

GUEST COLUMN

Awakening a German Yellow

By Mike Davis

I was doing some spring cleaning in my garage this past spring and was refolding an old plastic tarp. At first, I felt a pin prick on my arm but soon realized that I got stung by an insect! As I age, I am developing a greater appreciation of nature, so instead of dispatching the creature, I took a photo. I showed it to a member of my local naturalist group, the Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club. I regard Dr. Darryl Gwynne as the Club's resident entomologist, which is a scientist who studies insects. He confirmed that the creature was a German Yellow Jacket queen that overwintered in my tarp!

She is a foundress, as she is the only one of a few other queens to survive the winter from her nest the year before. She will build a new nest, lay eggs, and forage for food for her grubs. She will do all of that alone until her sterile daughters emerge as adult workers. She will then devote her time to staying in the nest just laying eggs. Later in the season larger nest cells will be created, for the production of new queens and male drones.

To put it into human terms, I awakened a princess who spent the winter cozied up in a relatively-warm abode in my tarp, only to be rudely disturbed by a big hairless ape (me). She could and did express her displeasure. I got stung by a Foundress Queen. What an honour! The sting was not too noticeable in the beginning, but got more painful over a day or so. I had a rash for about a week and it was a little itchy. After that, it was just a memory. By the way, she survived her encounter with me.

Meat Eater

Several years ago, I observed what I think may have been a worker Yellow Jacket wasp during a local Ribfest in Georgetown. I was relaxing at a picnic table and noticed a wasp landing on a pile of discarded rib bones that someone had eaten from but had not taken to the garbage. It was late in the summer and as I was familiar with wasps going after sugar, I thought she was going after the likely high-sugar content BBQ sauce. I was wrong. I watched her scrape meat leavings away from the bone and roll them into a ball. She then flew away, likely to her nest to feed a grub! She exploited a protein source.

Dr. Gwynne explained that the German Yellow Jacket is more aggressive than other native Yellow Jacket species and as it is an introduced species, can displace native species by outcompeting them. My Internet research at thecanadianencyclopedia.ca found that they are pollinators, as they go after flower nectar, and that they can control pests by preying on other insects to feed to their grubs.

Dr. Darryl Gwynne is Emeritus Professor of Biology, University of Toronto. His research emphasis is on using insects, particularly Katydid and Crickets, to



Autumn in Bayfront Park, Hamilton.
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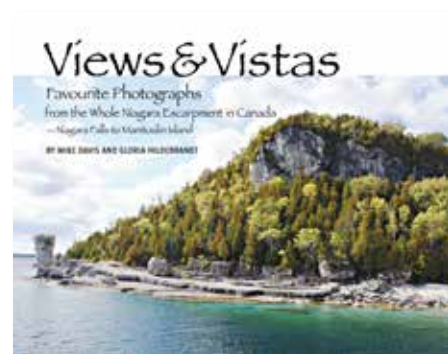
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Jacket Queen

understand some of Darwin's ideas, particularly how sex differences evolve. He is an Ig Nobel prize recipient. This is a satirical prize awarded to promote public engagement with scientific research. Dr. Gwynne last appeared in

my article "The birds and the bees, and the dance flies," in Summer 2011. **NEV**

Mike Davis is co-founder, co-owner, co-publisher and accounts manager for Niagara Escarpment Views.

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