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Thousands of bees attack couple, horses in Pantego

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PANTEGO — For the past few weeks, Kristen Beaugard had noticed bees near her home and had tried in vain to get rid of them.

The bees would fly in and out of a shed in the backyard of the rental property on Miller Lane, but she had no idea of the danger that was buzzing inside.

Wednesday evening, as Beaugard was exercising one of her two miniature horses, thousands of angry bees attacked her, her boyfriend and the horses. Beaugard was stung about 200 times and her boyfriend 50. The two horses were stung so much that they did not survive.

"They were chasing us down, they were following us," she said. "We swept up piles and piles of them. ... It was like a bad movie."

The couple doesn't know what caused the swarm of bees — estimated 30,000 — to leave their hive and attack. The bees are being tested to find out whether they are [Africanized bees](#), also known as "killer bees" for their aggressive behavior.

Beaugard, 44, is healing from the stings and praising emergency workers for braving the attack and trying to save animals.

Beaugard said she noticed nothing out of the ordinary as she exercised Trump, a Shetland pony, until he started jumping and kicking. Suddenly, a dark cloud of bees appeared and began stinging both of them. When efforts to swipe the bees off failed, she jumped into the pool and Trump followed.

"It got all dark, like it was nighttime there were so many bees," she said. "We were trying to stand up in the water but every time we stuck our heads out for air, they would cover us and start stinging us. We were trying to breathe and they were stinging us in the face and in the nose."

She escaped into the house, with bees flying behind her and crashing into windows. Horrified, she watched Trump frantically run all over the yard, rubbing against bushes to wipe off the bees and stumbling. Her boyfriend, whom she declined to identify, called 911 as the bees overwhelmed Trump and a second horse, Chip.

"It looked like they were moving because they were so covered in bees," Beaugard said, breaking into tears. "It just looked like they were shimmering because the bees were on them and stinging them."

Firefighters put on their gear and headed to the backyard, squirting foam to clear out the clouds of bees. They were able to drag the distressed animals into a pasture, where police and paramedics — some wearing their uniform shirts without extra protection — worked to try to save the horses, injecting medicine to treat allergic reactions and giving "massive doses of Benadryl," an antihistamine. One worker administered oxygen to the horses through a face mask, Beaugard said.

Police and fire crews, some of whom own horses, called buddies and veterinarians for advice on treating the horses. They checked Beaugard's eyes and pulled stingers out of her body, but she refused to go to a hospital. Officials stayed with the couple late into the evening.

Chip, a 6-year-old show horse, died shortly before Mansfield equine veterinarian Patricia Tersteeg arrived at about 10 p.m. Trump was loaded onto a trailer and spent the night at her clinic.

Tersteeg had to sedate Trump because he was so agitated and his eyes were swollen shut. She treated Trump with a series of drugs, but he died early Friday.

"He had so much swelling in his face, he must have kept his face above water to breathe. That's where all the bee stings concentrated," Tersteeg said. "He was so overwhelmed by bites that his body could not handle it. That's way too much for any 250 pound mammal to survive."

In addition to the horses, the bees killed five hens. A sixth has stingers all over her body and her eyes were swollen shut. The couple's dog was stung several times, too.

A beekeeper disposed of the hive and a sample of the bees was sent to experts to determine whether they were Africanized honey bees,

also called “killer bees,” said Barry Reeves, Pantego assistant police chief.

“A beekeeper disposed of the bees yesterday morning due to the fact that they were aggressive,” Reeves said. “We were told it was a hybrid honey bee.”

The whole ordeal, said Beauregard, has been “incredibly painful.”

The only place Beauregard wasn’t stung was on her feet, which were protected by shoes. And at first, her heart was racing, keeping her awake all of Wednesday night, but that improved by Thursday morning and now she is sore, can hardly move her muscles and has bumps all over, even on her eyelids. She’s treating herself with Benadryl.

Looking back, she worries about what could have happened if the bees had attacked residents of the nursing home next door.

“I want everyone to know if you see bees on your property it needs to be taken care of immediately,” Beauregard said. “We did not disturb the hive. We were nowhere near it.”

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