

First Asian giant hornet trapped in Birch Bay

Department of Ag says the invasive hornets have established a nest in the area



Ruthie Danielsen tends to the six beehives on her Birch Bay property, about a mile from where the Asian giant hornet was caught in a WSDA bottle trap.

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

The hunt for the invasive Asian giant hornet ramps up after Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) officials announced that the first Asian giant hornet in Birch Bay had been trapped just north of BP Cherry Point Refinery on July 14.

This comes after WSDA, cooperating agencies and the public set over 1,844 bottle traps for the world's largest hornet. In a citizen science effort, the public set 1,080 of the traps.

The traps use orange juice and rice cooking wine, and mirror similar traps used in the hornet's native habitat in Japan.

"This is encouraging because it means we know that the traps work," said WSDA managing entomologist Sven Spichiger in a news release. "But it also means we have work to do."

In a July 31 press conference, Spichiger said capturing the hornet, which the agency presumes is a worker but will be confirmed after testing, was not unexpected. The agency knew there was a nest late last year that had likely produced queens and male hornets, creating opportunity for hornets to escape and produce new colonies.

Five hornets had previously been confirmed in Washington and there were three detections in Canada after the invasive species arrived in North America for the first time last fall, probably by cargo ship.

The last hornet was discovered in Custer in late May and confirmed to be a mated queen. Spichiger said the detections of this, and the queen found in June in north Bellingham, helped eliminate the threat of possible new nests from those queens.

"This detection unfortunately means that we did get a nest that was able to establish somewhere in the Birch Bay area," he said.

The hornets are known for their large size that reaches up to 2 inches, orange and black bodies, and aggression towards honey bees. The hornets have made a buzz among concerned citizens,



Ruthie Danielsen maintains seven Asian giant hornet traps, three near her home and four on nearby properties. The traps, made of orange juice and rice cooking wine, were proven to work after a hornet was caught in July in a WSDA trap.

even those outside Washington state, and stakeholders like Birch Bay beekeeper Ruthie Danielsen.

"I treat the bees like I do my goats, my dogs and my kitties," said Danielsen, who became a beekeeper five years ago after retiring. "They're a part of our family. That's probably what's so devastating about another thing that can come in and kill them. It's really distressing."

Danielsen said it's not the hornet alone that worries her, despite the fact that the Cherry Point hornet was trapped about a mile from her six honeybee hives. The hornet is an added stressor on top of pesticides, other bees trying to rob her hives and Varroa mites.

Varroa mites are invasive species that came to Washington in the '80s and carry diseases that can kill hives. One unmanaged hive threatens all of the other hives, said Danielsen, who treated her hives four times last fall.

The additional pressure of the hornet is especially dangerous for commercial pollinators, which use their honey bees to help pollinate fruits and nuts.

"It's a domino effect," Danielsen said. "I don't think that's an alarmist view. That's a potential."

Danielsen, who was one of the

Photos by Grace McCarthy

first members of the Mt. Baker Beekeepers Association to spur the group into action in February, said she's working with her former employer, BP Cherry Point Refinery, to put additional traps on its wooded property. Danielsen has three traps at her home and four others that she maintains on neighbors' properties.

She's also been calling on state representatives to co-sponsor the "Murder Hornet Eradication Act of 2020" bill that was introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives in May by U.S. House Natural Resources Committee chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ). The bill directs the Department of the Interior to provide \$4 million each year from 2021 to 2025 to states to provide a program for management, research and public education to help eradicate the hornet and restore affected bee populations, according to the bill. Currently, Representative Derek Kilmer from Port Angeles is the only co-sponsor from Washington.

"If the participation from the general public wanes, they're going to need a lot more funding to keep this going," Danielsen said, noting the labor it takes for WSDA workers to inspect over a thousand samples weekly.

WSDA plans to add about 40 more traps in Birch Bay that will be monitored daily, Spichiger said. The agency has been preparing to track the hornet locally.

The next steps will be to follow a hornet back to its nest using sightlines or by attaching a tracking tag.

The agency has given itself a deadline of early to mid-September to locate the nest before the colony begins creating new reproducing queens and male hornets, Spichiger said.

"We absolutely do not want this species in North America. People need to pay attention," Danielsen said. "This is not a good thing. It's not just for us little hobbyists, this is not a good thing for North America."

For more information on the hornet, visit agr.wa.gov/departments/insects-pests-and-weeds/insects/hornets.

