



28.8.23

For immediate release

British Beekeepers urge caution when blackberrying and hedge trimming

The British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) is warning of the need for caution when picking blackberries and trimming hedges following the discovery of a record number of Asian hornet nests in the UK this year.

Many nests have been found in patches of brambles and in hedgerows and there are fears that foragers enjoying the bumper blackberry crop and gardeners could inadvertently disturb a nest.

BBKA Chair Diane Drinkwater said: "Foragers and gardeners should check hedges carefully to avoid disturbing an Asian hornet nest. Normally they don't attack, but if you are near a nest, or disturb it, they can become extremely aggressive and dangerous."

More nests have been discovered in the UK this year than in the previous six years combined and many of them have been found in brambles. A single nest can contain up to 6,000 workers and 350 queens.

Asian hornets (*Vespa velutina*) look like large, black wasps with yellow legs, an orange face and an orange band on the body. They are slightly smaller than native European hornets which are almost entirely yellow.

Diane added: "Normally Asian hornets are not seen in the UK until the end of September but this year there has been an unprecedented number already. To date at least 26 Asian hornet nests have been found in 23 locations, the majority around the south coast."

The BBKA is drawing attention to the menace the insects pose not just to people but also the nation's honey bees. One hornet can devour up to 50 honey bees at a time.

“Asian hornets are a top predator – they are the lions of the insect world.”

Asian hornet week – September 6-10 – is a key time to spot the hornets so that their nests can be destroyed before they multiply.

“We need the public's help!” continued Diane. “If you see an Asian hornet, take a photo and report it immediately using the Asian Hornet Watch phone app or via the BBKA's website.”

In the autumn Asian hornets can be spotted on flowering ivy, fallen fruit and catching honey bees outside their hives.

Meanwhile the nation's beekeepers are pulling together in a bid to find all the nests before winter.

Thousands of beekeepers have put out monitoring traps and bait stations to check for the presence of the highly destructive insect.

More than a thousand beekeepers are part of teams across the country and ready to assist the National Bee Unit (NBU). The NBU sends bee inspectors to track hornets back to their nests which are then destroyed.

Ends

Photos:

Diane Drinkwater, Chair of BBKA

Asian hornet on a twig © Crown copyright

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About Asian hornets (*Vespa velutina*):

- As of 29.8.23, there have been 26 Asian hornet nests found in 23 locations.
- Between 2016 and 2022 there were just 14 nests. The first Asian hornet in the UK was discovered in 2016.
- See the National Bee Unit Asian hornet rolling news page for latest tally.
<https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/about-us/beekeeping-news/2023-asian-hornet-rolling-updates/>
- The UK is in the eradication phase of the contingency response and all sightings are being tracked and nests killed rapidly.
- All hornets caught along with the contents of the nests are being scientifically analysed to determine if there is any evidence of an established population in the UK.
- To date there is no evidence of an established population in the UK.
- Reports from Europe and Jersey indicate that it is an exceptional hornet year and record numbers of queens and nests are being seen.
- Asian hornets are slightly smaller than native European hornets, have a distinctive black/dark brown thorax; brown abdominal segments with the fourth segment almost entirely yellow-orange, brown legs with yellow ends, a black head and an orange-yellow face.
- Asian hornets are a notifiable, non-native, invasive species and should be reported immediately via the Asian Hornet Watch app or
https://risc.brc.ac.uk/alert.php?species=asian_hornet
- A report by scientists puts the cost of the Asian hornet invasion in France at €30.8 million annually.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969723041992>
- Scientists report that Asian hornets have a serious and detrimental impact on pollinators and pollination services.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1439179123000415?via%3Dihub>

About the BBKA:

- Established in 1874, the BBKA is a charity made up of 75 associations in England and Wales plus one each in Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and Jersey and serves more than 27,000 members.
- Our charitable objectives are to advance the education of the public and beekeepers in the craft of beekeeping and promote the importance of bees in the environment.

- We act as an umbrella group for the associations, co-ordinate a swarm collection service for the public, administer training for beekeepers and encourage the setting up of teams to respond to Asian hornet sightings.
- In addition, we champion issues which impact on honey bees and other pollinators. Campaigns include Asian hornets, the use of neonicotinoid insecticides, adulteration of imported honey and planting for pollinators. We also fund vital research into bee health and welfare.