**ASIAN HORNET FACT SHEET**

**What is it?**

Asian hornet, *Vespa velutina*, is native to China and south east Asia. It was accidentally imported into France where it was first discovered in 2004.

**Where is it now?**

It is now widespread throughout France and is spreading into the surrounding countries. It has become established in the Channel Islands. Nests have been found in England in each year since 2016 but, so far, vigilance and prompt action has enabled these nests to be destroyed before they could release young queens in the autumn.

**Why is Asian hornet a problem?**

Asian hornets prey on insects in order to provide food for their grubs. They will capture and eat a wide variety of insects, including hoverflies, dragonflies and butterflies but have a particular liking for honeybees. Once Asian hornets have located a beehive, they keep returning to prey on worker bees as they enter or leave the hive. Honeybees soon learn there is danger outside and become reluctant to leave the hive. This affects the honey crop available to beekeepers and reduces pollination of flowers. Weakened hives can be invaded by Asian hornets and the entire bee colony wiped out.

**What does Asian hornet look like?**

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Asian hornets are 25-30mm (1’’-1¼’’) long. When viewed from above, the head and body is almost entirely black apart from an orange-yellow band towards the rear end of the body. The tips of the legs are pale yellow.

The European hornet, *Vespa crabro*, is commonly found in Surrey. It is a little larger than Asian hornet and is predominantly yellow and brown in colour with brown tips to its legs. European hornet and other UK native species of social wasps sometimes feed on bees but are not a problem.

**Where and when might I see Asian hornets?**

Young queen Asian hornets overwinter in sheltered places. They become active in February-March when they may visit flowers in search of nectar. A queen will begin construction of her nest, which is made of a papery substance derived from wood fibres mixed with the hornet’s saliva. The initial nest may be in an outbuilding, roof space or in open air situations on a tree or shrub. Initially the queen is on her own and she does all the nest building and feeding of the first generation of worker hornet grubs. By early summer, the queen will have the assistance of worker hornets that take over nest construction and food gathering, allowing the queen to concentrate on egg laying.

Worker Asian hornets may be seen near beehives at any time between late May and early November. They may also be seen anywhere there is an aggregation of insects for them to prey on. Ivy flowers in late August – October attract many insects and are a potential Asian hornet attractant.

By late summer, an Asian hornet nest can contain several thousand hornets. During September – October the nest will be producing males and young queens. A single undetected nest could release about 200 mated queens that will go into winter resting places, ready to start new nests in the following spring.

**What do I do if I see an Asian hornet?**

To be sure it is an Asian hornet, get a photograph or capture a specimen. If you have an Apple or Android phone, download the Asian Hornet Watch app. This gives information about recognition of Asian hornet and other insects that might be confused with it, as well as how to report your finding.

If you do not have a smart phone, send your photograph to **alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk**. Specimens of an Asian hornet should be sent to the National Bee Unit, The Animal and Plant Health Agency, Sand Hutton, York, YO41 1LZ.

If you are unsure about what you have seen, contact a local beekeeper for advice – see the Asian hornet poster for contact details.

**What happens next if it is an Asian hornet?**

National Bee Unit staff will come to the area where Asian hornets have been seen and will track down the location of the nest(s). Once located, the nest(s) will be destroyed at no cost to the persons reporting Asian hornets or having the nest(s) on their property.

**Further information**

For further information on Asian hornet, see –

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/pages/faqs/category/asian-hornet-faqs>

<http://www.nonnativespecies.org/alerts/index.cfm?id=4>

<https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/109164>