

2023 Surrey Asian Hornet Report for Surrey Beekeepers Association AGM

This report is submitted to inform the wider membership of the Surrey beekeepers associations of all the activity that the Asian Hornet co-ordinators have been undertaking, within our county, regarding mounting a defence against incursions of Asian hornet.

We are fortunate that we have suffered no incursions beyond 2 nests that were identified in the Oxted area and these were attended to by colleagues from Westerham Beekeepers.

Thanks from all Surrey beekeepers to their divisional Asian Hornet Leads, some of whom have stepped forward and some have stepped aside during the year due to a variety of other commitments, but have ensured a consistent representation and action when needed.

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Our focus therefore has been on 3 key activities

1. Ensuring beekeepers are well informed about Asian Hornet
2. Informing the public of the risks to the wider ecosystem presented by Asian hornet.
3. Monitoring for and attending potential sightings to confirm (or not) the presence of Asian hornet.

A review of 2023 Activity:

Spring – the county’s coordinators met for the first time in May and started working together under the leadership of Keith Mackie (Reigate)

Summer – As the numbers of nests found and the number of confirmed sightings grew to unprecedented numbers,- mainly in the south Kent region,- it became clear that we need to be proactive and our Regional Bee inspector, Stewart Westsmith advised us to take a more thorough approach to monitoring. The divisions collaborated to purchase a pallet of hornet bait and monitoring stations were set out in multiple locations across the wider Surrey area. NO Asian hornets were seen, and the monitoring was ended in the middle of November, at the end of the monitoring year when no further hornets are expected to be seen.

Autumn – Keith Mackie needed to step back from his role as county co-ordinator due to other commitments and Helen Worwood (Epsom) has kindly agreed to take on this role, and a smooth handover has already begun.

In the light of the shocking high numbers of nests found this year, a call to action was sent out to all divisions in October, asking for volunteers to step forward and help create, and be involved in the implementation of a comprehensive Public Awareness Campaign, which will target the whole of Surrey, the Southeast and beyond. At the Time of this report, end November, a team of about 30 volunteers have put themselves forward to be involved.

The Awareness Campaign team leads are, Laura Duke (Guildford) Stuart Gendall (Epsom) and Jonathan Brookhouse (Guildford) who have worked together to produce a comprehensive plan for 2024.

This Awareness Campaign is a huge and vital project and thank you to all those that put yourselves forward, together we can make an impact.

Alongside that project, the AH Teams in all divisions will also need more volunteers to monitor and potentially verify for next year. If the trend of high numbers continues next year, it is estimated that divisions will need at least double the current AHAT numbers. If you can give up some of your free time, you would be very welcome, please get in touch.

The Awareness Campaign Plan is being shared freely with other neighbouring counties that are interested to use it as a template. It is also being shared with the BBKA leadership. David Parker (Weybridge) and Jonathan Brookhouse are offering them support in the hope that BBKA will play a central role in the Awareness Campaign.

During November, several divisional AHATs, leads and co-ordinators attended a day with Hampshire beekeepers and there is further co-operative work being planned.

Winter -Planning ahead for 2024

We await the NBU report on nest analysis from the 70+nests destroyed this year. This will inform our approach to monitoring / trapping for spring queens.

We are developing plans for “Asian Hornet Roadshows” to further inform and educate the wider public about the nuisance and ecological impact this predator will have if it becomes established.

We are increasingly managing and influencing relationships with national organisations whose help and influence will be useful in the campaign against Asian hornet.

We are encouraging all divisions to have an Asian hornet recap meeting before the spring season gets under way.

We encourage all divisions to share the monthly AHAT newsletter, so we are all kept regularly informed and we encourage all members to read the newsletter

We continue to encourage members to undertake the Asian hornet e-learning and quiz on the BBKA website so that they can join the fightback!