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City council reinstates late fees on B&O, gas and utility tax

BY OLIVER LAZENBY

Blaine City Council has reinstated some late fees for quarterly and monthly tax payments that the city paused at the beginning of the pandemic. The late payment penalties will go into effect on November 1, the day after third quarter taxes are due. Council took action at its September 28 meeting.

Blaine city manager Michael Jones waived late payment penalties for the city's penny-per-gallon gas tax in March and the next month council waived late fees for quarterly business and occupancy tax payments, as well as a 6 percent tax on gross income that utility companies pay to the city.

Since then, nearly all businesses have kept up with those tax payments, said Jeff Lazenby, city finance director (who is not related to the reporter). However, three major businesses have not paid quarterly B&O taxes all year.

One of those businesses is a seafood merchant wholesaler and the other is a food wholesale manufacturer, according to meeting documents. Late fees for both utility taxes and B&O taxes are 10 percent of the total payment if it is received 1-30 days past the due date, 20 percent if it's 31-60 days past due and 30 percent for payments more than 61 days late.

City council directed the finance department to create a proposal for reinstating those fees at its September 14 meeting. At that meeting, Lazenby told council that three major Blaine businesses hadn't paid any B&O taxes, and that he was "fairly confident" that at least one of those businesses wasn't much affected by the pandemic.

"At this point, it may be kinder and more compassionate to not let people dig themselves into a hole that they can't get back out of whenever this slingshots back," councilmember Richard May said at that meeting. "If the idea is to just give them time, that's not the same as giving them something for free."

Since this is the first year the city is collecting a B&O tax, getting payments from major businesses will help the city plan next year's budget.

"It would be very helpful for us to go

(See *Late fees*, page 15)

One step closer to finding underground nests



▲ From l., Vikram Iyer, a University of Washington Ph.D. student who created a radio tag to track the Asian giant hornet, shows WSDA entomologist Chris Looney, eradication coordinator Rian Wojahn and managing entomologist Sven Spichiger how to use the device on September 30 in east Blaine.

Photo courtesy WSDA

Racing to find hornet nests before "slaughter phase"

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Threat of the Asian giant hornet establishing itself in Blaine before spreading across the state, and potentially the West Coast, looms as the hornets enter the 'slaughter' phase of their life cycle in early fall.

On September 30, the Washington State Department of Agriculture got one step closer to meeting its goal of finding at least one of the underground nests, thanks to a few leads from residents in east Blaine, near Burk Road.

A week earlier on September 21, Philip Bovenkamp was working outside when he heard a low-pitched hum, similar to a hummingbird but different from anything he'd ever heard. Bovenkamp followed the noise, suspicious after his wife had doubted a sighting earlier that week and he had seen something large fly by earlier. He'd been on high alert for bugs because his fifth-grade daughter, Jillian, was catching them

for an entomology project at her school in Lynden.

Bovenkamp, who lives on 5 acres, traced the unfamiliar noise to a hornet inspecting a paper wasp nest in his tool shed. After one Google search, he was able to verify the large orange-and-black hornet with almond-shaped eyes was the same invasive insect scientists were calling on the public to trap.

As October neared, researchers needed people to spot the hornets more than ever as the insects enter their slaughter phase, when they attack their prey in force for food. With nests established and new queens preparing to mate later this month, scientists said, time to prevent honeybee killings runs short.

If not controlled in Washington state, the hornets could spread down the West Coast and eventually reach the East Coast and even the coasts of Africa, Australia, Europe and South America, according to a Wash-

ington State University study published September 22. The hornet thrives in areas with warm summers, mild winters and high rainfall, which means eastern Washington and the U.S. interior are inhospitable to the

(See *Hornets*, page 10)

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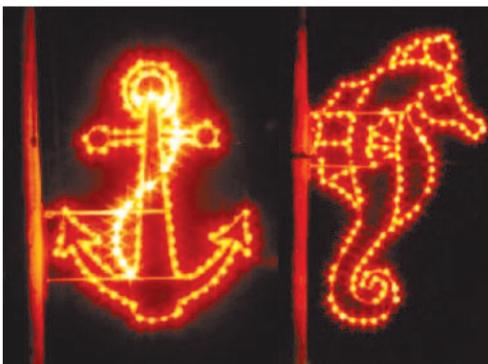
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Hornets ...

