

## How To Deal With Yellowjacket Nests

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Twice, in recent days, I have been contacted by homeowners who had bee or wasp nests in their yard and were told that they couldn't be destroyed. This left the homeowners with a rather helpless feeling of being trapped in their house and unable to enjoy their own yard. First of all, we have no bee or wasp species in Kansas that are on the endangered species list and there is no law protecting bees and wasps. If you have nests of yellowjackets, bumblebees, paper wasps, whatever, that are in a location that they are becoming a threat to your family's health and well being you can destroy that nest. A particular company may have a policy against doing that, but that's a company policy, not a state or federal law.

Let me immediately follow that up with the knowledge that all bees and wasps are inherently good and beneficial to ecosystems and as such to our society as well. If nests of any of these species are not near your home or living/work area, just avoid them, ignore them and let them go about their business. We desperately need all the pollinators we can get, but not at the expense of life and limb.

Many of our bee and wasp species are solitary nesters. They go about their business of raising young and pollinating plants and if we leave them alone they'll leave us alone. A few species are colonial insects. Honeybees are well known and establish colonies (hives) that can live for years. It's also of interest to most people to hear that honeybees are not native to North America, they are native to Europe and Asia. Early European settlers brought them to North America mainly for the honey that they produce.

Other commonly encountered colonial nesters include yellow jackets, paper wasps and bumblebees. Paper wasps build the flat bottomed papery nests under roof eaves. Easy to find and if they aren't near a door, often best to just be ignored. Bumblebees and yellowjackets are generally nesting in the ground or at ground level. For the most part these colonies die off at the end of the growing season. New fertile queens are developed at the end of the season, which fly off and hibernate over the winter.

When spring comes around the queen starts a new nest and for much of the early part of the summer are unobserved. But as the summer progresses, the colony grows and by August into fall, the colonies are big enough that there are now guard bees. You can spend all summer walking right by a nest in the ground and one day, wham, they come boiling out and sting you. Which is painful for most of us, but life threatening to those who have bee sting allergies.

When one of these nests is discovered you need to clear the area and let the colony calm down. Then observe from a safe distance and try to locate the nest entrance. It is often a small hole left over from a mouse tunnel or some other primary excavator. Once it's located figure out some way to find it after dark. Do not attack in the broad daylight as too many of the colony is out foraging for food. You want to purchase some wasp and hornet spray. I prefer one of the foaming products that shoots several feet. About an hour after dark, carefully approach the colony entrance and fill it with the spray. If possible spray for about ten seconds. Then turn off the light and retreat quickly. Observe the colony for a few days and retreat if there is still activity. If you are allergic to bee stings DO NOT do this yourself! It's best to leave as many of these bee and wasp nests alone as you can. But sometimes we have to take action to depopulate a colony for the safety of you and your family!