

Warm Summer Boosts Wasp Encounters

Wednesday, 31 July 2013

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

You may have noticed an increase in little wasps this summer but haven't been able to spot any of their paper-like nests in the trees or under the eaves of buildings. Based on anecdotal reports, there seems to be an unusually high number of the stinging bugs this summer — especially the ones who live in nests underground.

That's what April Eads came across while clearing brush in her yard. She was stung twice by one wasp she thought was a fly and was trying to shoo away. She had what she considers a normal reaction to the stings: pain and localized swelling, but the next day she had a different reaction.

"About 24 hours later, something really bad started happening I started getting really itchy, beet red, super hot and everything was swelling. My rings got tight, my watch got tight my shoes got tight. So I left from the haircut and went home, and was, you know, a little panicky. Took a cold shower, took some more Benadryl, probably too much, and ended up going to sleep, so I was fine."

But during the following week, she wound up in the emergency room twice.

"The ER doctor said this was pretty rare that this happened because I don't have any allergies. And it's not anaphylactic-type shock. It's just some strange reaction my body is having. So, they're pretty scary. Those wasps you definitely don't want to mess with."

Since these wasps don't have nests up in trees, Eads is concerned that others may be ambushed like she was.

"The biggest issue is they make nests in the ground. They make nest everywhere, but a lot of times in the ground, which is where mine is. They'll make them in old dead trees. And you don't see it, they're a teeny-tiny hole, so that's why it's so dangerous for kids or people picking berries."

As for the wasp nests in her yard, Eads says she had some help with trying to eradicate them.

"My mom came over and set like three traps and sprayed probably four bottles of wasp killer. We haven't seen any activity, the traps have probably only caught like five wasps, so we got them with the chemical eradicator. So just kinda keeping an eye on them — I'm looking under eaves in my house, porches and just being sure, because I've seen a couple flying around here and there near my property and now I'm just really paranoid."

A 2009 study from the University of Alaska Fairbanks showed Kodiak Islanders lead the state in stings per capita, with the Interior having the sheer highest number of reported stings. Prevalence of stinging insects has increased 600 percent in some parts of the state in the last 10 years.