LGPOA members:

As some of you are aware, there is an issue with insects at the West Beach on West Geneva Drive.  The Board has been actively involved in trying to address and cure the issue.  We checked with local pest control companies, but none are willing to treat an area that contains a playground, so we then contacted Michigan State University for advice.  Based on that advice we have sprayed the area with soapy water and will check to see whether that was effective.  If it was not, we plan to re-spray this evening.

Below are two messages from the MSU expert, one after we first contacted him and one after he inspected the beach:

“First off, thank you for emailing--it's nice to hear from folks looking for more humane ways to take care of wasp problems. It is all too common to hear people show little care/compassion for these creatures, despite their overwhelming ecological importance.

Now, for the (somewhat) bad news: I am most experienced working with social wasps--things like paper wasps and yellowjackets, which construct nests out of paper. You've probably seen these papery nests hanging from eaves and roofs before. The nice thing when it comes to removing these sorts of wasps is that they form colonies not too dissimilar from honeybees, where most of the wasps and their young are in the nest at any given point in time--particularly at night. This makes their nests well-defended, but also renders it relatively easy to destroy and/or move a nest and its associated wasps.

However, the vast majority of wasps/bees (including the ones likely tunneling into this beach) are solitary and do NOT live in the nests they create. Instead, such wasps/bees dig burrows, lay eggs in these burrows, seal these burrows after stuffing them with food for their soon-to-hatch babies, and then leave the burrow alone.

So, anyways, destroying/soaking the nests with water is probably a good idea--it will kill the eggs and any recently-hatched larvae, preventing you guys from getting even more wasps/bees next summer. However, it will do little to kill the actual insects that everyone is running into this summer. I would bet that the majority of wasp/bees frequenting this site will be out hunting insects and collecting nectar from flowers at any given point in time, not tending to their nests. Destroying the nests would likely deter individual wasps/bees from returning, and perhaps even get the problem under control for the rest  of the summer. However, this beach likely represents high-quality nesting habitat for these insects--I would guess that many wasps/bees will continue to visit the site in the future.

I would say you have two options: 1) carefully monitoring the beach and destroying/soaking nests as soon as they appear (chemical-based pesticides perhaps offer a more certain solution, as the parent wasps/bees will die upon returning to their burrows, but I completely understand not wanting to use such chemicals in a play area). 2) altering the beach landscape such that it is no longer attractive to these insects--at least in the case of Cicada Killers, making the beach wetter or more covered in vegetation will render it less suitable for nesting. That being said, that may make the beach less attractive to humans as well!

The good news in all of this is that solitary wasps/bees, while typically capable of stinging, are very docile creatures that usually only sting when roughly handled or cornered. Unlike a yellowjacket or honeybee, the sting of these creatures are primarily adapted for use on other insects that they feed on. Cicada Killers are very scary-looking, but, as the name implies, they are primarily only concerned with attacking cicadas, and rarely ever sting people. While I'm sure people will be happier when they're gone, no one is in terrible danger playing on that beach.

Sorry for all the text/information--hopefully you find it helpful, rather than annoying! As a wasp scientist, I would of course love to check out the site myself and remove the individuals I happen upon, but I am unfortunately traveling right now and won't be back in Michigan until late next week (either Wednesday or Thursday). I completely understand if you want to try to eliminate the problem before hand--even then, I would still be happy to swing by and catch/remove any residual visitors.”

“Hi everyone,

Well, I was at the beach for about 2.5-3 hours yesterday, catching wasps until I ran out of vials and my cooler started to warm up too much to keep the wasps cold and docile.

From what I can see, the playground is dominated primarily by  *Bicyrtes quadrifasciatus,* sometimes called "stinkbug hunters". As the common name would imply, they primarily prey on the young stinkbugs (I actually observed multiple wasps dragging them into their tunnels). So, while certainly a nuisance to your playground and beach, they have at least been helping to keep stinkbug populations under control during their stay. At first glance, they have a color pattern rather similar to the Eastern Cicada Killer, *Sphecius spheciosus*, which is probably why others thought you had a cicada killer problem.

Like most solitary wasps, they appear to be relatively docile and more likely to attack each other/stinkbugs than people. I was never stung once, despite walking among them, swinging my net at them, trampling their burrows, and stuffing them into vials. I don't really know how this nesting aggregation got so dense--as I was saying to Chadd yesterday, some wasps are known to be "philopatric", meaning that they return to the areas in which they were born to reproduce. My best guess is that a few wasps found the playground some years ago and that their progeny multiplied and continued to return to the site, but that's just speculation.

Thankfully, nature is responding to the wasps' population boom--I noticed many wasps being trailed by small flies. Judging by their behavior, these are almost certainly parasitic flies that attack the baby wasps in the tunnels by laying their eggs on the very stinkbugs which the adult wasps are feeding to their young. With any luck, they will help make sure you guys have a more under-control wasp population in the coming years.

Other than the stinkbug hunters, I caught single individuals of a few other wasp species:  *Sphex ichneumoneus*, or the Great Golden Digger Wasp; an as-of-yet unidentified spider wasp (family Pompilidae); and a very small (<5 mm long) wasp that I'll need to look at under a microscope.  I wouldn't worry about the digger and spider wasps--they don't seem to be very populous (the individuals I caught were the only ones I observed flying around the playground), and, like the stinkbug hunters, are solitary and non-aggressive. The small wasp was fairly common, but is way too small to sting anyone (I picked up a couple with my bare hands to confirm this), and look like flies to anyone who isn't an expert. Besides, my best guess is that the small wasp, like the flies, is also some sort of parasite taking advantage of the numerous stinkbug hunters.

Hopefully you find this information helpful--I can get you an ID on the small wasp when I have some more time in the next couple days. Let me know if you continue to have problems, by the way; stinkbugs hunters have been considered as a candidate to help control invasive stinkbug pests, but few have had success rearing these wasps in laboratory setting.  “