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Deadly swarm invades from pit bull's owner

By Elliott Jones

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FORT PIERCE— An explosion of thousands of yellow jackets from an immense hive in a thicket of backyard palms could have been triggered by the pit bull that died of their stings, according to pest control experts.

And once a yellow jacket is killed, it releases a scent that causes the other insects to swarm and sting, said exterminator Ed Ruby with Critter Control.

On Sunday morning, Ruby applied the last of six gallons of insecticide needed to saturate the nest that blended into masses of low-growing palm fronds and stems in a central Fort Pierce neighborhood. Ruby said it was one of the largest ground-level nests he has seen.

The incident started late Saturday afternoon when a neighbor alerted Demontra Robinson that his dog was barking in the backyard on South 20th Street, south of Orange Avenue.

When Robinson came out, 8-month-old "Baby" was "screaming and crying" in a "fog" of the yellow jackets. He had left the dog tied up to a tree about 9 feet from the clump of palms.

A neighbor called 911, which alerted the city's animal control officers, who called in a pest control company to tackle the yellow jackets.

It took two hours for the swarm to calm down so people could approach. By then, the dog "was passed out," Robinson said. Animal

Control Officer William Blue took the pit bull to an emergency animal hospital. The pit bull died before making it to the hospital, according to police.

Robinson was stung twice, causing painful welts that required his treatment at the Lawnwood Regional Medical Center and Heart Institute.

Ruby got there Saturday night after another pet control company couldn't come out.

Even then, he received one sting that he said kept him up at night.

When he was first called out, he was told they were bees. If he had known they were yellow jackets, he said he would have worn boots in addition to the full-sleeved protective clothing and head gear he wore.

Robinson has lived at the house in the 300 block of South 20th Street since 1999 and said he never saw the yellow jackets in the yard he mows.

The clump of palm, with the hive inside, is along a fence between Robinson's yard and the yard of Maria James, who says she knew the yellow jackets were there but didn't have the money to hire a pest-removal company. She said her 9-year-old son was stung Saturday before the yellow jackets attacked the pit bull.

People who find a large bee or yellow jacket nest that presents a community nuisance can call 911.

Still, Ruby said, many problems fall back on the property owner to resolve and "unfortunately some of them don't have the money."

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Ordinance proposed to regulate guard dogs

By Keona Gardner

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY — County officials want to regulate the care of guard dogs and the conditions when dogs can be tied outside to a fence.

Guard dogs would have to be registered, and owners would be required to provide adequate food and water for any dog tethered to a fence or post.

Notable highlights from the ordinance include:

■ Animals younger than 6 months or that are ill cannot be tethered.

■ Tether must be at least 10 feet long or four times the length of the animal.

■ Fenced-in enclosures must be six inches above the ground and have a roof to shield a dog from the elements.

■ Tethering is prohibited in hurricanes, tropical storms or when temperatures are colder than 40 or warmer than 85, and when the wind chill is 35 or colder and the heat index is 100 or warmer.

Penalties have not been determined, said Assistant County Attorney Heather Young.

The County Commission is to vote on the revised ordinance 9 a.m. Tuesday.

County resident Danny Kresky asked for the tethering inclusion after seeing a guard dog tied to a

fence at a mechanic shop.

"Can you imagine being tied up and you can't move out of the Florida sun?" Kresky asked.

Animal Control Supervisor Karen Taylor said having a too-short tether can prevent the dog from reaching its water or food.

"Animals can get tangled up in their tether and can choke themselves," Taylor said. "I can't remember any recent cases where this happened, but we want to be proactive."

Officials with the Humane Society of St. Lucie County said the new ordinance makes sure pets have the proper care.

An injury from being tethered mostly has to do with the care a dog receives from its owner, said Dr. Michael O'Connor, veterinarian of Holy Family Veterinary Hospital in Fort Pierce.

"Tethering a dog for a half-hour or an hour is not severe, but when it goes to four hours, eight hours or more than it could become a case of neglect because the dog could not be getting the proper amount of exercise or water," O'Connor said.

Vero Beach, Fort Pierce and Martin County have no laws restricting tethering. However, Fort Pierce requires the tether to be at least 10 feet and it cannot be a choke or prong-type tether, said Peggy Arraiz city code-compliance manager.

RGS7 protein indicated as a potential drug target

By Eric Sauter
YourNews Contributor

Once used in the 18th century as currency to reverse the trade imbalance between China and Britain, morphine and its painkilling qualities have been misunderstood (and misused) almost continually ever since.

The drug works its euphoric effect by acting on a specific protein that has been part of vertebrate anatomy for nearly a half-billion years.

