

The Hunt is On ...

Jason Learner and **Nigel Semmence**, National Bee Unit, highlight the need for vigilance as the new season approaches

As you will be aware, *Vespa velutina*, aka the yellow-legged hornet or Asian hornet, was discovered in the United Kingdom (UK) in September 2016.

In some sense this was inevitable and bound to happen sooner or later.

The hornet arrived in Lot-et-Garonne, south-west France, in 2004 in a consignment of pottery from China and, since then, it has spread rapidly at a rate of around 60–100 km/year. Sightings of Asian hornets had been made as close to the UK as Calais – just across the English Channel – so one could argue that the possibility of the hornet reaching our shores was very high indeed. Perhaps surprisingly, the first hornet sighting was not in the south-east, but in the west of England, in Tetbury, Gloucestershire.

Monitoring

This year, we need to ensure that we are more vigilant than we have ever been when monitoring for the hornet's presence in the UK. It is the

responsibility of all of us, not just those in Gloucestershire or southern England. The Tetbury example demonstrates that the hornet could show up anywhere.

Monitoring need not be an onerous task. In fact, there are many ways it can be done. One of the simplest methods is to look for nests in trees. In France, Asian hornets can form nests in many types of tree so, although the nest in the UK was found in a conifer, do not restrict your search to this particular variety. Start your searches this spring, while out in the apiaries, by glancing at the surrounding tree lines. Now is the ideal time, while the trees are still bare and without leaves.

Spring Trapping

Traps can be as expensive or cheap as you want. As the season begins, we will be out checking colonies regularly which provides an opportunity to monitor and trap any potential foundress queens.

Spring trapping works, but it is not a 'silver bullet', ie, it will not trap every hornet queen emerging from hibernation. It is, however, a good start

in reducing nest populations for that year and, therefore, a start at reducing predation on honey bee colonies.

There are many commercial traps available. Studies comparing trap designs show that funnel traps are the most effective. Commercial hornet traps are available but if you prefer something for nothing, the National Bee Unit (NBU) has its own Asian hornet monitoring trap (Mark II). This is simple to make and only takes about 20 minutes. The best thing is it costs pennies. You can find instructions on how to make one on the NBU website at: www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=208 under 'Monitoring for the Asian hornet' and aptly titled 'An Asian hornet monitoring trap'. This factsheet also includes information about what types of bait to use at different times of the year, information on where to hang traps and what to do if you think you have caught a hornet. In addition, make sure that you are informed as to what an Asian hornet looks like so that you can spot one.

Sightings

If you believe you have seen an Asian hornet, you should report it to: alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk When emailing, please include your name, the location of the sighting and, if possible, a photograph of the suspected hornet. Please do not put yourself in any danger of getting stung when trying to take a photo. Even if you are unsure, send it in anyway – it is better to be safe than sorry.

As professionals in the beekeeping industry, inspecting many colonies in many apiaries, bee farmers are the ones who are most likely to spot any hornets. With vigilance, we can reduce the potential impact of this insect. □



Asian hornet,
Vespa velutina