Killer Bees

"Killer bees" aren't always deadly. But they are more aggressive than regular honeybees. They travel in large numbers and unlike other bees can attack as a group, killing animals and people, which is why they're called killer bees.

Killer bees were created when Scientists in South America bred European honeybees with African bees. Instead of creating bees able to make honey in tropical climates, the scientists created aggressive, Africanized honeybees that didn't make any more honey. Some of the bees escaped the lab and migrated north. Now, they have spread into North America.

Killer bees are able to survive very harsh conditions. They may also be more immune to the colony collapse disorder that is killing domestic honeybees in North America.

Africanized honeybees are slightly smaller than regular bees, and they don't live in normal hives. Instead, they build their nests in enclosed places like hollow trees, garbage cans and house attics. If they feel threatened or even simply annoyed, their whole colony may attack the invader. If Africanized honeybees attack you, use your hands or shirt to cover your head, and run as fast as you can for shelter. Most serious bee attacks involve multiple stings to the face and head.

© USDA Agricultural Research Service
Bugwood.org, Scott Bauer

An Africanized honeybee (left) and a European honeybee (right) on a honeycomb. Despite color differences between these two bees, normally they can't be identified by eye.

© Clipart.com

presented by Science a-z a division of Learning A-Z

Scientists Search for Clues to a Bee Mystery

Bees are very important to farmers. As they move from plant to plant, they pollinate many crops. Because of this pollination, the plants are able to make seeds and reproduce.

Last year, beekeepers started to notice something strange in their beehives. The worker bees were leaving, and not coming back! Sometimes, the bees left behind their honey, and the queen bee. This is strange, because in most honeybee colonies, the bees feed and protect the queen. No one knows why the bees abandoned the hive, or where they went. Scientists call this *colony collapse disorder,* or CCD for short.

© Photos.com

Today, scientists are a little closer to solving the mystery of disappearing honeybees.

To find out what makes bees leave their hives, scientists studied 51 groups of bees. Some of the colonies had experienced CCD, and some had not.

In all the colonies where the bees had left their hives, the scientists found a virus. This virus, called *Israeli Acute*

See Bee Mystery on page 2

Writing Prompt:

What might this bee do next?

© 123RF, Borut Gorenjak

Bee Mystery

Continued from page 1

Paralysis Virus (IAPV, for short) causes bees to become sick and die.

The scientists are not sure if the virus makes the infected bees leave, or if there are other reasons. They will do tests to see how IAPV affects bee colonies. But for now, they know that bees with the virus may abandon their hives. The virus can be used as a warning for beekeepers, and help scientists learn more about CCD.

Compare and Contrast

Bees

- have bodies covered in fine hair
- live in hives, with many other bees
- eat nectar
- collect pollen and nectar for young bees
- can sting once
- pollinate plants
- make honey

A wasp

© BigStockPhoto

A bee

Photo courtesy of PDPhoto.org

Wasps

- have leathery bodies
- live alone or together, in burrows or trees
- eat other insects
- like human food, such as meat and soft drinks
- can sting many times
- don't pollinate plants
- don't make honey (in fact, they eat bees and their honey!)

Photos bottom, left to right: © SnapVillage, © 123RF, Gyula Matics, © 123RF, Stachu343, © Dreamstime, Groza

Bees find pollen, fly back to their hive, and dance in a way that tells other bees where the pollen is. Beekeepers harvest the bees' honey.