

"They're funny things, Accidents. You never have them till you're having them."

— Eeyore (A.A. Milne)

Last month we read cautionary tales about beekeeping getting out of hand, specifically with regard to controlling civilization's oldest advancement, Fire. But that's not the only non-bee-related risk of beekeeping, not by a long shot!

Rabid racoons

Late one night, my dogs were raising a ruckus out near my bee hives. Throwing on my slippers and grabbing a flashlight, I went out to see what was going on. My Great Pyrenees was dancing around one of my hives, showing extreme interest but keeping her distance. Something was moving underneath. The flashlight showed that it was a juvenile raccoon, huddled underneath the hive stand. That was weird... what was it after? The warmth of the hive? A late-night bee snack? I secured the dogs and went back to bed.

The next day, the raccoon was wandering listlessly in the front yard, clearly "not right". My wife shot it (don't mess with my wife) and it was confirmed to be rabid.

Having our hives attract bears is a major headache, but who would have ever thought they'd attract rabid raccoons?

Critters you didn't know would hurt you

Our honey bees are gourmet food for a variety of wildlife (see "[What's that eating my bees?](#)"). Beekeepers must be on the lookout for yellowjackets, snakes in the grass, black widow spiders inside the boxes' handholds and a plethora of other human-harming creatures, all of which inhabit my bee yard.

One fall early in my beekeeping career, I found several insects that looked a lot like praying mantises on the side of a hive, eating honey bees as if they were Big Macs. I've seen plenty of praying mantises and walking sticks in my life, and they are interesting to watch. These looked like the Klingon version, with something like half of a circular saw blade coming out of



Wheel bugs may look innocent but they deliver an excruciating bite.

Photo: Texas AgriLife Extension Service

their thorax. So I scooped one up in my hand to show the kids.

I had almost reached the house when the sharpest pain I've ever experienced shot through my hand. The dang thing had bitten me! And the pain was excruciating!

It turns out that I had found some Wheel Bugs, a type of Assassin Bug. I continue to see them occasionally in the fall, but I don't try to collect specimens to show friends and family. My hand still hurts when I think about it!

Slip 'n fall

Nancy Oglesby reports: "I once tripped and fell down five stairs while carrying a bunch (too much) of bee equipment down the patio stairs to my bee hives. I was very black and blue but no broken bones."

Physics is not our friend

Peggy Wilson knows about this topic: "Of course there's also the 10-foot stepladder tipping over as you stretch that 5-gallon bucket out to the swarm high in that cedar tree.... I love keeping bees...."

Ouch!

Keith Houck gives us experience-based instructions that Papa Berenstain Bear would be proud of:

How to prep kindling for the smoker

1. Hold hive tool down on concrete with sharp end up to protect razor-sharp edge.

2. Carefully affix the end of the kindling onto the sharp edge of the hive tool to get a grip for splitting.
3. Pound the hive tool down hard on the concrete using the hand holding the kindling.
4. Go to urgent care for stitches in palm of hand (but just clear of the radial artery!).

Heat exhaustion

When it is mid-summer, 95°F with typical high summertime humidity in the Piedmont, what do we do? We put on head-to-toe body suits, stand in full sun and lift weights for several hours. Hmm. How could that go wrong?

One answer is heat exhaustion, which can lead to heat stroke. The latter is extremely serious and warrants an immediate call to 911. I don't know about you, but I don't want my tombstone to read, "Killed by the heat while looking at some insects."

Stories of near-death experiences due to heat stroke are all over the internet. Just Google "[beekeeper heat stroke](#)". One such report is provided by Caroline Patricia Allen¹, a beekeeper in Albemarle. She says, "August 18th, I was working with my four hives.... I had finished two of the four hives when I got light headed, slightly dizzy, and felt faint. I sat down for a while because I wasn't through. After a few minutes of not feeling any better, I decided to finish feeding then close the hives." Jumping ahead in the story, she says, "The 911 guy said I should take my blood pressure. It was 205 over 90. YIKES! He stayed on the line with me until the ambulance arrived."

I'm not a doctor and I don't play one on TV (or on the internet) so I'm not going to give medical advice. There is plenty of competent advice online from agencies such as the [Centers for Disease Control](#). I've attached an info-flyer from [them](#) on the next page – read it! The life you save may be yours!

What can we specifically do as beekeepers to prevent heat-related issues? The folks at

[BetterBee](#) have some practical advice just for us. A few bits of their wisdom include:

1. Instead of working with hives midday (which is often ideal otherwise), choose early morning or late afternoon when temperatures are cooler.
2. Invest in a ventilated suit or jacket. Wear weather-friendly clothing (if anything) underneath.
3. Drink plenty of water before beginning work and periodically while at work. Not peeing or not sweating is a warning sign of dehydration, as is dark urine.
4. If you are doing heavy work, recruit a helper! That's what bee buddies are for! That also gives someone to call 911.
5. They summarize with: "If you begin to feel nauseated, faint, or crampy, you're moving out of the realm of simple hard work and possibly into the danger zone. Rest in the shade or your air-conditioned vehicle, then pack up the hives and call it a day."

Stay off the front page!

I don't mind if the *News & Observer* or *Herald-Sun* mentions me in an article on record-breaking honey harvests or how my county beekeeping chapter prepares thousands of extremely well-informed beekeepers, but I don't want the headline to be about me falling out of a tree while collecting a swarm or being found dead in the bee yard, the victim of heat stroke. And even though those stories can be morbidly amusing, I don't want to read one about you either! As Sergeant Phil Esterhaus used to say at the daily roll call on *Hill Street Blues*, "Hey, let's be careful out there!"

Randall Austin is a NC Master Beekeeper who keeps a few honey bee hives in northern Orange County, NC. He can be reached at s.randall.austin@gmail.com.


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¹ C.P. Allen, "Had a Heat Stroke When Working with My Bees",

<https://farmhouseusings.com/2014/08/20/had-a-heat-stroke-when-working-with-my-bees/>

HEAT-RELATED ILLNESSES

WHAT TO LOOK FOR	WHAT TO DO
HEAT STROKE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High body temperature (103°F or higher) • Hot, red, dry, or damp skin • Fast, strong pulse • Headache • Dizziness • Nausea • Confusion • Losing consciousness (passing out) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call 911 right away-heat stroke is a medical emergency • Move the person to a cooler place • Help lower the person's temperature with cool cloths or a cool bath • Do not give the person anything to drink
HEAT EXHAUSTION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy sweating • Cold, pale, and clammy skin • Fast, weak pulse • Nausea or vomiting • Muscle cramps • Tiredness or weakness • Dizziness • Headache • Fainting (passing out) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move to a cool place • Loosen your clothes • Put cool, wet cloths on your body or take a cool bath • Sip water <p>Get medical help right away if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are throwing up • Your symptoms get worse • Your symptoms last longer than 1 hour
HEAT CRAMPS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy sweating during intense exercise • Muscle pain or spasms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop physical activity and move to a cool place • Drink water or a sports drink • Wait for cramps to go away before you do any more physical activity <p>Get medical help right away if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cramps last longer than 1 hour • You're on a low-sodium diet • You have heart problems
SUNBURN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Painful, red, and warm skin • Blisters on the skin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay out of the sun until your sunburn heals • Put cool cloths on sunburned areas or take a cool bath • Put moisturizing lotion on sunburned areas • Do not break blisters
HEAT RASH	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red clusters of small blisters that look like pimples on the skin (usually on the neck, chest, groin, or in elbow creases) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay in a cool, dry place • Keep the rash dry • Use powder (like baby powder) to soothe the rash


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