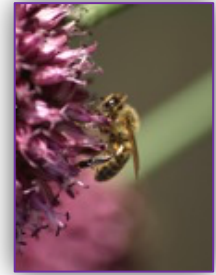


**SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS
BEEKEEPERS
BRANCH NEWSLETTER
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Bees Under Threat

As the new beekeeping season approaches there is one main topic: the Asian Hornet. In this newsletter we have reports on a workshop held by Vanessa Jones and on a BBKA webinar, which focused on how France has been tackling the problem. There are more workshops this month and our branch meeting will set out a plan to start trapping Asian Hornets.

Battling the Asian Hornet

Towards the end of January a mixed group of beekeepers and other interested parties gathered at Vanessa Jones' home for the first of her three workshops on the Asian Hornet. This is a summary of the topics covered:

It is important to remember that the Asian Hornet is an environmental issue and, potentially, a public health issue, not simply a problem for beekeepers.



The Asian Hornet arrived in southern France twenty years ago, it is now thoroughly established in Western Europe and has encroached into the UK in recent years. It is strong enough to fly across the Channel and has certainly been hitching a ride on cross-Channel traffic. The Asian Hornet is an apex predator with a voracious appetite for all types of insect and spiders. It also has high reproduction rates. A single foundress queen will emerge from hibernation in early spring to feed on nectar, showing a preference for early camellia flowers. She will start to lay eggs which will develop into workers up to about mid-summer. By this time there will be a large nest ready for phase two of the breeding cycle in the second part of the summer. The queen will then start to lay eggs which will develop into fertile females and fertile males. The workers will now be preying on insects to collect protein for the developing brood. A single queen can produce several hundred fertile females towards the end of summer, which will mate and prepare to overwinter, becoming foundress queens in their own right. Not all the young queens will survive the winter but several dozen will do so; each queen can be expected to produce about 25-30 surviving fertile queens each year.

Overwintering queens have very small nests, typically 3-6cm in diameter, which appear very similar to wasp nests. These will often be hidden in sheltered corners of buildings, so can be very difficult to find and identify. In early spring it may be easiest to spot emerging queens feeding on early flowering shrubs. As the colony size increases in early summer much larger nests are built, which can be up to beach-ball sized and can be located in trees or undergrowth.

If the hornets are disturbed, they will defend their nest aggressively. A single Asian Hornet sting is similar to a sting from a European Hornet. However, each insect is capable of multiple stings, and Asian Hornets are known to sting in large groups, which can result in hospital treatment being required. A standard cotton bee suit will not offer much protection. The double layer Sentinel type of suit is currently the protective clothing preferred by inspectors. Agricultural workers, ramblers and dog-walkers are at most risk of accidentally disturbing a nest.

At the time of writing, it is illegal to release an Asian Hornet should you catch one. Destroying nests can only be done by approved contractors working with the National Bee Unit. Any sightings must be forwarded to the NBU using the smart phone app or email, with a photo for identification. All beekeepers who have set out traps should record these on Beebase. Vanessa's next workshop will go into trapping in more detail. Trapping will only be effective if done methodically and thoroughly. The right trap in the right place at the right time is essential. It is also important to note that traps must be inspected every day.

It is hoped that there will be a change in regulations regarding Asian Hornets shortly. Please watch out for announcements and get out in your gardens to look carefully at your early flowering shrubs.

Many thanks to Vanessa for hosting these important and informative workshops.

Liz Birchenough

Asian Hornet Workshops

Monitor more, trap less - **Saturday 10 February at 2pm**

Management techniques for beekeepers - **Saturday 24 February at 2pm**

If you are interested in attending a workshop please email Vanessa: vanessapjones@btinternet.com

Lessons from France

BBKA hosted a nationwide webinar presented by Andrew Durham. The purpose was to call on Andrew's comprehensive experience of the Asian Hornet in France and update UK beekeepers on the current situation. It is important to remember that France has a higher percentage of commercial beekeepers than the UK and that the organisations are structured very differently. Nonetheless, Asian Hornets are now well established throughout France and along the north and west coastal regions of Spain. They have also gained a foothold in Belgium.

Andrew summarised the defences employed by French beekeepers. The main learning point seemed to be that the most effective approach was a combination of methods used at the appropriate time in the lifecycle. There was considerable discussion about spring trapping. A major issue was the sheer number of beekeeper hours required to inspect traps daily. Once the Asian Hornet workers have emerged, physical barriers become more important. In France a combination of the muzzle cage and entrance restriction block seemed to be popular and effective. Andrew was at pains to point out that the standard winter mouse guard was not appropriate as the holes were the wrong size. The electric harp also seems to be effective but the positioning with respect to the hive entrance is critical and several are needed together. This may be financially difficult for small scale beekeepers with only one or two colonies.

Andrew did remind members that the Asian Hornet had proved highly aggressive when disturbed.

A recording of Andrew's presentation is available on YouTube using this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-imBJoVzwY>

Liz Birchenough

You can find BBKA updates on the Asian Hornet on our website:

Track Asian Hornet:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/TrackAsianHornet-1.pdf>

Asian Hornet Year Planner:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/AsianHornetYearPlanner-1.pdf>

or go to our website home page: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>

Help Trap Asian Hornets

The branch meeting this month will set out our plan for Asian Hornet defences. The first phase, spring trapping, will start immediately. We need as many members as possible to participate because catching queens now is our best chance to prevent them gaining a hold in our area. It does not matter whether you have your own bees, we just need to get traps distributed as widely as possible. The branch will be ordering equipment for use, with instructions. If you only ever attend one branch meeting, make it this one. The meeting will be led by Martin Barrett, our Asian Hornet Co-ordinator, on **Tuesday 20th February at 7.30pm** at Weald Memorial Hall Long Barn Rd, Sevenoaks Weald TN14 6PT.

If you cannot attend but would like to participate in the spring trapping operation, please let me know:

membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Liz Birchenough

Bees For Sale

A local beekeeper will have nucs of overwintered bees for sale in the spring. They are on 14x12 national frames and have marked and mated 2023 queens. Contact David London on 07825 276060.

New Recruits

Our first Introduction to Beekeeping day this year was held in January. We welcomed eleven keen recruits to our regular getting started event. This time we included more detail about how the life cycle of the Asian Hornet will affect beekeepers and what defences we will need to consider.



The purpose of the course is to give everyone an honest and practical oversight into what to expect in terms of time commitment, cost and space requirement. We also try to encourage new members to come along to the branch apiaries to get used to handling bees under supervision.

It was great to get a really positive response from everyone and, even if it transpires that having your own colonies is not going to be a practical proposition, there is nothing to stop you participating in branch activities as a friend.

Liz Birchenough

Next Course for Beginners

The next classroom-based course for people interested in starting beekeeping will be on **Sunday 18th February 2024 from 10am to 4pm** at Weald Memorial Hall, Long Barn Rd, Sevenoaks Weald TN14 6PT

The course is £50 for members or friends of Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Beekeepers, £60 for non-members. To book contact Liz Birchenough: membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Send photos or articles for the newsletter to: marystaffurth@yahoo.com

Go to our website for all the latest beekeeping news: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>