

Bees Buzzing You?

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The yellow area between the eyes tells you this is a male carpenter bee. Males can't sting!

As I was walking past my over-grown, ten-foot tall allamanda 'Cherries Jubilee' shrub, a bumble bee like creature quickly got my attention. Flying a few feet above my head, he zoomed and darted intimidatingly. Carpenter bees ...males.... with flying skills that reminded me of an X-wing fighter plane, piloted by a Star Wars Jedi pilot. Will it fire miniature, long-range laser cannons or use its proton torpedo launchers to zap me? Other "fighter planes" join in to investigate the intruder. But, in fact, if one stands their ground and watches closely, these yellow-fuzzed face insects are also chasing one another. It turns out they are very territorial and protecting their particular section of the hedge from competing males and other threats. And although they appear aggressive, these males aren't equipped to sting! So, it is all bark and no bite in the insect sense!

According to a University of Florida Featured Creatures article, Large Carpenter Bees at <http://entnemdept.ifas.ufl.edu/creatures/misc/bees/xylocopa.htm> the carpenter bees resemble bumble bees in shape and size and somewhat in color, being black, metallic bluish or greenish black, or purplish blue. Males have yellowish areas on the face. Both sexes may have pale or yellowish pubescence (fuzz) on the thorax, legs, or abdomen, but these hairs are not as abundant nor as intensely colored as with bumble bees. Large carpenter bees are readily distinguished from bumble bees primarily by the absence of fuzz on the topside of their abdomen, making it somewhat shiny.

The species buzzing me goes by the name, *Xylocopa micans*. Little is known about its biology. Fortunately, it does not attack soffit areas or untreated cedar or pine boards on homes as a more northern species does. It has a reputation of causing structural damage to homes. The females of this species tunnel into sound wood to make "nests" or brood galleries with the precision of a 5/16 inch drill bit.



*A branch (possibly allamonda) hollowed out by *Xylocopa micans*. Ridges mark the individual larval chambers inside the branch. The top half of the branch shows the 1/2 inch entrance-exit hole.*

Fortunately, my carpenter bee species prefers to drill brood galleries into shrub or tree branches. There are reports of nests inside dead *Ligustrum* (possibly Japanese privet) and red maple branches. The nest entrances were about three feet above the ground, but entrances in other twigs were as low as six inches. The precisely drilled entrance hole is about 1/2 inch in diameter (see photo). So why are these buzzers around my allamanda? They are most likely using dead canes or branches of the allamanda or the nearby viburnum as a home for the next generation of baby "X-wing fighter" carpenter bees.

If annoyance problems arise from the activity of these pollen feeders, use a small amount of insecticide that is labeled for bees and wasps: this can be a dust, wettable powder or aerosol. The labeled pesticide should be inserted directly into the nesting holes. But, good luck, I could not find the entrance holes. But then again, being from Ohio, instead of looking low I was looking at the soffit area and higher up on the shrub branches, so I might have missed them. Since these bees don't have a reputation for stinging (although females are equipped to sting), I am leaving them alone and admiring their acrobatic aerial flight displays as they defend their homeland.

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