

Information Sheet

September 2010



BWARS



ASIAN HORNET (*Vespa velutina*)

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- * Alien Invasive
- * Spreading in France
- * **NOT in UK**
- * Potential threat to domestic Honeybees
- * **Please report possible sightings (with photos)**

Featuring:

- Background information
- Life cycle
- Habitat requirements
- Threats

Background and Distribution

This south-east Asian species of wasp was first recorded in France in 2005. The Asian Hornet (*Vespa velutina*) is thought to have arrived in a container of pottery from China before 2004 through the port of Bordeaux. Since 2005 it has spread rapidly throughout the neighbouring départements. There are still NO KNOWN UK records as of late summer 2010.

Slightly smaller than the native European Hornet (*Vespa crabro*), with queens up to 30mm, and workers up to 25mm in length. They are easily recognised by their appearance and difficult to confuse with any other species. The thorax is a velvety black / dark brown with brown abdominal segments bordered with a fine yellow band. Only the fourth abdominal segment is almost entirely a yellowy-orange. The legs are brown with yellow ends and the head is black with an orange-yellow face.

As with other social wasps, the colonies last one season, and only the fertilised queens hibernate.

Habitat and Threats

In France, the Asian Hornet nests in tall trees in urban and rural areas, but avoids pure stands of conifers. Nests are also found in garages, sheds, under decking - or much more rarely, in holes in walls or in the ground.

Vespa velutina is a day flying species which, unlike the European Hornet, ceases all activity at dusk. It is a proven predator of social wasps and bees, including Honeybees, but as in *V. crabro*, it also consumes a wide variety of other insect prey. *V. velutina* is not generally aggressive, although the stings can be painful. Large nests (usually those in trees) should certainly be avoided.

The impact on Honeybees can be limited merely by reducing the hive entrance to a narrow slit. So far, predation of honeybees in France by *V. velutina* seems to be limited to the adults rather than the brood.

Please notify the National Bee Unit (NBU) immediately (email address below) of any suspect hornets, providing as much information as possible. If possible, send the NBU a sample for examination



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A queen Asian Hornet



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Worker Asian Hornet hunting at a Honeybee hive



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Vespa velutina nest



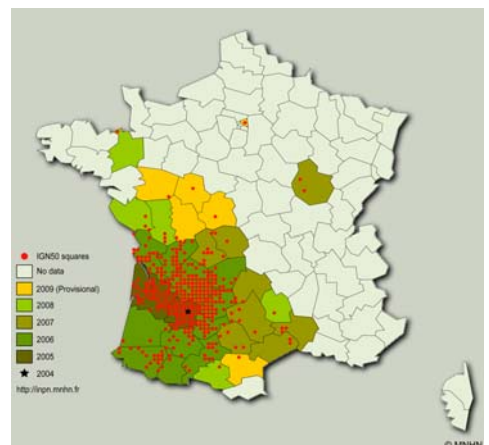
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Interior of nest showing Worker and brood



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A queen Asian Hornet



A map of France showing known distribution and colonised départements

Hymettus Ltd is the premier source of advice on the conservation of bees, wasps and ants within Great Britain and Ireland.

<http://hymettus.org.uk/>

BWARS, The Bees Wasps & Ants Recording Society is the national recording scheme which provides the only source of fully validated data on the UK bee, wasp & ant fauna.

<http://www.bwars.com/>

MNHN, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle de Paris, France, and INPN, Inventaire National du Patrimoine Naturel, for recording of validated data on all the species in France.

<http://inpn.mnhn.fr/isb/index.jsp?lg=en>

For further information and submission of records and/or photographs, please contact:

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Photos: Claire Villemant & Jean Haxaire