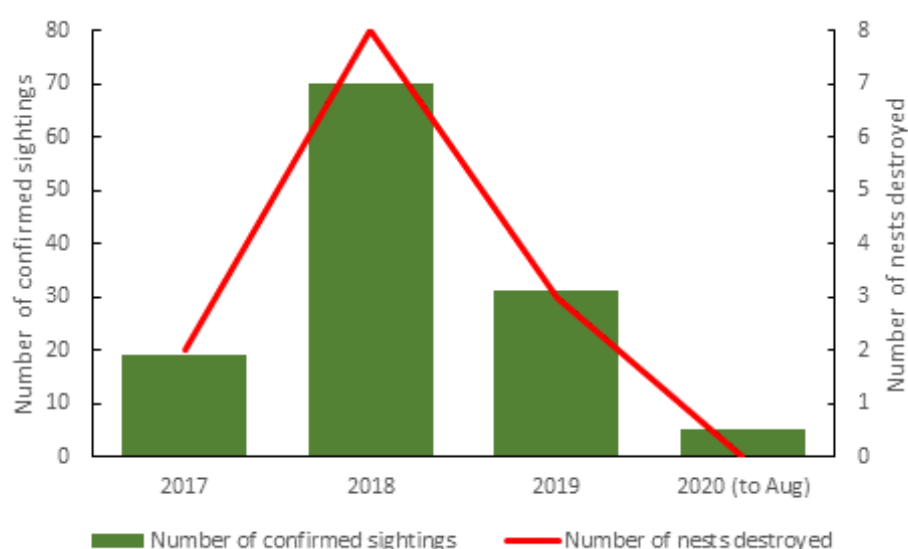




Asian Hornet Strategy: 2020 report

What were the numbers like this year?

The Asian Hornet Team are relieved to report the number of Asian hornet sightings and nests destroyed on Guernsey were well down compared to previous years.



For the second year running “Spring Queening” – the strategic trapping of queen hornets waking up from hibernation or flying into Guernsey from France, was organised during April-June. The island wide trapping was coordinated across the Bailiwick, with 270 traps deployed on Guernsey alone, and all being regularly monitored by volunteers.



Asian hornet captured in a greenhouse, Castel (18/05/20).



This spring, a total of 20 queen hornets were caught: Guernsey 3, Sark 4, Herm 0, Alderney 13. By the end of the autumn not a single nest was detected anywhere on Guernsey, Sark or Herm although a solitary one was found on Alderney and destroyed in late September.

Asian hornet nest treated and removed on Alderney (01/10/20).

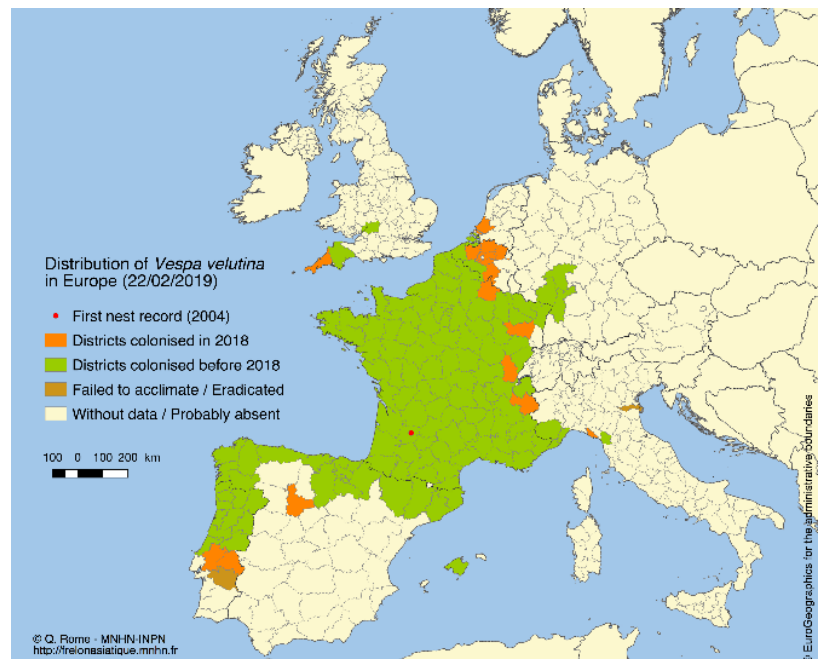
Is our Asian hornet strategy working?

The table below shows the steady decrease in both confirmed Asian hornet sightings and detected nests since numbers peaked back in 2018, which provides good evidence that our efforts to control hornet populations are paying off.

Guernsey	2017	2018	2019	2020
Possible sightings reported by the public	258	302	218	191
Confirmed positive sightings of hornets	20	70	15	6
Queens caught	0	4	10	3
Total nests - found & destroyed	2	8	3	0
Primary nests	0	0	1	0
Secondary nests	2	8	2	0

What is happening in France and beyond?

In Europe, Asian hornets are spreading out across the continent and becoming established in new areas at an estimated rate of 78km/year. Earlier this year, three nests were reported from Hamburg, Northern Germany. These hornets were shown to be related to French populations, and yet the nearest known European Asian hornets were 350km away. They were most likely transported inside vehicles/freight containers which only serves as another reminder of the high invasion potential of this species.

