

AH: Review of AH removal methods in Jersey October 2017

Having observed the *modus operandi* of the 'Hornet Squad' on 23/24 October 2017 I have the following observations to make.

The association of like-minded people in the endeavour of removing the invasive Asian Hornet (AH) is a very public spirited enterprise which is not only a rewarding exercise for those involved, but is providing a free and valuable public service.

The hornet squad are a band of beekeepers – the only people on the island who understand (or believe they understand) the nature of bees, wasps and hornets, and so are pre-disposed to tackle the thorny issue of AH control.

It would not be appropriate for a public servant, or a civil servant, to attempt control of these insects as they would be at a distinct disadvantage. So the authorities should be very grateful for the contribution the Jersey beekeepers are making in attempting the control of AH.

'Attempting' is the appropriate word, since in these early days (late 2017) there is a distinct lack of field information and understanding the nature and behaviour of these invasive insects. There has been liaison with the French with respect to appropriate protective suits and how to kill colonies way up in trees, but fieldwork on how AH behaves in Jersey is urgently required since it does not seem that AH behaviour is the same as in Jersey.

Like-for-like methodology is not always appropriate where the nature of the insect is different. The hornet squad needs to focus on their immediate problem.

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It should not be forgotten that the target species of AH are honeybees so there is real issue of loss of pollinators for crops – granted Jersey has fewer pollinated crops than decades before, but AH also eat many of the other pollinator species (of which there are 1500 species in the UK) and any loss of pollinators is a loss to insect biodiversity; Jersey relies on tourism, and the ‘green’ nature of Jersey is part of the reason why tourists visit; hornets eat flies, other bees, hoverflies, dragonflies and butterflies.

Without more field evidence at the current time there is no information to inform mitigation and the strategy going forward.

The scientific methods employed by Bob Hogge and deployed in a robust way will eventually result in a sensible plan for control of the AH, that can be rolled-out in Jersey and the rest of the UK as a model pro-active approach.

The current invasion appears to be permanent, with AH here to stay.

Bob’s pioneer work on lures for AH, and triangulation to find the AH nests is key to the success of the hornet squad, and the future understanding of the autecology of this insect on Jersey.

The quest for further scientific evidence is important, as some of these early nests should be saved intact where possible instead of being destroyed completely (this can sometime hamper speedy control methods). It was noted that two Jersey commercial pest controllers (not beekeepers) have been trained in France and now take over some control measures.

Working out the model approach for control of AH nests was evidenced on the day of removal on 23rd October, when the hornet squad sat down for hours to thrash out a strategy. That strategy saw the formulation of a Risk Assessment, sorting out individual roles, timings, having all the gear necessary for the evening / night work and alerting the neighbours and authorities (ambulance and honorary police). The evening was unsuccessful despite the hard work since equipment let them down. There needs to be plenty of Plan Bs for each measure, and contingencies.

Whilst the authorities are fully engaged with the Jersey beekeepers in tackling AH, it does seem to this observer that more funds should be made available for this increasing problem. It is acknowledged that that authorities have ‘public safety’ as their main focus of any assistance, but it was useful to know that they will be trying to protect public places, schools, parks etc as their priority. This is likely to be a growing trend. This was a lesson gained from the French where 900 nests have been destroyed. Funds should also be made to the emergency services who will need equipment so that they can actively deal with any emergency situation as it arises.

Altogether the exercise to remove AH nests seems to be in its infancy with the hornet squad working out their methodology by trial and error, and honing their skills to create an ideal method of tackling the AH.

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