# Concerns rise over early sightings of invasive Asian hornets in the UK



Experts in the UK are raising concerns over a significant rise in early suspected sightings of Asian hornets, an invasive species known to pose a serious threat to native pollinators and agricultural ecosystems. The surge in sightings has been described as "unprecedented," triggering fears of a potential increase in the Asian hornet population across the region.

The Asian hornet, or yellow-legged hornet, is notorious for its predation on honey bees, with some individuals capable of killing up to 50 bees per day. Its impact has already been felt in parts of France and Italy, where honey bee colonies have been decimated, resulting in a marked decrease in honey production. First identified in France in 2004 after arriving in a shipment of pottery from China, the hornets have since spread across 15 countries in Europe.

In the UK, the Asian hornet was first spotted in 2016. Although the number of nests destroyed in the country fell significantly to 24 last year—three times fewer than the previous count—an alarming development came to light last year when experts confirmed that the hornets had successfully over-wintered in the UK for the first time.

With a mild spring underway, experts in Jersey reported an extraordinary uptick in early sightings of Vespa velutina, the Italian-based Asian hornet. John De Carteret, a founding member of the Jersey Asian Hornet Group, expressed concern over the situation, noting, "The first queens were more than two weeks early this year." As of April 11, reports indicated that 262 queen Asian hornets had been seen, reflecting an increase of over 1,000 per cent compared to the same date last year. This number surged rapidly from an already concerning 147 sightings on April 6 and just 33 a week prior to that.

De Carteret further highlighted the implications of these figures, stating, “When we reach 266 queens, we will equal the total from 2024 – and that figure wasn’t reached until 25 June.” This burgeoning population could indicate serious ecological consequences.

Ian Campbell from the British Beekeepers Association remarked on the alarming capacity for proliferation among these hornets, suggesting that it would be surprising if numbers did not surpass those recorded in 2024. Campbell pointed out that in regions like Spain and Belgium, numbers have exploded from a mere handful of nests to as many as 10,000 within four years. He noted that a typical nest can host between 2,000 and 3,000 hornets, which collectively can consume over 11 kilograms of insects per season—an amount equivalent to roughly 90,000 bees.

Research published in November 2023 underscored the severity of the Asian hornet’s impact on local bee populations, especially in France, which is the hardest-hit country in Europe. Estimates suggest that between 2.6 and 29.2 per cent of the country’s bee colonies face the risk of annihilation due to this invasive species, potentially resulting in economic losses of up to €30 million annually.

As of now, only two officially confirmed hornets have been spotted in the UK in 2025, located in Shropshire and Kent, according to data from the government’s Animal and Plant Health Agency. However, experts caution that the actual number of sightings typically exceeds those that are ultimately verified and eradicated.

A study conducted earlier this year by researchers at the University of Exeter analysed genetic material from over 1,500 hornet larvae found in 103 nests across Jersey, France, Spain, and the UK. This analysis revealed that Asian hornets feed on a variety of insect species already impacted by farming practices, land use changes, and chemical pollution. The findings highlighted the potential repercussions for agriculture, as 43 of the 50 most commonly identified insect species in the hornet larvae's diet are known visitors to flowers, including key crop pollinators such as honey bees, buff-tailed bumble bees, and red-tailed bumble bees.

Siffreya Pedersen, leading the study, emphasised the critical role insects play in ecosystem functionality, saying, "Most insect populations are in decline due to factors such as habitat destruction and chemical pollution. The expanding area inhabited by Asian hornets poses an extra threat." The combination of ecological shifts and invasive species presents a complex challenge that experts are closely monitoring.

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

## References

* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asian-hornet-uk-sightings/asian-hornet-sightings-recorded-since-2016> - This URL confirms the presence of Asian hornets in the UK, providing details on confirmed sightings since 2016, including the 2025 sightings in Shropshire and Kent. It also explains how the hornets are identified and reported.
* <https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/about-us/beekeeping-news/asian-hornet-2024-rolling-update> - This page lists credible sightings and nest findings of yellow-legged hornets for 2024 in the UK, supporting the rise in sightings and their ecological impact. It also includes information on reporting and surveillance efforts.
* <https://www.britishbeekeepers.co.uk/> - While not a specific article from this website, the British Beekeepers Association is mentioned in the context of comments on the Asian hornet's proliferation, highlighting concerns from beekeeping communities about the threat to native pollinators.
* <https://www.int-res.com/abstracts/me/10/m010p255-263.xml> - This study outlines the environmental impacts of invasive species like the Asian hornet. Although not directly linked, it supports concerns over ecological consequences of such invasions on native ecosystems.
* <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-28259-1> - This scientific publication could provide insights into ecological shifts due to invasive species, aligning with expert concerns about the Asian hornet's impact on insect populations and agriculture.