# Earliest sighting of Asian hornet raises concerns for UK ecosystems



Experts have reported the earliest-ever sighting of the Asian hornet in the UK, a significant development with potential implications for local ecosystems. This invasive species, known for its size—twice that of a common wasp—and its voracious appetite for bees, was captured on January 24, 2024, in Oswestry, Shropshire. This sighting breaks the previous record, with the earliest prior capture occurring on March 11, 2023, in Ash, Kent.

Historically, Asian hornets have usually been sighted during late summer, with peak sightings occurring in September and October. The recent capture in January has raised concerns among experts that these insects may have adapted to withstand the typically harsher winters in the UK, possibly allowing them to establish a more permanent presence. DNA analyses conducted last year indicated that Asian hornets might now be able to survive British winters, further heightening apprehensions regarding their ecological impact.

Kate Wilson, head of the Animal & Plant Health Agency’s National Bee Unit, commented on the situation, stating, “Yellow-legged hornets cause significant damage to native pollinators, including our much-loved honey bees. That’s why APHA’s National Bee Unit continues to take swift and effective action to stamp out the threat posed by yellow-legged hornets, all as part of ongoing monitoring and surveillance work to protect our pollinators.” She also noted that thanks to increasing public reports via the Asian Hornet Watch app, earlier sightings may become more common. “We encourage the public to remain vigilant and continue to report any potential sightings to us,” she added.

Since the initial sighting in Oswestry, authorities have confirmed another capture on March 20, 2024, in Canterbury, Kent. While Asian hornets do not pose a direct threat to human health, they are recognised as a significant threat to biodiversity, particularly the populations of honey bees and other pollinators, as one hornet can consume up to 50 bees in a single day.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has indicated that its efforts continue to focus on tracking sightings and eradicating the hornet's nests to prevent further spread. Last year, 24 nests were destroyed in areas predominantly around Kent and East Sussex, underscoring ongoing concerns about this invasive species.

As Asian hornets are primarily found in regions where they have crossed the Channel from France, their establishment in the UK could disrupt local ecosystems and the delicate balance of pollinator populations. The urgency of monitoring these sightings reflects broader ecological concerns and the proactive measures authorities are taking to manage and mitigate the threat posed by this invasive species.

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

## References

* <https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/about-us/beekeeping-news/asian-hornet-2024-rolling-update> - This webpage provides updates on Asian hornet sightings and the ongoing surveillance efforts by the National Bee Unit, corroborating the increased monitoring and concern about the species' presence in the UK.
* <https://www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/asianhornet.html> - This webpage details the history and current status of Asian hornet sightings in the UK, including the importance of public vigilance and reporting, aligning with the expert advice provided by Kate Wilson.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asian-hornet-uk-sightings> - This page lists confirmed Asian hornet sightings in the UK, offering a comprehensive overview of the species' spread and how to identify it, supporting the statement about ongoing efforts to track and eradicate the species.
* <https://www.non-nativespecies.org/alerts/index.cfm?id=4> - This webpage provides detailed information on the Asian hornet, including its identification and the ecological impact, which aligns with concerns about its threat to pollinators mentioned in the article.
* <https://www.defra.gov.uk> - Although not directly about Asian hornets, Defra's official website would contain information on the Department's role in tracking and managing invasive species, including the Asian hornet, supporting the article's mention of Defra's efforts.
* <https://app.asianhornetwatch.app/> - The Asian Hornet Watch app is mentioned as a crucial tool for the public to report sightings, which is emphasized by Kate Wilson's comments on the importance of public vigilance and early reporting.
* <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/asian-hornets-seen-uk-earlier-34953362> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.mylondon.news/news/uk-world-news/map-shows-giant-asian-hornet-31303599> - Please view link - unable to able to access data