



HONEYBEES: TRUE OR FALSE?

Find out why bees are important, why they're in trouble, and what we can do to help. Have a question? Contact Kate at beepublicproject@gmail.com or visit beepublic.com. Honeybees, by nature, are remarkably gentle creatures. Most of the fear associated with them comes from their relatives, yellow jackets and wasps. Let's break down some myths and facts:

1. If you stand near a beehive or see a honeybee, they'll go after you.

FALSE! Honeybees around the hive are going out to look for flowers and have no interest in people. They are coming and going, just like cars driving in the road! But, it is important that you don't stand in front of the hive because a bee flying back home might bump into you and you might get startled. It's safe to watch a beehive from a distance, and very fun.

2. Honeybees go after human food.

FALSE! Honeybees seek out the biggest food sources from "low-risk" sources. They focus mostly on flowering trees, fields of weeds, and other nectar rich garden plants. Yellow jackets, however, are omnivorous and will seek out food wherever they can get it. They are the ones who typically crawl into soda cans and pester folks at picnics.

But wait! If there's a large enough source of sugar — a spilled beverage or a melted popsicle for example — honeybees will feed from there. Just another reason to keep things tidy!

3. Honeybees are aggressive.

FALSE! Honeybees are *defensive*. As in, the only time they might sting would be to defend their home. Just like you and I, The honeybees want to protect their children, food security, and abode. Beekeepers wear protective gear because they are doing just that: Breaking and entering, stealing food (honey) and looking at honeybee babies!

Last year, I was stung about 4 times total taking care of 5-10 beehives with hundreds of thousands of bees in them. Most hives are so gentle that they never sting, even when being disrupted.

4. A swarm of bees is dangerous.

FALSE! When a beehive swarms (when 1/2 of the population leave the hive with a queen bee to find a new home,) it's actually the most gentle period in a bee's life. They have nothing to defend and are so full of honey for their trip that they physically can't bend their abdomens to sting. I've worked with swarms wearing no protection at all and the bees were as gentle as can be. Swarming is a natural behavior, but as beekeepers, one of our most important jobs is to prevent it from happening. We want to avoid losing 1/2 of our hives population, and we also don't want a swarm to scare the public. Little do they know that it is a magical and safe thing to witness!

5. Honeybees die when they sting.

TRUE! Honeybees will die when they sting, which is why they avoid it at all costs while out and about looking for nectar. Yellow jackets and wasps, however, can sting multiple times without dying.

WHAT DO I DO WHEN I SEE A BEE?

- If a bee is hanging out by you, just walk away or stand still.
- Fast movements might get them upset!

Remember: honeybees are our friends, they provide us with one out of every three bits of food we eat! Let's help them out by respecting their homes and being nice to them when we see them out pollinating plants!