing yellow jackets so there is no threat of killing off the good bees.

As for the bees showing up in a hot tub, there is probably a nest nearby and that big tub looks like an inviting source of hydration. They just want to share.