From page 1

invasive species, the study found.

After confirming the pest's identity, Bovenkamp returned and emptied a can of wasp spray before scooping the dead hornet into a container. "I thought that would be the end of my murder hornet adventures," he said.

But that evening, Bovenkamp saw another one pestering a paper wasp nest above their grill.

His wife, Debbie, made two traps from the WSDA website and caught a hornet the next day. "At that point, we were thinking if we're seeing this many in this short of time, we thought we might not be the only ones," he said.

Debbie Bovenkamp reported the sighting to WSDA that Saturday, September 26, thinking they'd just be "pins on a map." But by 1 p.m. Monday, WSDA entomologist Chris Looney pulled into the couple's country property and told them it was the best lead the agency had.

It wasn't until Looney was preparing to leave the property on Tuesday, September 29 that he and Bovenkamp saw a hornet buzz by. Looney caught the live hornet in a butterfly net and by the next morning, seven WSDA representatives were at Bovenkamp's home preparing to track the hornet back to its nest – a culmination of months of effort.

The scientists placed the hornet in ice to slow its metabolism long enough to attach a radio tag that could follow the hornet back to its nest, suspected to be within 2 miles of Bovenkamp's property. The tag, tracked via a cellphone app, worked properly but the glue didn't dry fast enough, sticking to the hornet's wing and making it unable to fly, said Sven Spichiger, WSDA entomologist during an October 2 news conference.

The entomologists then attempted to tie the tag to the hornet with thread, similar to how European scientists track the Asian hornet, a different invasive species.

"We absolutely believe we are going to get more live hornets," said Spichiger, of the hornets believed to be workers. "We are supremely confident that in the next couple of weeks, we'll be able to snag one, if not more, of them."

The WSDA response team added 30 live traps to the Bovenkamp's neighborhood, an area previously outside its concentrated trapping grid. While knocking on neighbors' doors for permission to hang the bottle traps, agency staff found a dead hornet in a street lamp. They were also given a doorbell camera photo of a hornet and heard a third report of the hornet found dead on a porch, which the resident discarded.

"We have basically six specimens in the last week," Spichiger said. "We, of course, believe we are dealing with a nest and we will be watching that particular area pretty close."

For months, researchers had looked for any sign of even one murder hornet. Seeing one after another appear in east Blaine became a victory of sorts.

"There were a lot of emotions for our staff this week," said Karla Salp, WSDA public engagement

specialist. "We feel very close because we have all these detections in this little pocket."

These sightings bring the total count to 15 confirmed Asian giant hornets trapped in Washington, all of which have been found in Whatcom County, Salp said.

Since the most recent sightings were less than two miles from the U.S./Canada border, B.C. officials have added six more traps just north of the border. There hasn't been a confirmed hornet sighting in B.C. since one was found in Langley in May.

Paul van Westendorp, provincial apiculturist for B.C., said he doesn't have an exact number on traps in B.C. but they are surveying three areas: Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, where a nest was eradicated last September; the Cowichan Valley, south of Nanaimo, where there were four credible sightings in June; and the Fraser Valley from White Rock to Aldergrove.

"These hornets are not respectful of any border," Van Westendorp said. "They just fly wherever they'd like to go."

DNA sequencing tested last winter suggests the hornet found in Blaine in December and the Nanaimo nest had separate origins, South Korea and Japan, respectively, Van Westendorp said. A different large hornet species from Asia, he said, was also found in Vancouver in the summer of 2019. This hints that the Asian giant hornets could have been introduced at separate times, although van Westendorp noted the DNA sample is not a foolproof indicator because the hornets can move from the area where they are predominantly located.

"The question can be raised, do we do enough to control and check for invasive species that could have huge implications to our forests?" he said.

Spichiger said the recent sightings confirmed the hornets prey on yellow jackets, paper wasps and other native pollinators besides the honeybee, which could have a greater impact on the environment. The gravity of wide-scale impact is currently hard to determine, Salp added.

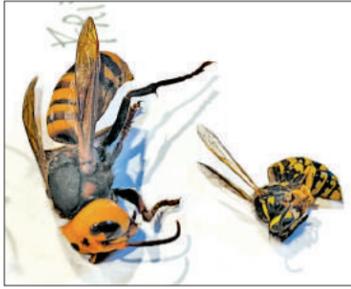
Residents have spotted the hornets checking for wasp nests under building structures such as carports and the edge of roofs, said Salp, who recommends people keep a special eye on those places.

