

# 'Murder hornets' invading U.S. are about to enter 'slaughter phase'

5 October 2020, by Christine Clarridge, The Seattle Times



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Just when you think Asian giant hornets' reputation couldn't get any worse, they're about to enter the "slaughter phase" when they attack in force, decapitate their victims and prey upon the brood for days.

Six "murder hornets," as they're sometimes called, have been caught, trapped or reported since Sept. 21 in the Blaine area, where they were first spotted in the U.S. last year.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture, or WSDA, is desperate to track down their [nest](#) and kill them before they go on their murderous rampage.

"Asian giant hornets this time of year start going into what we call the slaughter phase," said Sven-Erik Spichiger, a department entomologist. "They will visit apiaries, basically mark a hive, attack it in force, removing every bee from the hive, decapitating them, killing all of the workers and then spending the next few days harvesting the brood and the pupae out of the hive as a food source."

During a news conference on Facebook on Friday, Spichiger said the department believes it's dealing with a nest and that it's critical to find it and destroy it before the slaughter phase or new nests are made.

Spichiger said the first of the six hornets was captured Sept. 21 east of Blaine, in northeastern Whatcom County, by a family after the hornet repeatedly visited a paper wasp nest in the eaves of their home.

The family then decided to deploy a citizen trap and caught a second one, Spichiger said. Another department entomologist, Chris Looney, met with the landowner and was able to catch a third one alive in his net while they were talking.

WSDA tried to glue a radio tag on the live hornet, but the glue failed, got on the hornet's wings and prevented it from flying home and leading scientists to its nest, Spichiger said.

Karla Sapp, WSDA spokeswoman, found the fourth hornet dead in a street lamp. The fifth was caught in a "perfect" doorbell camera picture that shows the insect's large yellow head, and the sixth was reported by a person who found it dead on a porch, Spichiger said.

He said the department will be checking its live traps daily and is using a number of approaches to find the Asian giant hornets, including the use of lure hives that have been placed in Birch Bay—where the first Asian giant hornet to be trapped in Washington state was found in July—Custer and Blaine.

The Asian giant hornet, the world's largest at 2 inches, can decimate entire hives of honeybees needed for pollination and deliver painful stings to humans. As many as 50 people die each year from their stings in Japan.

Sapp said it's critical for every person to report every potential Asian giant [hornet](#) sighting every single time.

Spichiger urged Washington beekeepers with a [hive](#) under attack to call (360) 902-1880 and asked them to note what direction the hornets were flying.

"Track it, don't whack it," he said. "We want to take out the nest so we don't have more next year."

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