

# **A Story of Allergic Reaction to Stinging**

*Lawrence Peiffer, EAS Master Beekeeper October 2010*

As beekeepers, we are sometimes expected to help out with unforeseen events. We help the neighbors with nuisance wasps, hornets and yellow-jackets. We are asked to help fellow beekeepers, catch swarms and maybe even cut out a colony from a building. But we also have to be ready for the unexpected. This summer, as a full-time teacher, I had a couple months off to regroup, think about the next year and recuperate from the past year. Beekeeping is a relaxing escape and I never know who's going to call or where a beekeeping situation might take me.

This past summer, I caught numerous swarms from Kittery, Eliot, Gorham, Limington and many places in between. I extracted several colonies from homes this summer as well, one of which was actually below ground level in the basement of a home.

As my summer vacations come to an end and I go back to school, I generally get quite busy and don't have the time to be as helpful. However, when I received a call on a weekend and spoke to a lady who described honey bees to a tee, I made the time. Even more intriguing was her telling me they were under her porch, but that she couldn't see the nest. We talked for a while about the bees and where they might be situated. Ultimately, I wasn't convinced they were honey bees, and told her so. She then told me of a huge party she had planned for the upcoming Saturday and that she had at least 40 people confirmed to be there, with the possibility of even more showing up. Her concern was that when they would use the grill on the porch, the activity of all the people on the porch might aggravate the bees. So I told her I would make an attempt to get her bees out before then.

I got out of school on a Wednesday afternoon and packed my stuff to rescue a misdirected colony of honey bees. I always take my jacket, seamless veil and a pair of gloves in case the bees get ugly as I show them

a new home. You know how moving can be upsetting to the girls. So away I went.

I arrived at the address that was given to me. No one was home. I put on my jacket and went to look under the porch for a colony of honey bees. I got to the opening where a crawl-space was and a couple small bees came whizzing out in a hurry. I stood back and watched as several more came and went. Curiosity got the best of me and I crawled in for a closer look. It wasn't well lit and the little bees disappeared into the distance. So I crawled in and searched for a nest. None was to be found. It was hot and I needed a break already. I looked out and saw that the owner, Ed, had just driven in on his motorcycle. He saw that I was there and came over and spoke to me while I was still under the porch. I let him know that they were not honey bees.

I then looked to the far side of the porch again. The sun had moved so I could now see the little bees much more clearly. They were landing on the ground. I went over to where they were and was able to identify them as ground hornets. I took my hive tool and scraped the leaves from the area. This was not the correct procedure. This disturbance created a small black cloud of bees that took offense to my presence and perhaps to my very being. I received multiple stings through my suit around the cuffs of my gloves, around my elbows and on a knee. I slowly backed out, rubbing my arms as the bees kept coming. I got out from under the porch and went to my truck. From there, I saw Ed. I motioned to him, saying "Stay over there, the bees are following me." Whoops, too late.

Ed got stung on the hip and then again beside the head. I asked him how he felt. He assured me he was okay and that he'd been stung before. I explained to him that multiple stings can be serious for anyone and that as we get more experienced (older), our bodies change and may become more sensitive to a sting. At that, he said, "Wow, I feel funny." I knew it wasn't a laughing situation. I asked him if he was feeling light-headed or dizzy. He said, "Well, yeah I guess so." I asked him if he'd please sit down so that if he fell, he wouldn't have far to go. So he sat on the top step of a two-step entry. I continued making small talk to keep him calm and make sure he was conscious. I asked him if I could call the rescue for him and he said, "No, I don't think it's that bad." Soon after, he turned and appeared to

look up at the wall of the house. As I spoke to him, I didn't get a response, so I headed his way. He twisted, curled into a ball and rolled down the stairs before I could get to him. I straightened him out and made sure he was breathing okay. He was. He then regained consciousness and we spoke some more. He laid there for a bit and then went to the top of the entry again. I asked him to please stay lying down and to elevate his feet. He did. I called the rescue. I let them know where we were, that I was a beekeeper, that I was with a bee-sting victim, and that Ed had been stung multiple times. I also explained that he was showing some signs of anaphylactic shock. It's funny how a few minutes in such a situation seem like an eternity.

I paced the driveway like a new father-to-be. I kept an eye on my patient and listened for the scream or the rescue. They called me several times to confirm my phone number and location. I ended-up moving my truck out to the main road so it could be used as a landmark. With that, they drove right in. As they rushed him away, I asked Ed if he would like me to stay and talk to his wife, Jane, and explain the situation to her. He thanked me for that. I reached her on her cell phone—she was on her way home, so I waited to tell her the story in person. When she heard about what had happened, she was a bit flustered. I helped her with her groceries and then she was off to find out which hospital they had taken Ed to. I received a call the next morning. It was Jane. She thanked me repeatedly for helping her and Ed out. She also said the exterminator had just left. When I asked how Ed was doing, she gave the phone to Ed. He gave many thanks as well. He told me the whole story and how he felt through the ordeal. He said that he had five stings on his hip and four more on his head, just behind his ear. He also explained how the doctor quizzed him on what I had said and told him to do. Ed said, "Because I have a prior heart condition, the doctor told me that you probably saved my life—that my blood would have pooled to the lowest point in my body and I might not have regained consciousness." That put me on cloud nine for the rest of the day.

So, I guess my CPR certification and my study of anaphylactic shock paid off. I also have epi-pen training; I found out that it can be just as deadly to administer the pen to someone who doesn't really need it. You need to know the symptoms. If you're going to help people with a bee problem, will you be ready?