Because all of the 15 Asian giant hornets trapped in Washington have been found in Whatcom County, local beekeepers dread the coming slaughter phase.

Although there have been no beehives attacked this year, Ted and Dorothy McFall are still reeling from discovering an entire colony slaughtered last November. The hobbyist beekeepers of McFall Beeyard in Custer found thousands of decapitated bees from one of their 30 colonies, a few weeks before the first hornet was found in Blaine.

"It's pretty unfortunate we happen to live in the one part of the United States where they are, and to have the bait," said Ted McFall, who has been beekeeping his entire life.

McFall said it's hard to estimate how much revenue they lost from losing their strongest colony be-



▲ One of the Asian giant hornets found near Burk Road next to a yellow jacket.

Photo courtesy WSDA.

cause they could have made many uses from the colony over the years, including breeding queens and pollinating farmers' crops. He worries their bees could get hit again this year, but worse, if there are two hornet nests in the area, which WSDA officials say is likely after the Birch Bay sightings this summer. Officials also haven't ruled out a third nest in Custer after a male hornet was trapped in late July.

The McFalls said they wouldn't have a 'fighting chance' without the support of the community, most of whom won't be affected directly.

"It's comforting. I'm glad we're not alone in this fight," Dorothy McFall said. "It's like the beginning of a forest fire. You try to put it out early before it gets too late."

WSDA created an emergency line for Whatcom County beekeepers who experience hives under attack, similar to 911. WSDA officials emphasized that beekeepers calling the 360/902-1880 num-



▲ Philip Bovenkamp of east Blaine holds up a hornet WSDA entomologists allowed his daughter to keep for a school project. Bovenkamp is one of two people in North America with a hornet, he said.

Photo by Grace McCarthy

ber must note the direction the hornets fly, and any other detail that could help tracking efforts.

In the days following his hornet escapade, Bovenkamp said he's taking extra walks around his yard and chatting with neighbors about the latest topic there. His daughter, Jillian, is now one of two people in North America with an Asian giant hornet, which WSDA allowed her to keep for her school project. She keeps her school project in their outdoor freezer, next to the white chocolate raspberry ice cream and frozen berries.

"The department of agriculture is going above and beyond. They're up here all week trying to track those things down, but they need our help," Bovenkamp said. "Every report we get helps them

zero in a little bit closer."

Walking through his backyard to point out where the hornets were spotted, Bovenkamp cocked his head and paused. "I thought I just saw one, a hornet," he said. "It buzzed around the top and just took off. It's the first time I've seen one since Saturday morning but I'm fairly confident that was one."

To report an Asian giant hornet sighting, visit bit.ly/34akL4H. People without internet can also call the hotline, 1-800/443-6684 but this will take longer for WSDA staff to respond due to a heavy call volume. Beekeepers with hives under attack are urged to call the emergency line, 360/902-1880. For more information, visit agr.wa.gov/hornets.

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WSDA attempts to track second Asian giant hornet

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Using lessons learned from the first Asian giant hornet tracking attempt last week, researchers inched closer to success with a second attempt at tracking a live hornet on October 7.

The attempt ultimately failed after researchers lost the radio signal but it was not without triumph, said Sven Spichiger, Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) managing entomologist during an October 12 news conference.

"Everything is progressing as much as possible," Spichiger said. "I'm pretty hopeful we'll have a nest and perform an eradication" Urgency comes as the hornets

enter the 'slaughter' phase, where the hornets can destroy an entire bee colony to feed their young. By the end of October, hornets will start mating and venture out to create new colonies by next spring.

The live hornet was caught on October 5 at the same east Blaine location as the first tracking attempt, near Burk Road. Agency officials tried tracking the hornet the next day but had to start over on October 7 due to a technology malfunction on the tracking chip.

Scientists waited until fog cleared after noon to ensure they could see the hornet as it took off. They tied a tracking device onto the hornet's abdomen with dental floss, instead of glue, which didn't dry fast enough during the first tracking attempt and rendered that hornet immobile.

European counterparts, who use a similar device to track the Asian hornet, a different species, suggested the Washington scientists place the hornet on a higher surface for flight. The hornet launched off an apple tree and landed on a few nearby trees before landing near dense Himalayan blackberry bushes. The scientists then lost track of the hornet when it quickly flew into trees.

