

The Buzzing Threat:

Asian 'Yellow Legged' Hornets and Their Impact on UK Wildlife

Introduction:

In recent years, the United Kingdom has faced an increasing threat from invasive species, with one particular intruder causing a buzz of concern among wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists alike. The Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*), originally from Southeast Asia, has established itself as a formidable invader, posing a significant risk to native ecosystems and biodiversity. This article delves into the potential consequences of the Asian hornet invasion in the UK and explores the steps being taken to minimise this ecological threat and suggest ways in which local members of Solihull Ramblers could help.

The Asian Hornet Invasion: A Menace to Biodiversity:

The Asian hornet, often referred to as the "yellow legged hornet", because it has bright yellow tips to its legs, in contrast to its dark body, is an aggressive predator that preys on honeybees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects. Recognised for its distinctive appearance, featuring a dark velvety body, distinctive orange band on the fourth segment of its abdomen and yellow legs, this invasive species has rapidly spread across Europe and is now causing alarm in the UK. Its predatory habits not only jeopardise native insect populations but also disrupt the delicate balance of local ecosystems.

Impact on Pollinators:

The UK, home to a rich diversity of pollinators, faces a severe threat to its bee populations due to the Asian hornet's voracious appetite for honeybees. Bees play a crucial role in pollinating plants, a process vital for the reproduction of many flowering species. The decline in bee populations could have cascading effects on the entire ecosystem, affecting plants, birds, and other wildlife that depend on these pollinators. Just one nest of Asian hornets can consume over 100,000 insects in one year and experience in France and Spain have shown population densities on average at one nest per square kilometre.

What can members of the Solihull Ramblers do to help?

There are Five Easy Steps you can take to help:

1. Learn how to identify Asian hornets
2. Know where and when to look
3. Know how to report your sightings
4. Be vigilant
5. Spread the word to others

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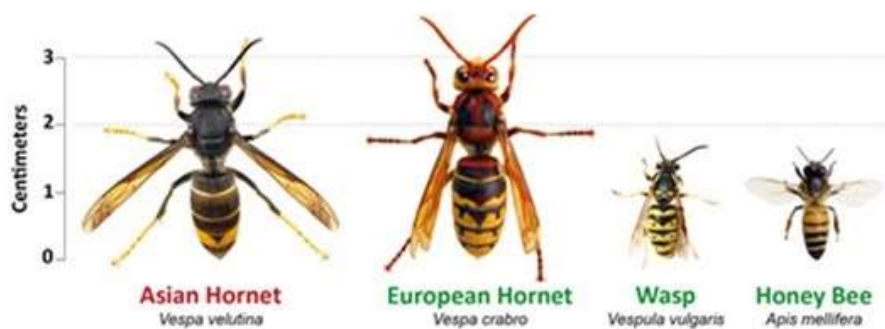
Identification:



The 3 things to look for:

1. Does it look very black?
2. Has it got a wide orange stripe on 4th segment of abdomen?
3. Does its legs look as if they have been dipped in yellow paint?

Think you've seen an Asian Hornet? Report it!



Report through the Asian Hornet Watch app or www.bit.ly/asianhornetreport



Animal & Plant Health Agency

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The Asian Hornet is often mistaken for our native insects, particularly the European hornet (*Vespa crabro*), but here are some key differences:

- Slightly smaller than the native hornet
- Dark abdomen, 4th segment yellow/orange
- Bright yellow tips to legs (native hornet dark)
- Entirely black thorax (native hornet more orange)



[Animal & Plant Health Agency have put together a short film to help you identify them too.](#)

Where and when could you see an Asian Hornet:

Asian hornets in the UK are most active during the warmer months, typically from spring through autumn. Nests are more likely to be visible during this period as the colony expands. They only fly during the day, unlike our native European Hornet.

Spring - Queen Asian Hornets are active from after the last frost and will be looking to create a *Primary Nest*. These are typically low down in sheltered places e.g. under eaves of houses, in sheds, perhaps near last year's nest. The primary nest is brown in colour similar to a Median wasp nest, but smaller, they start the size of a golf ball and grow to the size of a small melon. The Asian hornets may be seen on flowering plants, near bee hives and near water.

Summer / Autumn - the Queen builds a *Secondary Nest*, which is far larger than the Primary Nest, and can be as large as 80 cm in height and 50 cm wide. These Secondary nests are typically at an elevated position. This could include trees, high shrubs, or even on structures like buildings. It is often difficult to see these Secondary Nests until the leaves fall. The Asian Hornets diet changes throughout the year and in summer they start foraging for protein. They can often be seen around dustbins, and at street markets where they are attracted by fish stalls and rotten fruit.

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How to report sightings:

The Solihull Ramblers and the general public are encouraged to be vigilant and report any sightings of Asian hornets. Early detection is crucial in preventing the establishment of these invaders, and we can all play a vital role in monitoring the spread of the species. It is crucial you report any possible sightings so experts can take quick and effective action to eradicate Asian hornets. The best way is to use the '*Asian Hornet Watch*' app to record and report any sightings.

- **Asian Hornet Watch App** ([android version](#), [apple version](#))



However, if you have not downloaded the app, then you can send your photos and videos by email to: alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk or use the [NNSS Online recording form](#)

All sightings are investigated and specialist teams from the National Bee Unit are tasked with destroying any confirmed nests, with DNA tests being conducted to help to trace and monitor the progress throughout the UK.

See it! Snap it! Send it!

A word of caution:

Whilst the Asian hornet's sting is thought to be similar to our native Median wasps (*Dolichovespula media*) and their tendency is to be less aggressive than Median wasps when foraging, the Asian Hornet is extremely aggressive if they feel that their nest is threatened. It is worth remembering that stings can cause allergic reactions in some individuals. So the advice is not to approach or disturb a nest, but report it using the Asian Hornet Watch App ([android version](#), [apple version](#)).

Conclusion:

The Asian hornet invasion in the UK is a critical conservation challenge that requires concerted efforts from organisations, government bodies, and the public. A proactive approach in monitoring, reporting, and spreading the word will go a long way to protecting the country's diverse wildlife. As we collectively face this buzzing menace, staying informed and actively participating in prevention and eradication efforts is crucial to safeguarding the delicate balance of our ecosystems.

Colin White

Solihull & District Branch of the Warwickshire Beekeeping Association

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Relevant Links:

[ID sheet and Alert Poster from NNSS](#)

[NNSS alert poster](#)

[BBKA Asian Hornet](#)

[APHA Science Blog](#)

[Asian Hornet Watch app for iPhone](#)

[Asian Hornet Watch app for android](#)

[NNSS Online recording form](#)

Editor's Notes:

British Beekeeping Association's (BBKA):

Recognising the urgency of the situation, the BBKA has been actively involved in monitoring and addressing the Asian hornet invasion. The organisation works in collaboration with government agencies, researchers, and local communities to develop strategies for early detection and eradication of these invasive pests. BBKA volunteers and staff are trained to identify Asian hornet nests and report their findings promptly. In addition to monitoring and reporting efforts, the BBKA is actively involved in raising awareness about the Asian hornet invasion. By fostering a sense of environmental responsibility, we aim to mobilise a collective response to the threat posed by the Asian hornet.

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