

State enlisting public in battle with hornets

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By all accounts, the Asian giant hornet is one scary critter.

At 2 inches, it's the world's largest hornet and has a venom more toxic than bees and wasps. Its stinger can pierce a beekeeper's suit. The hornet nests in the ground and in fall kills and decapitates honey bees and feeds the bees' unhatched brood to its own young. A few hornets can destroy a beehive within hours.

And now they are here in Washington. The City of Anacortes, Port of Anacortes, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and Samish Nation are setting traps this week to try to find out if any giant hornets have arrived on Fidalgo Island.

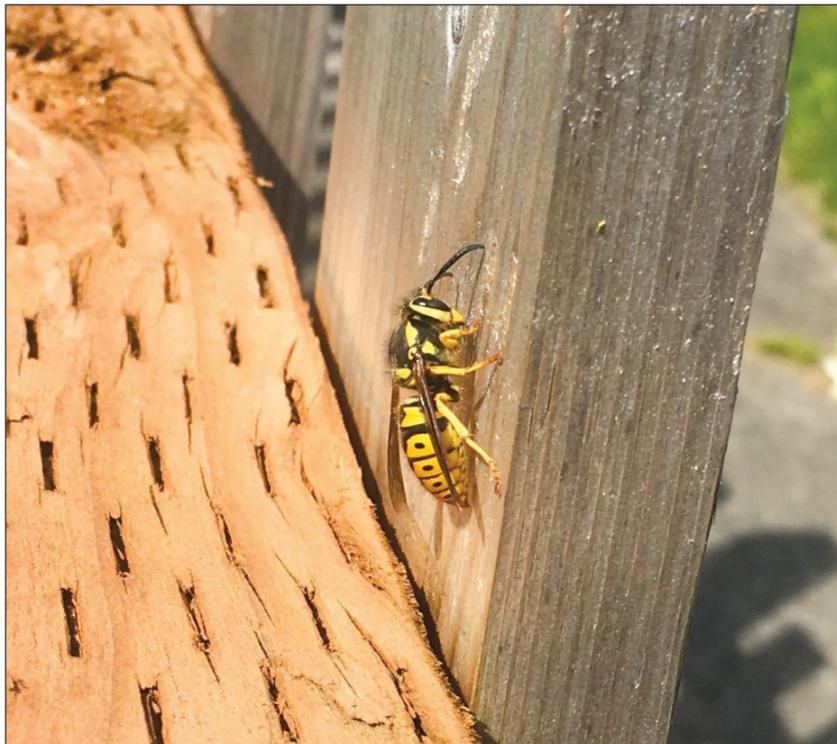
"They are definitely bad news for honeybees," said Karla Salp of the state Department of Agriculture.

And they're potentially bad news for humans.

"They generally aren't aggressive toward humans unless they feel threatened," Salp said. "They nest in the ground. If a hiker steps on a nest, the hornet could see that as a threat and attack." Each hornet can sting more than once; multiple stings can be fatal, Salp said.

Salp said it's not known how the hornets arrived in the U.S., whether in the cargo hold of a ship or by migration.

According to the Agriculture Department's map of reported sightings, a colony of Asian giant hornets was found and destroyed Sept. 18 in Nanaimo, B.C. It contained about 150 live hornets and 600 unhatched eggs and larvae. Then, two dead hornets were collected in Blaine, one on Oct. 30 and the other on Jan. 8, according to the sightings report map.



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED / WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Above: This hornet – believed to be an Asian giant hornet – was photographed April 18 on a fence in Mount Vernon. Below: The Asian giant hornet is 1.5 - 2 inches in length, with large orange/yellow head, prominent eyes, and a black and yellow striped abdomen.



Other sightings are under investigation throughout Washington, including one in Sedro-Woolley, one on Highway 9 and Prairie Road north of Sedro-Woolley, three in Mount Vernon, one in Coupeville and one at Lake McMurray.

No sightings had been reported as of Monday in Anacortes, and city Parks

and Recreation Director Jonn Lunsford said his department is "preparing to deploy our hornet traps this week" to keep the hornet from getting a foothold on the island.

The state Agriculture Department is enlisting the help of beekeepers and the public to trap and report what some are calling "murder hornets"

Asian giant hornet facts

- World's largest hornet, 1.5 to 2 inches in length
- Orange/yellow head with prominent eyes; black and yellow striped abdomen
- Stinger is longer than a bee's
- Nests in the ground
- Colonies established by late fall, and workers go out and forage. Workers eat other insects, including honey bees.
- Once hornet young hatch, workers enter a "slaughter phase," attack king bee hives, killing the adults and taking the brood as food for their young.

Source: Washington Department of Agriculture

If you see an Asian giant hornet nest:

Do not approach it or remove it. Call the Agriculture Department immediately at 800-443-6684.

impacts on the environment, economy and public health of Washington state," she said.

Salp said several reported sightings in Washington turned out to be yellow jackets or bumblebees.

"We'd rather have someone report what turns out to be a yellow jacket than not report what is an Asian giant hornet," she said.

Beekeepers and the public can help stop the

spread of the Asian giant hornet by setting and monitoring special traps and reporting catches, Salp said.

Learn more on the state Department of Agriculture website.

Salp shared this good news. Honey bees in Japan have learned how to fight back against the hornet by gathering in a ball around the invader and vibrating to produce heat — cooking the hornet to death.



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