Vikram Iyer, a Ph.D. student at the University of Washington, contacted WSDA early this year about adapting a bug camera he made for beetles to track the in-

vasive hornet.

The Bluetooth chip sends out a radio signal twice per second that allows people to track the chip through an app on their phone. The signal is directed about 30 feet from the radio tag in a forested area and up to a few hundred feet in a field, Iyer said.

"This is the same sort of approach that's used in traditional wildlife tracking for large animals but this is struck down to a really small size," he said during the news conference.

Staff were able to get an initial flight direction and talk to surrounding property owners who gave eyewitness sightings from the week prior and earlier in the summer, Spichiger said.

In the next few weeks, the agency will receive new radio tags with distances that reach farther with a stronger signal, Spichiger said. The tags aren't kept in stock because of their short shelf life, he added.

The second tracking attempt came as the agency also received reports of two new sightings on October 9: A worker hornet trapped a mile south of the first Blaine sighting in December 2019 and a hornet trapped by Canadian authorities in Langley, B.C., just north of the border near the east Blaine sightings.

The two U.S. hornet findings on October 5 and October 9 brings the total number of confirmed specimens in Whatcom County to 18.

Spichiger said he is confident the agency will eradicate the east Blaine nest before the end of the month, but is worried by the lack of sightings near the suspected Birch Bay nest. A third nest is probable, he said, especially after the October 9 hornet trapped within Blaine city limits.

"We expected we'd see far worse than this and we're really only focused on two or three areas in Whatcom County," said Spichiger, who once feared the invasive species would have spread across western Washington by now. "But it looks like we're concentrated in one area, which really gives us a fighting chance."

Once the east Blaine nest is located, WSDA will perform an early morning eradication. The agency staff will vacuum hundreds of hornets out of the underground nest and then inject a tube with carbon dioxide to kill any remaining.

"We're hurrying as much as we can but there's a lot of ground for us to cover," Spichiger said. "We will continue our efforts until we win."

To report an Asian giant hornet sighting, visit bit.ly/34ak-L4H. People without internet can also call the hotline, 800/443-6684 but this will take longer for WSDA staff to respond due to a heavy call volume. Beekeepers with hives under attack are urged to call the emergency line, 360/902-1880. For more information, visit agr.wa.gov/hornets.

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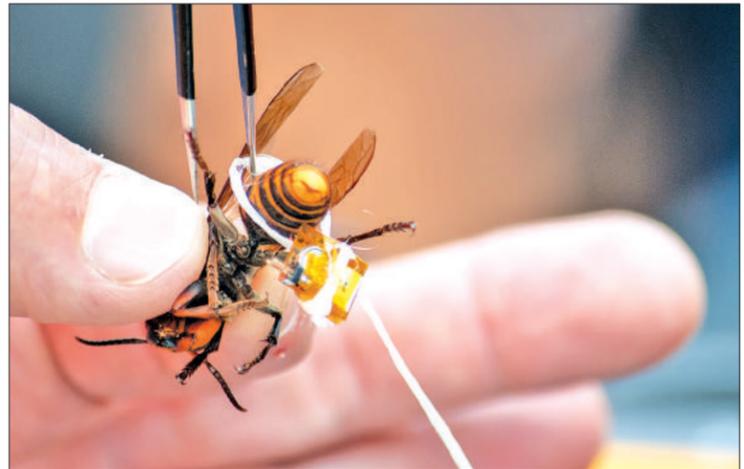
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WSDA officials made their second attempt at tracking an Asian giant hornet on October 7. Scientists tracked the invasive species by tying a Bluetooth chip on the hornet with dental floss.

WSDA entomologist Chris Looney tracks the Asian giant hornet in east Blaine. WSDA officials eventually lost track of the hornet when it flew out of signal range.

Photos courtesy of WSDA



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First U.S. Asian giant hornet nest found in east Blaine

Posted Thursday, October 22, 2020 9:26 pm

By Grace McCarthy

The Washington State Department of Agriculture located the first Asian giant hornet nest in the U.S. on October 22, a state agency spokesperson confirmed to *The Northern Light*.

The nest was located in a tree off Burk Road in east Blaine around 4 p.m. after about two hours of tracking, said Karla Salp, WSDA public engagement specialist.

