



WASP **(*VESPULA VULGARIS*)**

BIOLOGY

Eleven species of true wasps are found in Europe, while only two; *Vespula vulgaris* and *Vespula germanica* can be described as widely distributed pest species. The hornet *Vespa crabro* also attracts a considerable amount of interest but is seldom sufficiently common to constitute a true pest. Various species of bees are often confused with wasps on the basis of their black and yellow colouring. Owing to their ability to sting and their fondness for sweet material feral honey bees occasionally achieve a similar pest status to wasps.

Both *Vespula vulgaris* and *Vespula germanica* over winter only as queens. The former is commonly found in houses in the spring and autumn as it is leaving and seeking a hibernation spot. *Vespula germanica* typically over winters under the bark on dead trees. Having emerged from hibernation the queen will start to construct the nest in a hole in the ground, a hollow tree or similar artificial structures such as birds nest boxes, attics etc. She will raise the first few workers by her own efforts and these workers will then take on enlarging the nest and caring for the immature stages to follow. Nest construction normally starts in earnest during June and the nest will reach a peak size in September of five to ten thousand workers. These workers will



normally forage up to 400m from the nest in search of food (insects, spiders and carrion) fluids (sap, nectar and fruit juices) and nest building materials (wood pulp).

The number of wasp colonies will vary considerably from year to year and from place to place. Peak densities of two nests per hectare have been recorded in "wasp years". In the autumn the queen seeks somewhere to hibernate while the rest of the colony dies out. Unlike honey bees, wasps never swarm.

PEST STATUS

Stings - The hazard of wasp stings is universal knowledge, very few people manage to avoid being stung at some time or another. In the UK around three people die each year from wasp stings, either as a result of respiratory obstruction following a sting in the mouth or throat or from anaphylactic shock.

Fruit Damage - Wasps chew through the skin of apples, pears, plums and other fruits in order to reach sweet pulp. When wasps are abundant such damage can be severe to the commercial grower as well as the private gardener.

Other Damage - Wasps and particularly hornets have been known to enter bee hives and eat the brood and honey, although this is fortunately not a widespread problem. Wasps chew wood to make pulp for their nests, where this occurs on, for example, garden furniture, timber cladding on houses, etc it is sometimes seen as a problem.

CONTROL

Although killing foraging wasps using contact sprays or baited traps, jam jars, etc will kill many workers it will seldom solve the problem. For maximum effect it is essential to find and treat the nest.

Following wasps leaving a food source may provide an indication of the direction of the nest. Ideally, nests should be treated in cool weather or early or late in the day when most wasps are resting quietly in the nest. To attempt to treat an active nest on a warm day is likely to provoke an aggressive counter attack. The simplest technique is to apply 10-20 grams of a proprietary wasp killing powder containing 5% carbaryl (obtainable from most hardware stores) directly into the nest hole using a teaspoon which may be tied to the end of a stick for convenience.

When it is impossible to tip the dust into the hole it may be blown in using the puffer container. Alternatively, nest entrances may be treated using a liquid insecticide applied from a sprayer or an aerosol spray can, in which case a pinstream nozzle should be used to soak the nest entrance and the area immediately surrounding it. Most products are fast acting; knock-down will occur within minutes of treatment, the majority of the wasps will be dead within an hour, while nests are normally completely eliminated by 24 hours after the treatment

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USE PESTICIDES SAFELY

COUNCIL PEST CONTROL SERVICES

Arrangements may be made for the Council's Pest Control Operator to treat a wasps nest at a fixed charge and appointments may be made by telephoning 01509 634628. If you are a householder in receipt of one of the income related benefits, namely; Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance (income related), Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit Pensions Credit or Employment Support Allowance (income based) you will be entitled to a free treatment by the Council. We will normally endeavour to respond to requests for service within five working days and aim to deal with 90% of requests within this time. However as wasps are a 'nuisance' insect rather than a public health pest you may have to wait a little longer subject to the demands on our service at this peak time of the year.

TREATMENT BY PRIVATE PEST CONTROL COMPANIES

Consult your Yellow Pages "Pest and Vermin Control Services" for details of your local private company.

For further information contact:

Pest Control Service
Environmental Health Services
Southfields
Southfield Road
Loughborough
Leics LE11 2TX
Tel: 01509 634628
E-mail:
occupational.health@charnwood.gov.uk