F-22 RAPTOR GROUNDED BY 20,000 BEES

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The US Air Force's F-22 Raptor may be the most advanced fighter jet in the world but even with $143 million-worth of stealth and supersonic capabilities, it proved to be no match for one unlikely adversary --- a huge swarm of honey bees.

An F-22 aircraft from the 192nd Air Wing was temporarily grounded on June 11 after crew members at Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Virginia discovered nearly 20,000 bees hanging from the jet's exhaust nozzle following flight operations.

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Honey bees hanging from the exhaust nozzle of an F-22 Raptor engine on June 11, 2016 at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia.

"I was shocked like everyone else because it looked like a cloud of thousands of bees," said Tech. Sgt. Jeffrey Baskin, 192nd Maintenance Squadron crew chief, in an Air Force press release.

Rather than try to clear the bees from the jet themselves, crew members realized that honey bees are at risk of extinction and contacted local beekeeper and retired US Navy veteran, Andy Westrich, who proclaimed the hive the largest he had ever seen after being escorted to the aircraft.

Westrich used vacuum hoses to wrangle the thousands of bees into several large buckets and safely relocate the colony.



Beekeeper Andy Westrichwas called to remove and relocate the bees to a safe place.

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Before transporting the bees to their new home at a local beer production facility, Westrich took them to his house and found that the hive weighed nearly eight pounds in total, according to the Air Force release.

But how do nearly 20,000 bees, weighing a collective eight pounds find their way onto the exhaust pipe of a fighter jet?

They likely came from a much larger bee hive somewhere else on the base, according to Chief Master Sgt. Gregg Allen, 192nd Maintenance Group Quality Assurance chief, who also happens to be a beekeeper.



Photos: In the U.S. Air Force fleet

F-22 Raptor – The twin-engine F-22 stealth fighter, flown by a single pilot and armed with a 20mm cannon, heat-seeking missiles, radar-guided missiles and radar-guided bombs, can perform both air-to-air and air-to-ground missions. The service has 183 of the Raptors, which went operational in 2005.

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