WSDA officials found two live hornets in an east Blaine WSDA trap on October 21, and were kept alive to be tracked on October 22. Salp said the first hornet wouldn't take flight but the entomologists followed the second hornet for about two hours until it led them to the nest, located on the edge of a resident's property. WSDA tracked the hornet using a new, long-range radio tag.

Salp said the next steps are for the scientists to solidify an eradication plan, which will need to be adapted since they anticipated finding the nest in the ground. They plan to eradicate the nest the morning of Saturday, October 24, she said.

WSDA officials believe there is at least one other nest in north Whatcom County after detections in Birch Bay, Custer and within the city of Blaine this year.

The world's largest hornet is thought to have arrived in North America last year through international trade. Researchers have been working to find nests as the hornet enters its 'slaughter phase,' when the hornets are famed for decapitating entire honeybee colonies. Researchers hoped to eradicate the nests before the reproductive hornets emerge at the end of October.

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HOME & GARDEN

A monthly special section in *The Northern Light*

First Asian giant hornet nest found in U.S. eradicated in east Blaine

Despite national attention, locals find the "murder" hornet not so murderous

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Philip Bovenkamp was the first to arrive. At 4 a.m. he pulled his lawn chair 100 feet behind the yellow caution tape on his neighbor's east Blaine property. He drank black coffee in the 30-degree weather, and waited. It was eradication day.

"I didn't know what to expect," said Bovenkamp, whose reports of Asian giant hornet sightings late September catalyzed the first U.S. Asian giant hornet nest eradication on October 24. "I didn't know if the hornets would be swarming around and mad, or tamed, but we decided to stay way, way back."

A few neighbors trickling in became dozens as Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) officials arrived around 5:30 a.m. to put on their eradication suits, thick enough to protect from the 6 millimeter stinger of the world's largest hornet. Face shields also protected the entomologists' eyes from spraying venom as the Blaine neighbors sat mere yards away, sipping coffee.

Before sunrise on October 24, these early risers would see four scientists vacuum 85 hornets from the first nest spotted in the U.S., located in a tree in a backyard off Burk Road. The nest was found October 22 after scientists successfully tracked one of four live hornets caught that week with a new, long-range radio tag.

Although the invasive hornets venom is no more toxic than a honeybee's, the pests deliver multiple doses that can cause necrosis (the premature death of cells), WSDA managing entomologist Sven Spichiger said in a press conference the Monday following eradication. In Japan, the hornets are known to kill about 50 people per year.

This, paired with their 'slaughter' phase in fall, when a few hornets can decapitate around 30,000 honeybees, has dubbed them 'murder hornet.'

International headlines spotlighted east Blaine in what many consider its biggest claim to fame. From trending on Twitter to news stories that read, "Murder hornets that will haunt your nightmares," much of the U.S. has grappled with the idea of these killer hornets since they arrived in North America last year.

But neighbors said they didn't find the hornets too murderous.

Over the last several weeks, the hornets have ingrained themselves in this community. Bovenkamp's 14-year-old neighbor Childrey DeJong saw the large hornet with a distinctive orange head fly by her kitchen window

the night of Bovenkamp's first sighting. Even though a hornet remained near her family's new honey bee colony during WSDA's second tracking attempt on October 7, they dismissed its presence after it appeared to ignore their hive. Around the same time, Matthew Furdyk, an 18-year-old Lynden senior, spotted a hornet on his family's garden shed. The hornet, the size of his finger, made a deep humming noise as it pestered wasp nests but the teen said he was only concerned because of his mother's bee allergies. He wasn't about to change his daily routine.

Bovenkamp had been eyeing the nest before WSDA started its removal. He said he never felt in danger, and even took his 10-year-old daughter to visit the nest the day before. When he noticed the property owner inch toward the scientists' eradication that morning, Bovenkamp and a dozen other neighbors felt safe to scoot their lawn chairs closer.

The eradication drew neighbors together who had been dealing with their separate experience of hornet sightings, Bovenkamp said.

"It was a community gathering," he said. "We were sitting out there talking about the excitement of the week."

WSDA staff planned their attack for when the most hornets would be inside the nest. The scientists stuffed the entrances of the nest, which was 10 feet high, with foam and wrapped the tree with cellophane. They then vacuumed the hornets from the one opening not blocked. To oust more hornets, scientists hit the tree with a board and then pumped carbon dioxide into the tree to kill the remaining hornets. Once the tree was sprayed again with foam and wrapped, scientists added traps for potential survivors or hornets that had been away from the nest.

