

Another Asian giant hornet found in northwestern Washington

May 29 2020, by Nicholas K. Geranios

A dead Asian giant hornet has been found in Washington state, and officials said Friday they were trying to learn if the honey bee predators have established colonies here.

The Washington state Department of Agriculture said it was the first confirmed sighting of an Asian giant hornet in Washington this year. The hornets are known as Murder Hornets in Japan, a name that state officials frown upon.

The hornet found this week was believed to be a queen, said Sven-Erik Spichiger, an entomologist for the agency.

"If we start finding workers we would know that colonies are established," Spichiger said. "We are concerned."

On Wednesday, a resident near the town of Custer in Whatcom County found the dead specimen while walking on a roadway and contacted WSDA.

State and federal labs confirmed that the specimen was an Asian giant hornet on Friday morning.

The hornet was detected near the location of a suspected Asian giant hornet bee kill in 2019. WSDA had already planned trapping in that area and will maintain that plan to try to find any colony that may be there, the agency said.

"At this time, there is no evidence that Asian giant hornets are established in Washington state or anywhere else in the United States," said Osama El-Lissy, an official with the federal Plant Protection and Quarantine program.

The latest find came just days after the government of British Columbia confirmed their first detection of the year in Canada near the town of Langley, B.C. That specimen was initially reported to authorities on May 15.

The Asian giant hornet is the world's largest hornet and a predator of honey bees and other insects. A small group of Asian giant hornets can kill an entire honey bee hive in a matter of hours.

The state of Washington received the first report of an Asian giant hornet last December from a resident near Blaine and later learned of another specimen in the area which Washington State University scientists had collected. These were the first-ever confirmed sightings of Asian giant hornet in the United States.

Since the specimens were confirmed in Washington late last year, state entomologists have been working with USDA to create trapping and eradication plans for the invasive pest in order to protect honey bees and the hundreds of crops in Washington that depend on those bees for pollination.

"It will take all of us working together to locate and eradicate Asian giant hornets from our state," Spichiger said.

Ordinary hornet and wasp traps will not catch Asian giant hornets as the holes are too small for Asian giant hornets to enter the traps, officials said.

Although not typically aggressive toward humans, Asian giant hornets do pose a human health threat. Their sting is more dangerous than that of local bees and wasps and can cause severe pain, swelling, necrosis, and, in rare cases, even death. Anyone who is allergic to bee or wasp stings should not approach or attempt to trap for Asian giant hornets.

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Citation: Another Asian giant hornet found in northwestern Washington (2020, May 29) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-05-asian-giant-hornet-northwestern-washington.html>

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