

"Bee" Prepared on Your Trail Rides

Unfortunately, bees and wasps are a part of life that we can't do much about so we have to respect their presence
By Bob Jeffreys

As we enter the latter part of autumn we need to remember that this is the season when bees or wasps are most aggressive and defensive of their nests. I was personally reminded of this fact recently when only one horse and rider team of the four that started out returned to the ranch. We did find the others and thankfully no horses or riders were seriously injured, but they were stung repeatedly and were pretty shaken up. One particular horse took the brunt of the attack and was stung all over his body.

Unfortunately, bees and wasps are a part of life that we can't do much about so we have to respect their presence, do what we can to minimize attacks, and know what to do if we are attacked. Firstly, try to stay on well traveled paths; don't chance veering off into undisturbed areas. In particular avoid dead trees or logs and keep your eyes open for nests in trees.

However prudent we are in trying to be careful there still might, and if you trail ride often, probably will be a time when you'll disturb a nest. Most common are yellow jackets who nest in the ground. If you accidentally step on their nest, you'll be dealing with an angry group of flying, stinging insects.

So, if you're with a group it helps to have a plan. Determine beforehand what you will do if your group encounters bees or wasps. What I've learned works best is to have a code word such as "BEES" to be shouted loudly. Upon hearing this word everyone should be prepared to move away quickly and keep going for at least a quarter of a mile. Most bees/wasps won't travel further than that, but some may. If the attack hits the lead horse the rest of the group should leave to the rear and that lead horse should continue forward. You can all meet up again at a predetermined rendezvous point. Try to stay on the horse and get it to move away from the site of the attack. If you are bucked off get away as fast as you can on foot - you can look for your horse later.

If a horse gets stung severely the best thing you can do is hose them off with cold water as soon as possible; check with your vet, but if you can't reach him or her, give the horse a shot of banamine (about 5 cc's) to calm them down and administer an antihistamine or a steroid such as Azium. They should be fine and all welts should be gone in a day or so.

If you know that you or any member of your group is allergic to bee/wasp stings, carry the appropriate medicine as prescribed by your doctor on all trail rides. To increase your safety you may wish to carry a cell phone, but lots of trail areas are not near cell towers; that's why it's important to have a predetermined meeting place arranged with your group.

Encountering such an incident is not pleasant, but if you keep your wits about you, and leave the area quickly, you should be all right and you'll have some "new" material to share with your buddies.

Safe riding!