Josie Shelton, whose 40-acre wooded property served as a launch zone on October 22 when scientists successfully tracked the hornet, likened the experience to the 1982 sci-fi film "E.T."

Many who attended the eradication had followed the hornet with WSDA staff since the agency began knocking on their doors after Bovenkamp's hornet sightings in late September. Shelton, Bovenkamp and a Discovery Channel film crew documenting their lives, followed WSDA entomologists to the nest on October 22.

Shelton described finding the nest as intense, as the scientists raced against the clock in late afternoon to beat the next day's rain. Both recount the excitement



WSDA entomologist Chris Looney fills a tree cavity with carbon dioxide after vacuuming a nest of Asian giant hornets from inside it.

Photo by Elaine Thompson/AP

of hearing Spichiger say, "there's one, and another one" when he looked up and realized the nest was above ground, rather than underground, as scientists anticipated.

Following the nest detection going viral, neighbors say they've received calls from people they know from New York to Finland. "2020 has been such a hard year, but this is something I think everyone can get behind," Bovenkamp said. "It's so good to have what I think is a feel-good story at the end of the day."

But WSDA entomologists agree that while the eradication is a long-awaited victory, there's still work to be done. And fast. The agency is working against the clock as the hornets are expected to start mating and creating new colonies by the end of October. Spichiger said there's not a defining number for when the hornet

population becomes unmanageable, but continues to warn about their destructive habit of decapitating pollinators.

Spichiger believes there is at

least one nest in Birch Bay and possibly another in Custer and one in the city of Blaine. The agency has been stumped on leads to the suspected nests, especially the one in Birch Bay, where multiple hornets were found this summer but have since disappeared.

"While this is certainly a morale boost, this is only the start of our work to hopefully prevent the Asian giant hornet from gaining a foothold in the Pacific Northwest," Spichiger said in an October 26 press release. "We suspect there may be more nests in Whatcom County."

What's next

The state agency plans to excavate the east Blaine nest by cutting down the dead tree. Spichiger said he hopes this will locate the queen, which was not found during removal. Dissecting the nest will also help entomologists know if the tree started producing new queens.

Citizen scientists trapping will end October 31. The public has set over 1,500 traps since it started trapping in July. Whatcom, Skagit, Island and San Juan coun-

(See Hornets, page 10)

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Hornets ...

From page 9

ty residents can keep their traps through November, and should only submit their findings if they capture an Asian giant hornet.

Following the eradication, Josie Shelton walked along her wooded east Blaine property with her husband, Max, and 6-year-old daughter, Lily.

"I was nervous because at first they said it was a ground nest. We have five kids who run and play on the property, we didn't know where it was," Josie Shelton said. "If they didn't eradicate it, we would be surrounded by murder hornets."

Josie pointed to experimental traps WSDA hung on her property, along the path in which the hornets flew from their nest to the Bovenkamp's property. The new traps contained the orange juice and rice cooking wine mixture, but also had water with a honey-

bee comb boiled in it and a lure with acetic acid and isobutanol designed to catch the pests before they hit their slaughter phase.

"I always thought that we were fortunate because we didn't have any venomous critters," Bovenkamp said, reflecting on the neighborhood's experience with the deadly hornets. "Over time, we've gotten used to it and it's just like anyone else who lives in an area with dangerous animals."

Residents who've gotten near the hornets in the past few weeks echo similar sentiments.

"I felt like it was just any other hornet wasp or bee, unless if you're out to get them, they're not going to bother you," said Stephanie DeJong, who watched the hornets fly in and out of their nest the day before eradication. "People were getting so freaked out about these killer murder hornets. They're not something to be fearful of, they're something to be aware of because we don't want them in our area."



▲ Washington State Department of Agriculture outreach and education specialist Cassie Cichorz is assisted in putting on a protective suit before assisting to eradicate a nest of Asian giant hornets.

Photo by Elaine Thompson/AP

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▲ Neighbors look on in the early morning hours as Washington State Department of Agriculture workers vacuum a nest of Asian giant hornets from a tree.

Photo by Elaine Thompson/AP

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WSDA entomologist Chris Looney captured an Asian giant hornet at the base of the nest on October 23. Looney gave the vile with the live hornet to Philip Bovenkamp, above, and his neighbor Stephanie DeJong to see up close.

Photo courtesy Philip Bovenkamp.