# Asian hornets pose threat to Scotland's bee populations



Recent warnings from wildlife experts indicate that Asian hornets, an invasive species notorious for preying on bees, may soon invade Scotland, endangering local pollinator populations. The invasive hornets, also recognised as yellow-legged hornets, have seen their sightings increase notably in the UK, particularly after an "unprecedented" rise in numbers on the Isle of Jersey during early spring.

The urgency of the situation has prompted Scottish nature authorities to conduct two mock exercises this year, simulating how they would respond to potential incursions of Asian hornets. The alarm has been raised as these hornets have been spotted further up north, encroaching on Scottish borders. Estimates suggest that a single colony can exterminate up to 90,000 pollinating insects in just one season, which poses significant risks for agricultural sectors as well as ecological balance.

Craig Macadam, Conservation Director at Buglife, discussed the implications of this invasive species, stating, “The Yellow-legged Hornet, aka Asian Hornet, poses a significant ecological threat to Scotland with serious consequences for pollination and biodiversity. Early detection is crucial in preventing its establishment, so public awareness and prompt reporting represent Scotland's best defence against this emerging threat." He further emphasised the need for the public to learn how to identify these hornets and report any sightings via the Asian Hornet Watch app.

Asian hornets exhibit distinctive characteristics such as very dark bodies with bright yellow legs, and they can grow to nearly an inch in length. Their predatory nature is displayed through their gruesome feeding habits, where a single hornet can kill approximately 30 bees daily, decapitating them before feeding them to the queen’s larvae.

The ongoing invasion of these hornets throughout Europe has already resulted in considerable declines in honey production, particularly in countries like Portugal, where it dropped by about 35%. In France, the economic repercussions, due to loss of bees and honey, have been estimated at £27 million.

Since their first appearance in Europe in 2014, these hornets have increasingly infiltrated England, having been recorded as far north as Preston, Lancashire in the previous year—a location only 100 miles from Scotland’s border. The capacity of Asian hornet nests can reach up to 6,000 individuals, raising concerns that if they establish a presence in Scotland, the impact on local bee populations could be devastating.

While there have been no confirmed sightings of Asian hornets in Scotland to date, there was a credible yet unlogged sighting reported at a supermarket distribution centre in Motherwell back in 2017. Meanwhile, recent reports indicate a staggering increase in Asian hornets on Jersey, with 262 queen hornets noted as of April 11, marking an unprecedented rise of 1,090 per cent.

Stan Whitaker, an expert on invasive non-native species from NatureScot, expressed caution regarding the current year’s weather conditions affecting hornet visibility, stating it is “too early to tell” if more nests will be found in the UK this year. However, he acknowledged the significant threat posed by yellow-legged hornets to honeybees and native bees.

A representative from the Scottish Government confirmed that while there have been no confirmed sightings of the Asian hornet in Scotland thus far, contingency plans have been established. They highlighted the collaborative efforts with Crown dependencies, England, and Wales to monitor sightings and share strategic responses to potential threats from this invasive species.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/wildlife-biodiversity/asian-hornet-invasion-threatens-uk-pollinators-as-sightings-surge> - This URL supports the claim that Asian hornet sightings have surged in the UK, posing a severe threat to pollinators like honeybees. It highlights the increased sightings and their impact on the ecosystem.
* <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/what-happens-if-asian-hornet-invasion-worsens-all-possible-scenarios-1732685> - This article discusses potential scenarios if the Asian hornet invasion worsens, including impacts on food prices and bee populations. It emphasizes the critical threat these hornets pose to pollinators.
* <https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/diseases-and-pests/asian-hornet> - This resource provides background information on the Asian hornet, its life cycle, and its threat to honey bees in the UK. It details the spread of the species across Europe and preventive measures.
* <https://yorkbeekeepers.com/asian-hornet/> - This webpage highlights the threat Asian hornets pose to honey bees and native wildlife in the UK. It mentions the necessity of awareness and action to protect bee colonies.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-62428728> - This article could potentially provide updates on Asian hornet sightings and their impact in regions close to Scotland, though specific articles might vary. Typically, BBC reports cover local responses to invasive species.