

“Kill or be killed, eat or be eaten, was the law; and this mandate, down out of the depths of Time, he obeyed.”

— Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*

Autumn is here! Leaves are turning color and falling, asters and goldenrod are in full bloom, nights are pleasantly cool again and Wal-Mart has Christmas decorations for sale. This is also the time when a wide variety of creatures appear in my bee yard, trying to fatten up on yummy honey bees in a mad rush toward hibernation or one last round of brood rearing. Wasps, for example, need lots of protein to rear healthy young queens that will overwinter and form the basis for new colonies next spring.

For many of us, a hive inspection at this time of year provides a fascinating lesson in the ecology of the food chain that our honey bees are, unfortunately, a part of. I asked members of my county beekeepers association to share photos of “fall visitors to the bee yard” and the response was fantastic. How many of these critters have you seen lately?



Writing spiders have to eat, but this one built a large and highly effective web directly in front of the entrance to one of my hives. The little white doodads are entombed honey bees. Needless to say, the spider isn't in this spot any longer. Photo: the author



Spiders love bees, but not in the tender, caring sense. This spider is preparing a bee buffet. Photo: Lewis Cauble



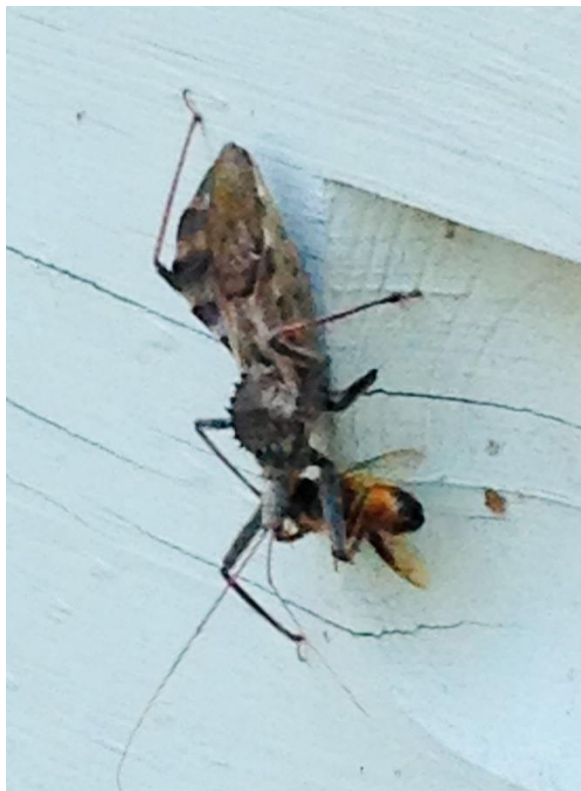
How can we hate such a beautiful creature? If that is your bee, the answer is simple. Photo: Grey Reavis



Spiders don't have to be big to be deadly. This one isn't any larger than the unfortunate bee it has captured. Photo: Kevin Bickford



Dragonflies are notorious bee-eaters. Photo: Douglass Phillips



One of my favorite fall visitors are Wheel Bugs, a type of Assassin Bug. Note the "wheel" on its thorax, which looks like a circular-saw blade. Don't make the mistake I once did (only once) of trying to hold one of these – their bite is intensely painful. Photo: Mark Powers



Yellow jacket wasps are extremely common in our area. They are opportunistic feeders, eating whatever is available, such as this drone pupa that has been ejected from a hive. Photo: Grey Reavis



Yellow Jackets don't only eat scraps. They can attack and kill bees, such as this drone, if they get a chance. Photo: Geoff Leister



A Bald-Faced Hornet feasts on brood that has been discarded from a hive.
Photo: John Rintoul



Eight- and six-legged creatures aren't the only predators that love honey bees. Four-legged ones do, too. Skunks, for example, are well-known as bee connoisseurs. There are two skunks bee-shopping in this picture, one in the foreground and one in the background. Photo: Shelley Rogers

With the popularity of bees as food, what's a beekeeper to do? It would be counter-productive for us to try to cleanse the environment of all life except for honey bees. Instead, if we keep strong, healthy colonies, hopefully we will have enough bees for our purposes with enough left over to share with our critter neighbors. Consider: would you rather have those spiders feast on a few worn-out foraging bees or your pet poodle? After all, spiders gotta eat!



Look carefully to find a ravenous Walking Stick in this photo. While this one isn't eating a honey bee, it is clear that a bee would be easy prey. Photo: Mark Gruener

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