Despite that lengthy pedigree, regulation of these receptor proteins has never been well understood.

A new study led by Kirill Martemyanov, an

associate professor on the Florida campus of The Scripps Research Institute (TSRI), has shown that a specific molecule controls morphine receptor signaling in a small group of brain cells.

The findings could lead to a new drug target for developing less-addictive pain medications and even offer a clue to the genetic predisposition of patients to addiction before treatment.

The study was published recently online ahead of print by the journal *Biological Psychiatry*.

The molecule in question is known as a regulator of G protein signaling (RGS) protein, which controls the morphine recep-

tor (mu opioid receptor).

Using genetically modified animal models lacking a particular RGS protein called RGS7, a protein abundant in the brain, the study showed that eliminating the protein enhanced reward, increased pain relief, delayed tolerance and heightened withdrawal in response to self-administered morphine doses.

In other words, without the protein, the animals were predisposed to morphine addiction.

"The mu opioid receptor acts as a conductor of the drug's effects, while RGS7 acts as a brake on the signal," Martemyanov said. "The animals could press a lever to receive

an infusion of morphine. We looked at the number of lever presses to determine how much they liked it and, judging from this test, mice lacking RGS7 craved the drug much more than their normal siblings."

RGS7 appears to exert its effects by regulating morphine-induced changes in excitability of neurons and plasticity of synapses — the ability of the synapse, the junction between two nerve cells, to change its function.

"This study reveals a unique modulatory role of RGS7 in a brain-region-specific action to morphine use and indicates RGS7 as a potential drug target," said research as-

sociate Laurie P. Sutton, first author of the study. "Pharmacological intervention at the level of RGS7 may reduce some of the detrimental side-effects associated with opiates."

Martemyanov believes there is a strong diagnostic future for their discovery. "If our findings hold true for human patients, you could look specifically for RGS7 levels for any disabling mutation with a simple blood test," he said.

In addition to Sutton and Martemyanov, other authors of the study, "RGS7 Regulates Reward Behavior by Controlling Opioid Signaling in the Striatum," were Olga



Kirill Martemyanov is an associate professor on the Florida campus of The Scripps Research Institute.

Ostrovskaya, Maria Dao, Kegiang Xie, Cesare Orlandi, Roy Smith and Summee Wee, all of TSRI at the time of the study.

For more information, see [http://www.biologicalpsychiatryjournal.com/article/S0006-3223\(15\)00653-8/abstract](http://www.biologicalpsychiatryjournal.com/article/S0006-3223(15)00653-8/abstract)

This work was supported by the National Institutes of Health (grants DA026405, DA036082 and DA036596) and the Canadian Institutes of Health. For more information, see www.scripps.edu/florida.

St. Lucie County approves changes to animal ordinance

By Erick Gill
YourNews contributor

ST. LUCIE COUNTY — St. Lucie County Commissioners recently approved a variety of changes to the county's Animal Ordinance to provide better protection for household pets.

The major changes to the county's Animal Ordinance include:

- Animals tethered outside without supervision is prohibited;

- Tethers must be at least 10-foot long or four times the length of the

animal;

- Animals younger than 6 months or that are injured/fill cannot be tethered;

- Animals kept outside in fenced enclosures must have a covered shelter, which is at least six inches above the ground;

- Keeping unattended animals tethered outside is prohibited during extreme weather conditions, such as tropical storms, hurricanes and when temperatures are colder than 40 degrees or when then heat index is 100 or hotter;

St. Lucie County Commissioners will be approving fines associated with violations of the ordinance sometime in October.

- The creation of aggressive animal registration requirements to address animals who have exhibited aggression toward other animals and humans but do not meet the statutory definition of a dangerous dog;
- The creation of registration and care require-

ments for guard dogs to insure humane treatment of guard dogs and provide information for law enforcement officers when responding to a call at a location with a guard dog. St. Lucie County Commissioners approved the ordinance, which was drafted with the help of a

five-member committee composed of representatives of law enforcement, animal control and a local veterinarian.

The new laws have been registered at the state level and are effective immediately. The changes to the St. Lucie County Animal Ordinance only apply to residents and businesses residing in the unincorporated areas of the county.

The cities of Fort Pierce and Port St. Lucie have their own animal ordinances. Initially, St. Lucie County's Animal Control offi-

cers will be issuing warnings, if residents are caught violating the ordinance.

However, St. Lucie County Commissioners will be approving fines associated with violations of the ordinance sometime in October.

For questions or concerns about St. Lucie County's Animal Control Ordinance call 772-462-8120.

The full ordinance can be found online at http://www.stlucieco.gov/eoc/animal_control.htm (under Quick Links).