# Yellow Legged Asian Hornet

This guide has been created to provide answers to common questions relating to this invasive non-native species of Hornet. It is of concern to beekeepers for obvious reasons but it should also be of concern to the public.

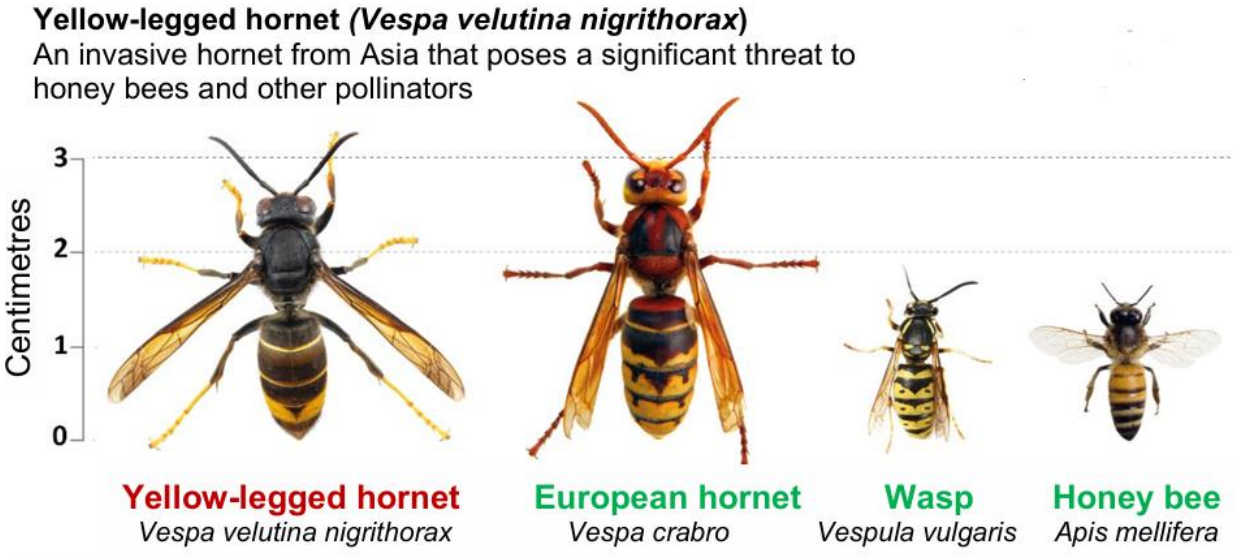
**What is this insect and where does it come from?**

The Yellow Legged Asian Hornet (*Vespa Velutina*) is a species of hornet that originates from South East Asia.

It is known by many names but in Europe it is referred to as Yellow Legged Asian Hornet to distinguish it from other Asian Hornets due to its distinctive yellow legs. It is of concern as an invasive species in countries outside of Asia.

**What does it look like?**

It is slightly smaller than our native European hornet. It has a very dark, almost black body, yellow legs up to its knees and has a distinctive orange stripe on its abdomen.



**I read that it arrived in France?**

Yes, it arrived in France in 2004 in a consignment of pottery and a single hornet was seen to escape from packaging.

This single specimen was a mated queen and went on to create a nest. It was several years before it was identified and the authorities realised the seriousness of its existence in France. Over the next 2 decades the YLAH has established itself across the whole of France and authorities acknowledge that it cannot be eradicated.

**Is it in the UK?**

Yes, it is. YLAH is predominantly in Kent and surrounding counties as of December 2025.

Once established in the northern part of France it was only a matter of time for YLAH to cross the channel. However, the first reported sighted was in Tetbury, Gloucester, in a potting shed in 2016. Over successive years many were reported across the southern counties with some further north. A lot were reported by people who had just returned from holiday in France.

This link will take you to the National Bee Unit YLAH page where you can see historical data on sightings and spread.

Historic UK Yellow-Legged Hornet Incursions » APHA - National Bee Unit - BeeBase


This map represents UK sightings and nests during 2024/25. It is a snapshot, illustrating the highest density being in south east England, but also how far YLAH can travel through hitch hiking.

