



GARY CASKEY/staff photographer

This bald-faced hornet is one of the summer's bumper crop residing in the Birmingham-Bloomfield area. Co-existing with hornets can be both delightful and dangerous.

Big sting

Living with hornets can be peaceful, but beware if you bump into their nest

By Jonathan S. Schechter
special writer

THE DOG days of summer are upon us. Time to relax, time to cool off, and perhaps time to explore your yard and find the unexpected.

You may discover a strange grey hanging object, bigger than a watermelon and alive with activity — buzzing activity that will end your relaxing day and send shivers down your spine.

No, they aren't the newly arrived "killer bees" that our California friends (who must have everything first) now have. The warm weather has produced a bumper crop of Michigan's own bald-faced hornets.

What are bald-faced hornets? The hornets are the largest member of the Vespidae family, which includes most of our common wasps and yellow jackets. The vespidae family members are all very capable of stinging and are more likely to sting us than the usually docile honey bee. Before you run for the spray can, or search the yellow pages for an exterminator, you would be best off knowing a little about the hornets, their life style and the dangers and delights of co-existence.

HORNETS ARE not bees any more than cows are horses, or cats are dogs. Hornets are hornets. They are heavy bodied insects, just over one-inch long, primarily black in color with white markings on the head. Thus the name "bald-faced."

They build large and conspicuous nests above ground. The nests are grey and made of simple "hornet-made" paper. The hornets chew or masticate wood fibers they strip from backyard decks, wood chips and tree bark. The pulpy product is then formed into a high quality, symmetrical and partitioned nest. Their paper-producing skills should be the envy of International Paper Co., while their interior design ability is more sophisticated than most interior designers could come up with for space efficiency.

The nest is used to raise the young larvae and as a shelter from weather.

It does not store honey because hornets do not make honey. Hornets are carnivores (meat eaters) and hunt all sorts of insects on daily sorties with bees included as part of the varied diet.

A **HORNET** away from the nest is generally docile and pays little attention to sun bathers and picnickers. However, if someone bumps into the nest, watch out. Hornets can be very aggressive and launch a frightening attack if the colony feels threatened. Unlike a honey bee, a hornet does not lose its stinger and can sting repeatedly. A sting from a hornet is painful, produces almost instant swelling and burning, and for the allergic, multiple stings can be a dire medical emergency.

Now for the good news.

The nests are usually above our reach and because of their large size it is hard to stumble into one by mistake. A hornet nest in your yard is good news, if the nest is up high and you are a gardener or have flower beds. The hornets will work throughout the daylight hours patrolling for insects to fill their insatiable appetites.

If you find a nest in your yard consider leaving it alone; but, give it a wide berth on humid days, don't run a power mower under it and don't let your kids see if they can hit it with a rock! They will not be able to run fast enough and

your yard will look like the filming ground for a B-rated movie on a killer bee attack.

IF YOU opt to leave the nest alone, their life cycle has some interesting aspects. If you are careful, you can outlast the hornets because about the time the tomato plants succumb to the frost, the hornets will be gone. The cold weather kills them all, except for the queens, which hibernate underground all winter.

The nest is never used again. (If you want to save the nest be very sure it is really empty. The warmth of a house would stir sluggish hornets into activity. Keep the nest for a few days in a sealed plastic bag in a warm place to make sure no stragglers were left inside.)

With the arrival of spring the queen emerges from hibernation and starts to function as an egg-laying machine. Once the first workers develop, the massive nest-building project starts over again.

IF THE sight of the nests makes you tremble or you are sensitive to stings, the nests can be removed.

Jonathan S. Schechter is a naturalist and freelance writer residing in Bloomfield Township.

Luncheon focus on adoptions

A round table luncheon with a four-member panel will focus on "Trans-racial, Trans-cultural and Foreign Adoptions" from noon to 3 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 12, at the Machus Red Fox Restaurant in Bloomfield Township.

The luncheon is sponsored by the Michigan Inter-Professional Association on Marriage, Divorce and the Family.

Members of the panel include Julia

Horn, Michigan Department of Social Services; Randy Watkins, president of the Committee to End Racism in Michigan child care system; Nancy Fox, director of Americans for International Adoption; and Addie Williams, Michigan Department of Social Services in Wayne County.

For reservations or price information, call 646-5622.

Christ Church sets finale

Christ Church Cranbrook's summer musical grand finale will be celebrated with a variety of music performed by carillonneur Beverly Buchanan at 4 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 1.

at 5 p.m. by doctent-guided tours of the church — noted for its rare art and modern Gothic architecture — and tours of the bell tower immediately following at 5 p.m.

Focus will be on selections by Bach,

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