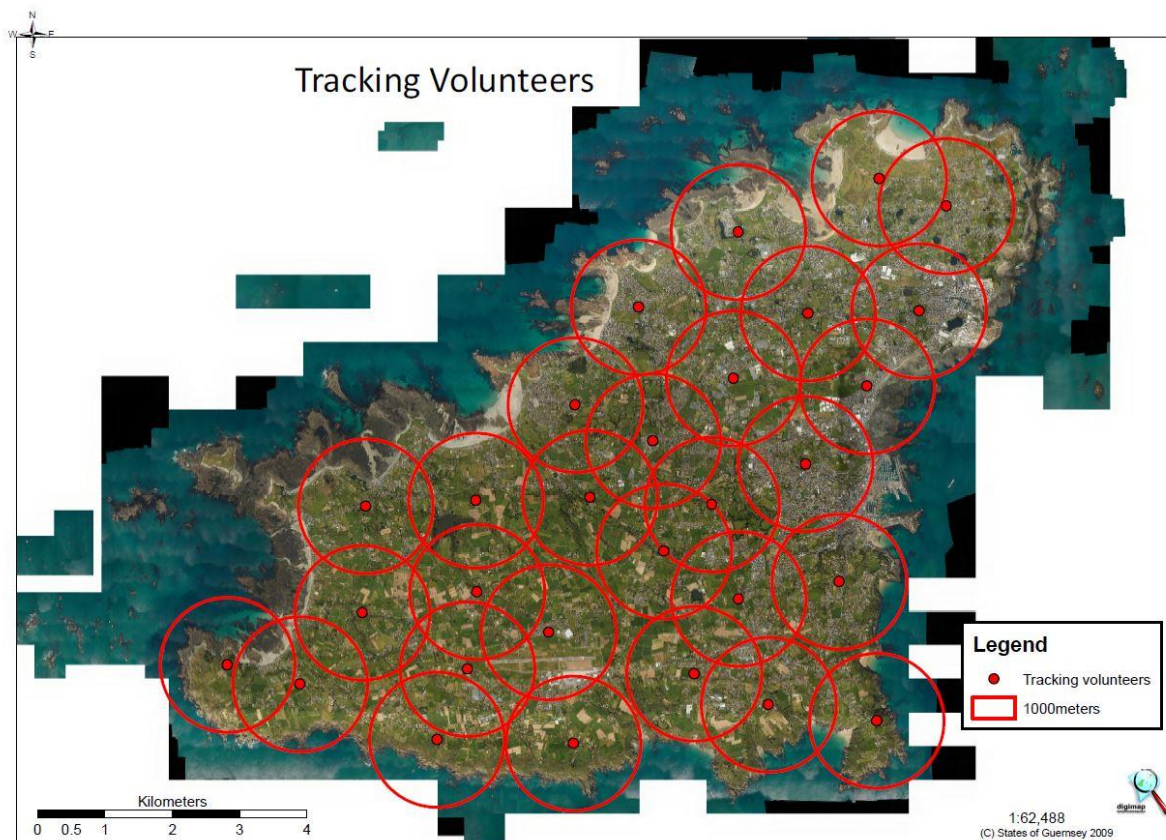


An ever present threat

While long-distance dispersal by humans is always a risk, the migration of Asian hornets into the Channel Islands is believed to be a regular occurrence each spring (and possibly autumn), with the natural dispersal of fertile queens, flying over from France. Guernsey is situated 27miles/43km from the French coast which is only a couple of hours away as the hornet flies. With populations still rising in France, the threats we face from this notorious pest will remain ever present.

A new approach is trialled

After a prolonged absence of confirmed hornet sightings over the summer-autumn months a new approach was trialled. The rationale was to ascertain if any nests had been missed by trying to entice foraging worker hornets to a sugary bait. Based on the usual foraging distances that worker hornets will travel from the nest, 30 monitoring bait stations were set up, evenly spaced using a grid map (pictured below) to provide island-wide coverage. Each one was looked after by volunteers from mid-August till the end of October. The work entailed topping up the liquid bait and observing the bait station for 15 minutes in the middle of the day. Despite daily checking across all locations not one of the volunteers reported seeing a visiting hornet. One of the 'wicking' style tracking stations is pictured on the right.



A late arrival in the autumn



The latest record of a hornet was from outside the beach café at Pembroke on 3 October 2020 (pictured left). We suspect this was a recently arrived queen hornet although it was not possible to confirm as it was not seen again. This sighting occurred after a period of 18 weeks since the last confirmed report back in June.

The importance of keeping the public engaged

We can never say for sure that we have no hornets on Guernsey. The problem is, when the numbers are low they are harder to spot so as a rule Asian hornets are generally under-reported, particularly in remote areas. This increases the risk that undetected nests will succeed in producing new queens in the autumn.

For this reason the Asian Hornet Team are continually working across the parishes and on neighbouring islands to engage with the public and raise awareness of the threats posed by this highly invasive pest.

‘It’s so important to encourage everyone to be vigilant when out and about; to notice something that looks unusual, to take a picture and report a possible hornet sighting straight away. These may seem simple steps that we can all follow and yet it has proved to be the most valuable weapon we possess when it comes to controlling Asian hornets’.

Francis Russell: – Project Coordinator, Asian Hornet Strategy.

Thank you to everyone who supported us this year in tracking down Asian hornets.