**Is it spreading?**

Yes, it is. YLAH is spreading to Mediterranean countries as environmental conditions favour it. It is also spreading north into Belgium and the Netherlands as milder temperatures have become the norm over the last few decades. Even Germany is reporting the spread of YLAH.

In the UK, the authorities have learned from French best practice and are doing a very good job in responding to sightings and implementing track/tracing of released specimens to locate nests, that are then destroyed.

Natural spread of YLAH is about 50 miles per year, however we must not forget that YLAH is good at hitching lifts in vehicles that have travelled from France or in produce from the continent. With good public awareness and understanding of the specific threat to our apiaries, we can do a lot to help save pollinators and specifically our bees.

**Has YLAH been sighted in Wales yet?**

No. In recent years, there have been sightings in Shropshire and as far north as Lancashire and Yorkshire. This shows that YLAH continues to hitch a lift in vehicles & produce.

In 2025, sightings were reported in Runcorn, Cheshire. This sighting led to a nest being found. A month later, there was a further sighting in Crosby. No nest found on this occasion. Also in 2025, there were sightings in Cork, that led to nests being found and later a sighting in Belfast.

With increased vessel traffic between ports in Eire and France post Brexit, it is perhaps no surprise that YLAH would arrive in Ireland. This means the threat for North Wales is from both East & West. With inter-continental freight still travelling on UK roads, the A55 could be a conduit for further spread across North Wales..

**When are we likely to see YLAH in North Wales?**

With sightings in Oswestry in 2024, there was a concern that YLAH would arrive in 2025. But this did not happen. With nests found in Runcorn, will it arrive in 2026? We do not know. It all depends on how many queens mated in Autumn 2025 and how many survive hibernation to emerge in spring 2026.

If we take Kent as an example of what could happen, then yes, we will at some point in the future see nests in North Wales, but if we put this into perspective and taking into account at as of the end of November 2025 there have been 544 sightings and 161 nests destroyed across the UK (mostly in the South) the hornet has not taken over and no beekeeper has yet reported losing a hive to YLAH predation.

**The YLAH colony annual lifecycle**

Spring - mated and overwintered queens emerge and build nests. Their diet will be sweet & sugar rich such as tree sap or nectar.

Summer - colony numbers have grown and significant predation on other insects takes place. This is when the diet swaps to protein rich and beekeepers need to be vigilant.

Autumn – diet switches back to sugary foods i.e decaying fruits with less predation on insects and honey bees.

**Why is it a problem?**

The YLAH is a voracious predator with no natural predators of its own. It can predate on as many as 50+ insects a day and uses the protein to feed larvae in the nest. In return the larvae secrete a sweet substance for the adult hornets. In one season a colony of hornets can consume as much as 11kg's of insects. It is a significant threat to the regional biodiversity as they predate pollinators including bumble bees, solitary bees, wasps and honey bees as well as flies, caterpillars, spiders and numerous small insects

**Will YLAH attack honey bees?**

Yes. Whilst YLAH will not always attack honey bees on the wing when away from the hive, once it has found a hive or wild colony in a tree, it will hawk the colony picking off bees as they leave. The message is spread and other YLAH arrive. Honey Bee colonies will go into stress and bees will not leave. They consume all stores and then starve. This is why it is important for beekeepers to think about defences in preparation for YLAH arrival.

**Can I just put a hive entrance reducer or a mouse guard onto my hive?**

No, these measures are not sufficient.

**What hive defence options are there?**

In Asia the local adapted honey bee (*Apis Cerana*) can defend itself by flying quickly to and from the colony. They are very effective at balling the hornet and killing it. Apis Mellirera Mellifera is not that adapted.

French beekeepers have come up with many ingenious methods of defending hives. A simple method is to make & fit what is known as a *muzzle* or wire mesh housing to the front of a hive. This does not stop the YLAH from hawking, but the mesh (even as wide as 25mm) is sufficient to put the YLAH off from flying through it. This therefore gives bees a safe area outside the hive so they can see where the YLAH is and fly off in different directions before the YLAH can catch them. This also reduces colony stress.

