

# ALERT: THIS COULD SAVE YOUR HORSE'S LIFE!

By Diana M. Berthold

We have all read numerous articles regarding safety in the barn and turnouts to avoid serious injury or death to horses. Awareness to help avoid injury and illness is the best way to keep your horse safe. We do the best we can, but at times, things happen! Just a few days ago, we had an emergency at home with one of our horses and I hope that I can help you to avoid such an emergency.

We were experiencing unseasonably wet and cool weather which happens as we make the transition from late summer to fall. It happened rather abruptly, which sometimes affects animals in sometimes causes horses to colic and it seems to make mosquitoes, flies, and bees unusually vicious. On this day, Dr. Cathe Montessano DVM, was called out to a few colic and bee sting emergencies. One of those calls was for my mare that had just been attacked by bees.

I had lunged my mare and put her in a grass paddock as I prepared to work with my daughter's gelding, when I noticed that she was going totally ballistic. While being swarmed by bees, she was stung well over 50 times. Some were multiple stings in the same site. My husband had just come down to the barn when I told him what had happened. He discovered an underground Yellow Jacket's beehive at the base of a fence post in the grass paddock, where I am told is a common place for them to build underground nests. As he tried to destroy it with insecticide, he was also stung numerous times. It was in a place where I always put the horses out after exercise and also where we walk through frequently so it was amazing that it went unnoticed. Almost instantly, my mare had huge swellings all over her body from the multiple bites she sustained. In a flash, her face and body were additionally covered in hives! After I called my vet, she called ahead to Kristin Hlavac O'Brien at nearby Happy Go Lucky Farm to tell her that I needed her Epi-pen (adrenalin to be immediately injected for a life threatening emergency) that she had on hand for allergic horses in her barn. At the same time, my son drove there to pick it up as quickly as possible. I was able to inject her while waiting for the vet to arrive. It was frightening to see this beautifully refined mare turn into this grotesque looking creature struggling to breathe! The swelling on her face was quickly closing her eyes, nostrils, and lips shut. It reminded me of a film I once saw demonstrating how theatrical artists can change actor's appearances for movies. Dr. Montes-

sano arrived quicker than I ever thought possible and injected steroids and anti-histamine. As the horse was shivering, she told me that my horse was in shock. Amazingly, the symptoms began to soften and disappear. Naturally, I checked her

throughout the night, but my vet also warned me that the reaction could return and to be prepared to for it. Days later, she still had some large soft swellings for which I gave her doses of Benadryl twice daily to help with the last of her symptoms.

It is now two weeks after this terrible ordeal and my mare is doing well. Her many wounds are healing. Now sensitized to bee stings, I must now be prepared to act if she should ever get stung again. An epi-pen is in my barn refrigerator. We are very thankful that we were home when it happened, she survived, my husband didn't have as serious experience as she, others weren't stung, and my family, friend, and vet were available at this critical time of need.

I have read about dangers in our horse's surroundings from electrical hazards to poisonous plants, but I have not read one about this potentially lethal hazard. Since my daughter has had asthma attacks and episodes with hives, I know just how important it is to recognize symptoms and to take immediate action. If hives or swellings develop especially on the face, time is critical and emergency action is essential. We are always reevaluating our property for possible dangers to our family and pets. In the past, we have found nests and destroyed them. In those few rainy cool days that we had, the bees were busy building a nest that was undetected by us. Unfortunately, the horse was out at the end of the day, when bees return to their hive. It is my hope that after reading this, you will add this to your list of things to be on the lookout for. Allergic reactions from bee stings (especially multiple stings or stings after such an allergic reaction to a sting) can cause allergic reaction and or death. Immediate emergency care is required. It could save a life!



Bees and wasps nests are often found in the rafters of older barns. Photo courtesy of D. Berthold

## Mattapoisett Stables continued

especially love working with young horses," said Bilodeau who imports and sells many young Warmbloods from Europe. "They present such a challenge, but it's very rewarding for me to see the progress they make." Training and sales of both dressage and hunter/jumper horses has become a large part of Melissa's business. Currently Melissa is working with two outstanding five year old Warmbloods, Van Adel and Versace, both imported from Europe. "I love them both," said Melissa. "They are going to mature into successful show horses with bright careers." Versace has already begun to prove Melissa correct as he won his first dressage show this April at Training Level with a score of 66%.

Recognizing the potential of a young horse is something that Bilodeau has become very experienced with. "Knowing what your horse likes to do, and what he is good at doing are key skills in the horse sale industry. I make sure when I am training a horse that he is fit for the job at hand, and that he enjoys his work." Similarly, Melissa matches up her sale horses with the best home possible. "I want them to go out into the world and succeed. The first step to success comes from recognizing what they are good at and finding a home that will foster their potential once they leave Mattapoisett Stables," said Melissa, who shared that she loves receiving thank you letters and updates from buyers. "Nothing makes me happier than to hear from a customer that the horse I sold them is their dream horse."

Besides importing and training, Melissa also teaches riders of all levels and ages. Her clients range from adult professionals to beginners just starting their equestrian career. "There is a horse in my barn for every rider," said Bilodeau, who has a broad range of well kept and expertly trained lesson horses. Undoubtedly her favorite is Calador who is now twenty-seven and semi-retired. While he may not be schooling tempi changes or pirouettes anymore, he still loves to work and is inspiring many first time riders. "The kids love him and he loves them just as much," said Melissa who occasionally uses Calador for her young beginner students. "You can tell he knows they are beginners and he takes care of them while they are riding."

Melissa is also an adjunct professor at Johnson & Wales University. Two days a week Melissa teaches lessons at the University's Rehoboth, MA Equine Center. "It's such a wonderful opportunity to be able to teach students who have made equine business their career focus. I share with them all the experiences I have had, and stress that hard work and determination lead to opportunity; and opportunity is followed by success."

If you would like to know more about Melissa Bilodeau or Mattapoisett Stables or if you are interest in lessons, boarding, training or horses available for sale, visit [www.mattapoisettstables.com](http://www.mattapoisettstables.com), call 508-294-2790 or email to; [mbcalador@aol.com](mailto:mbcalador@aol.com).