



**BWARS**

## Information Sheet

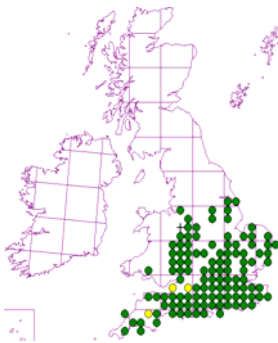
# HORNET (*Vespa crabro*)

Alan Phillips & Stuart Roberts

- \* Spectacular predator
- \* Generally docile
- \* Typical of mature woodlands and parks
- \* Nests in hollow trees
- \* **Can you add to our knowledge?**

**Featuring:**

- Background information
- Life cycle
- Habitat requirements
- Conservation
- Lookalikes



UK distribution of the Hornet, *Vespa crabro*

### Background and Distribution

The 'hornet' is our largest species of social wasp with queens averaging around 3cm in length. Once only common in central southern England, in the last 20 years the species has extended its range eastwards into Sussex and Kent and northwards to Yorkshire.

Over-wintering queens emerge in April and nests are initiated, usually in hollow trees or similar cavities, in May with the first workers appearing around June. New queens and males emerge from the nest September-October, mate and disperse, with the males dying and the newly-mated queens seeking over-wintering hibernation sites. Back at the nest, which may persist into November in mild years, the old queen and remaining workers eventually die-out.

Though smaller, queens of the 'median wasp' (*Dolichovespula media*) are often mistaken for hornets but the former is yellow and black with small areas of red whereas the hornet is a brown, red and yellowish-orange species lacking any deep black markings. Unlike the median wasp, the hornet has no yellow markings on the thorax.

### Habitat and Conservation

Very much a creature of lowland wooded habitats but will venture into gardens with mature trees especially if in the vicinity of woodland. Our preponderance for planting trees either in gardens or for conservation value in the wider countryside is probably one of the reasons for the species spread in recent years.

Often viewed along with other wasps with some trepidation, hornets are in fact relatively docile and problems only arise if nests are threatened.

They help maintain balance in nature by preying upon (and so controlling) numbers of other invertebrate species, some of which are regarded as agricultural pests.



A queen hornet after emerging from hibernation



Worker hornets emerging from a nest in a hollow tree



A male hornet showing typically long antennae



A hornets' nest. The beige coloration and blistery bulges are diagnostic

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/>

For further information and submission of records:

**contact:** [aculeates\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:aculeates[at]gmail.com)

**Photos:** N. Jones, J. Michaelson, R. Williams