A pre made muzzle costing about £40 - £50

DIY using scraps of wood and wire mesh

A simple DIY muzzle using just wire mesh

There are many defence methods that can be seen if you search on line. One method is the Electric Harp. This will be added to this page as part of future updates.

**What can I do?**

It is important to know how to identify a Yellow Legged Asian Hornet compared to other native insects such as the European Hornet or the Wood Wasp (it also has yellow legs) or the Hornet Mimic Hoverfly for example.

In addition to this guide, look at the NNSS identification guide on our web site or via this link:

ID vespa velutina yellow-legged hornet

There are some very informative books by Andy Durham or Dr Sarah Bunker. There is a lot of information published online by the National Bee Unit, Non-Native Species Inspectorate, and the British Beekeeper Association. In addition, look out for activities organised by Conwy Beekeepers committee as part of the CBK awareness campaign.

**Conwy Beekeepers activity**

- Presentation on YLAH on 16 Jan 2025 as part of our winter programme of events
- Created a working group to look at traps and defence methods
- Recruit additional Verifiers to act on sighting reports and set up traps
- Frequent updates to all members on all YLAH developments
- Awareness campaign on website and social media
- Visiting locations vulnerable to YLAH such as fruit and veg wholesalers, transports hubs, caravan parks.
- Provide talks to interested groups such as Ramblers, WI, Scouts, and schools
- Lobby local politicians and councillors to lead in the fight against YLAH
- Populate local community notice boards – both physical boards and online forums.

**What do I do if I think I have seen a Yellow Legged Asian Hornet?**

Download the Asian Hornet Watch app onto your smartphone. Go to your app store, search for it, and download it. **But remember**, sighting reports will not be actioned unless there is a photograph of what you saw submitted with the report.


You can also report online using this link.

Non-native Alert - Asian Hornet

**Can I trap YLAH?**

There is nothing stopping you from putting out traps. There are several available to buy but ensure the one you choose or even make yourself, is a selective trap. A selective trap has holes of a certain size that allows YLAH to enter (about 8mm) but larger insects cannot get in and smaller ones that have entered, can escape. It is important to use a suitable attractant liquid and to create an 'island' using sponge, otherwise all you will have is a trap full of drowned insects.

**Safety**

The YLAH sting is not by itself any worse than that of the native European Hornet, or from other UK wasps or bees. However, it is important to know that Hornet and Wasp sting venom is different to Honey Bee venom. Also do not assume any tolerance to the venom of one will provide tolerance to the other. YLAH pheromone released when stinging is strong and if you are near to a YLAH nest, more hornets will appear quickly and attack. It is the multiple sting incidents that are of concern as one will almost certainly be hospitalised. Such incidents are on the rise in mainland Europe and fatalities are increasing, mainly of very young or elderly people or those with underlying illnesses. If you do see more than one hornet, keep your distance and seek further assistance.

If you catch what you think is a YLAH, report it!

**Some of the more common types of traps**

Veto-Pharma trap

This trap will require some modification


Gard Apis

This is a popular trap in France & very effective

Veto Pharma – Vespa Catch with Adjustable holes


Ornetin – plastic entrance is twisted onto a jar

**What does a YLAH nest look like?**

In its early stages the nest can look like a wasp nest. It is made from wood pulp in the same way wasps build their nests, but they get much larger and are a creamy beige colour as opposed to grey wasp nests. They are often Pear shaped. They are not always high up in trees, but also can be built in bushes. This is a particular hazard for dog walkers looking for a lost ball or children playing and looking for the ball that has been kicked.

The nest will start small but can get very big

If a nest if found, DO NOT ATTEMPT TO GET CLOSE TO LOOK AT IT. If the hornets inside sense vibration or other threat they will immediately attack in large numbers. Call for assistance immediately using the app or the web link detailed earlier.

**Verifiers**

Verifiers will respond to reported sightings if the submission has a photograph. Verifiers can set traps and monitor them. They are part of a wider team, headed by a Coordinator. If you wish to be a verifier, contact the association secretary.

For Verifier guidance see our *Verifier role and guidance* document

**Monitors**

Setting traps and monitoring is straight forward. The Association's Coordinator should be informed. For help see our *Methods of monitoring guide*