

News Article

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“Murder” Hornets – Should You Be Afraid to Go Outside?

I’ll have to admit that I was intrigued and more than a little suspicious when I first saw a post on social media about supposed “murder” hornets. Here in Indiana, should you be afraid to go outside when murderous Hymenoptera may be lurking about?

Purdue experts Elizabeth Barnes, Cliff Sadoff and Brock Harper recently authored an article in *Purdue Landscape Report* on Asian giant hornets (aka “murder” hornets, giant Asian wasp, giant Japanese hornet, or giant sparrow wasp). They said that the hornets have not been seen in Indiana, nor have they been seen in any states near us. “It is highly unlikely that there are any Asian giant hornets in Indiana,” they said. But, should we be worried? They said, “Yes and no.”

Scientists are currently only aware of introductions of Asian giant hornets (AGH) in British Columbia, Canada and in Washington State. We’re a long way from there.

The AGH originally came from tropical and temperate Asia. Adults are 1.5-2 inches long, with a large yellow or orange head and a brownish-black and yellow striped abdomen.

Common in Indiana, the baldfaced hornet has a black and white to pale-yellow head with a predominantly black abdomen. Our baldfaced hornet colonies are the ones that build the familiar large, grayish, pear-shaped nest that typically is suspended in trees or on sides of buildings. It looks somewhat like a large, gray papier-mache football to me. Also, baldfaced hornets are much smaller – five-eighths to three-quarters of an inch in length.

For size, somewhat comparable insects we have in Indiana to the AGH would be the cicada killer wasp and the European hornet. Both are large insects, although still not as large as AGH. Cicada killers are solitary wasps that do not form a large colony, and measure 1-1½ inches in length. It forms a single burrow in light, well-drained soils. You may have noticed a cicada killer burrow in a lawn, next to a tree, or next to a sidewalk or flower bed. The wasp resembles a fat, over-grown yellow jacket. It is most active around July 4. The European hornet is a large hornet, about 1-1¼ inches long, and is most active in the fall.

The Purdue authors stated that the name murder hornet is a misnomer. “They’re not malicious,” said the authors. “They’re just hungry, efficient hunters.”

The big concern in the United States is to bees and beekeepers. According to Washington State University scientists, a single Asian giant hornet can kill dozens of honey bees in minutes. A group of

30 hornets can destroy an entire hive of 30,000 bees in less than four hours. Washington State Department of Agriculture also warns that the stinger can penetrate typical beekeeping protective clothing.

Officials in Washington and in Canada are working hard to eradicate Asian giant hornets.

The Purdue authors stated, “Beekeepers are the most likely to encounter Asian giant hornets and should keep aware of the states in which this hornet has been found.” In general, you should use the same caution that you do with any stinging insect. “They are not generally aggressive but will defend their nests or the beehive they are attacking,” they said. “They generally nest in wooded areas in abandoned burrows in the ground.”

Find the original Purdue article at <https://www.purduelandscapereport.org/>. Learn more about Washington State Department of Agriculture’s dealings with AGH at: agr.wa.gov/hornets. If you snap a picture of what you believe to be an Asian giant hornet, contact the Purdue Extension office, or find the means of reporting the insects to authorities at reportInvasive.com.