

Yellow Legged Hornet

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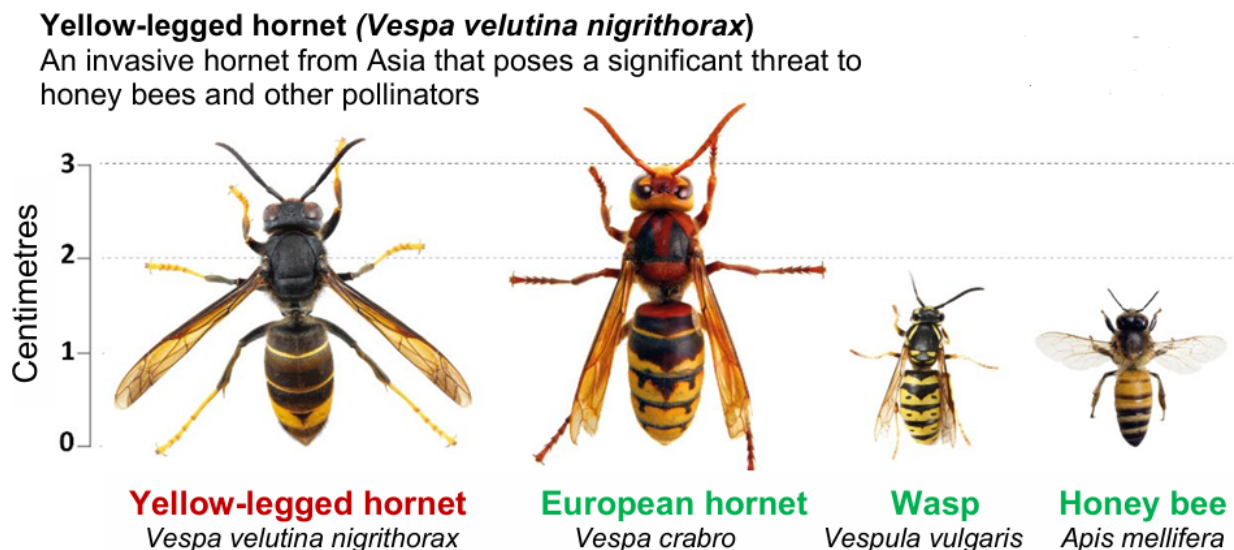
This guide has been created to provide answers to common questions relating to this invasive non-native species of Hornet. It is of concern to beekeepers for obvious reasons but it should also be of concern to the public.

What is this insect and where does it come from?

The **Yellow Legged Hornet** (*Vespa Velutina*) formerly called Yellow Legged Asian Hornet, is a species of hornet originating from South East Asia. It was renamed the Yellow Legged Hornet primarily to improve public identification and reduce confusion with other species. The name also emphasises the yellow legs which as a unique feature of this insect.

What does it look like?

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



How did it get to the UK?

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 YLH has established itself across the whole of France and authorities acknowledge that it cannot be eradicated.

Is it in the UK?

Yes, it is. YLH is present in southern counties of England, predominantly in Kent.

Once established in the northern part of France it was only a matter of time for it to cross the channel. However, the first reported sighting was in Tetbury, Gloucester, in a potting shed in 2016. Over successive years many were reported across other 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 YLH 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 locations and density from 2024 - 26. It is a snapshot, illustrating the highest density being in south east England, but also how far YLH can travel.

Is it spreading?

Yes, it is. YLH is spreading across Europe and is now established in Mediterranean countries. It is also spreading north into Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany as the hornet adapts to milder conditions.

In the UK, the authorities have learned from French best practice by responding to sightings and implementing track/tracing. Caught specimens are released and traced to locate nests, that are then destroyed.

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

Has YLH been sighted in Wales yet?

In recent years, there have been sightings in Shropshire and as far north as Lancashire and Yorkshire. In late 2025 it was sighted in Cheshire and this led to a nest being found. A month later, there was a further sighting in Crosby. No nest found on this occasion. In January 2026 a nest was found in Wrexham, but it was clearly old and abandoned. It was attributed to 2025 statistics. However, due to its location, traps were positioned around the immediate area to catch any mated queens in Spring.

It should be noted that 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 YLH 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 YLH in North Wales?

This is the big question often asked, but cannot be answered. With sightings in Oswestry in 2024, there was a concern that there would be sightings across Wales in 2025. It all depends on how many females mate in the previous year and go on to hibernate, emerge and then start building their own nests.

It is important to spread awareness and as beekeepers, we improve our knowledge of the insect and prepare, rather than react once it is seen.

The YLH 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 some reduced predation on insects and honey bees.



Why is it a problem?

The YLH 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 YLH attack honey bees?

Yes. Whilst YLH 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. It does not take long for other YLH to arrive and attack bees en-mass. Honey Bee colonies being predated, will go into stress and bees will not leave. They consume all their stores and then starve. This is why it is important for beekeepers to think about defences in preparation for YLH 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 YLH from hawking, but the mesh (even as wide as 25mm) is sufficient to put the YLH off from flying through it. This therefore gives bees a safe area outside the hive so they can see where the hornet is and fly off in different directions before the hornet 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



Online research of French beekeeping sites will provide details of defence methods.

What can I do?

It is important to know how to identify a Yellow Legged 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

- Presentations on YLH began in 2025. They can be booked by contacting the association
- 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 YLH developments
- Awareness campaign on website and social media
- Visiting locations vulnerable to YLH 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 YLH
- Populate local community notice boards – both physical boards and online forums.

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

Download the Asian Hornet Watch app onto your smartphone via the app store and download it.

Remember that 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 YLH?

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 YLH 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 YLH 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. YLH pheromone released when stinging is strong and if you are near to a YLH 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 YLH, report it!

Some of the more common types of traps

Veto-Pharma trap

This trap will require some modification



Veto Pharma – Vespa Catch with Adjustable holes

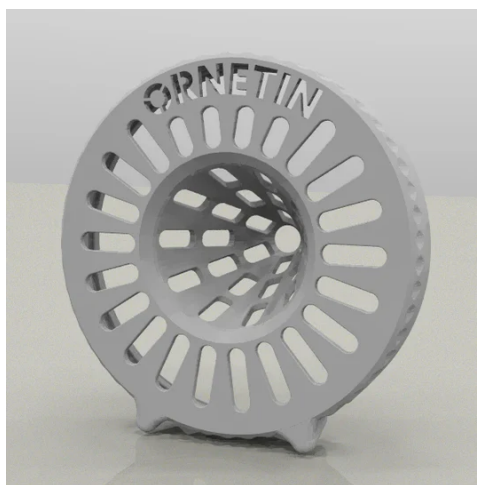


Gard Apis

This is a popular trap in France & very effective



Ornetin – plastic entrance is twisted onto a jar



What does a YLH 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 is 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*