

Mining Bees Are Beneficial



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Spring is the time of year our the UF-IFAS County Extension offices receive calls about ground-dwelling bees that are building a large number of nests in lawns and fields. These bees are known as andrenid bees, or mining bees, and are in the Genus *Andrena*. They appear to be particularly plentiful this year because the low rainfall provided the dry soil that the bee refers.

The andrenid bees are solitary, which means each female does her own work to provision a nest cell with nectar and pollen as a food for her offspring. The bees are approximately ½ inch in length with a black body and light-colored hairs. After mating in the spring, the female selects a site that has dry, loose soil with sparse vegetation. She excavates a vertical shaft in the soil that is approximately the diameter of a pencil and up to 18 inches deep. Off of the main shaft, the female will construct several brood chambers that she lines with a waterproof material. The female bee provisions each brood chamber with pollen and nectar on which she lays an egg. The pollen and nectar sustain the larva until fall when the overwintering adult is formed. Early in the spring the bees emerge from the ground to begin the cycle over again. There is only one generation per year.

The small mound of soil that is excavated from each burrow calls additional attention to the activity of the bees. Furthermore, as males continue to hover in the area of the burrows looking for unmated females, the bees appear more menacing than they actually are. If the andrenid bees would disperse in the spring and build widely scattered nests, they would most likely rarely be noticed. However, they have a tendency to concentrate their nests in a relatively small area. In some cases the openings to the underground burrows are no more than 3-4 inches apart.

The threat of being stung by the andrenid bees is usually highly overrated. The males cannot sting and the females are docile and not likely to sting unless stepped on, handled, or threatened. While the entrances to the tunnels and excavated soil may appear disruptive to the lawn, they usually are not actually damaging to the

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lawn. It may appear that the grass is thin because of the bees, but it is more likely that the bees are in the area because the grass was already thin. Therefore, control is usually not necessary. To the contrary, because the andrenid bees forage to gather pollen and nectar, they are actually beneficial because they serve as pollinators this time of the year.

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