

Asian Hornet Action Team Update.

The limited incursion into the UK by the Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina nigrithorax*) has received much press coverage. They were first sited in Gloucestershire in 2016 and in 2018 and sighted as far apart as Liskeard and Hull.

Early sightings and early accurate identification are essential to contain the spread of this very damaging non-native invader. Asian hornets can spread up to 60km a year and their environmental limits are still unclear but unchecked a northern limit through Britain and Germany is both very likely and expected. The Asian hornets seem to like both warmth and moisture so unless we are vigilant and take action they may gain a hold throughout the UK. This would be very damaging to indigenous insect populations as well as to honey bees as they eat most native pollinators.

The BBKA have asked every branch to appoint a coordinator (I am the coordinator for the Sevenoaks branch) to act as a point of contact for Asian hornet sightings. If you think you see an Asian hornet, report it immediately. Email alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk or use the free Asian hornet Watch apps on a smartphone. Take a photo if possible. My contact details are below and please do not hesitate to contact me if you think you have seen an Asian hornet and need advice or a second pair of eyes.

We cannot stress enough that early sightings are our best line of defence so do call if you are in doubt. Early detection to allow the National Bee Unit to intervene and prevent the establishment of nests on a localised basis is the plan.

All of the local coordinators for Kent will share information and maintain records of sightings and share information within the County and report nationally. The overall Kent coordinator is Chris Morris and all coordinators details are on the BBKA website contained within the Asian Hornet Action Team web pages.

What to look out for: key identifiers Asian hornet

- up to 30mm long and slightly smaller than our native indigenous hornet (*Vespa crabo*)
- dark and velvety abdomen but the 4th abdominal segment is lighter. They look almost black - apart from a bright orange head
- brown legs with yellow tips
- orange head
- hovering behaviour in front of hives
- day flying species, ceases activity at dusk
- active April to November peaking in August and September

Only newly mated queens overwinter and emerge to create a new nest. They are carnivorous. For every nest not destroyed it is likely that between 4 and 6 new nests will be found the following year within a one kilometre radius. So, early sightings are crucial to keeping the Asian hornets out.

Understanding the Asian hornet's diet is useful. Early in the year sugars are essential for an early energy boost; followed by protein (our precious honey bees are a favourite) for brood rearing and then back to sugars again as brood rearing comes to a close and then proteins again as the newly mated queens prepare for winter. Just like wasps!

Our best chance is to spot the queens coming out of hibernation so March/April will be a busy month. Please do not hesitate to call if you think you have spotted an Asian hornet and need a second pair of eyes. I am contactable on 07799 383996 or email vanessajones@btinternet.com

If you want to make a Hornet Trap have a look on this link:

<http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Asian-Hornet-Trap.pdf>

Vanessa Jones [January 2019] 07 799 383 996