

# Alarmed About the “Murder Hornet”?

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*

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**PHOTO CREDIT: Scott Camazine**

**The Asian Giant Hornet is native to Asia and most commonly found in Japan and South Korea. The chance of Asian Giant Hornets invading Texas soon or at all is slim.**

What headline can possibly draw people away from their thoughts about partisan politics, the COVID-19 pandemic and other such matters? That would be “Murder Hornets”! I cannot think of a more sensationalized headline, so kudos to whomever came up with that attention grabber. Quite frankly, it makes me cringe each time I see it.

Over the past several weeks, news media across the nation released fear into many people in regard to the “Murder Hornet.” The name was inadvertently given to the insect, in an effort to get your attention. It seems to have worked. Due to much social media misinformation, I have received numerous inquiries about the Asian Giant Hornet.

There is always “The rest of the story,” as the famous Paul Harvey of radio use to say in his radio addresses. Hopefully we can clear up the mud that has been stirred up by misinformation regardless of where it came from.

In September, 2019, a foreign wasp known as the Asian Giant Hornet





arrived in Washington state and in British Columbia. It has yet to be determined how they arrived. Regardless of how it got there, the fact is: IT IS NOT IN TEXAS.

Rumors, now with social media, spread like wildfire. The news media has given the insect the name of “Murder Hornet.” The actual common name is the Asian Giant Hornet or called by its scientific name, *Vespa mandarinia*. The Asian Giant Hornet is native to Asia and most commonly found in Japan and South Korea.

In Texas, we already have a lot of stinging wasps and bees in our Texas landscapes. There are 3 characteristics that make the Asian Giant Wasp get a lot of attention. Their size (1½ inches long and queens up to 2 inches) reportedly makes it one the largest wasp in the world. Secondly, the way they can sting repetitively with their ¼-inch long stinger and given its size it is safe to conclude that it is extremely painful especially since it injects a large amount of neurotoxin. Lastly, would be their large mandibles and a tough exoskeleton that makes it a formidable foe when it comes to other insects. The main concern is they prey upon honey bees (see photo).

According to Dr. Mike Merchant, Professor and Extension Urban Entomologist with Texas A&M University “The bottom-line is that the chance of Asian Giant Hornets invading Texas soon or at all is slim, given that at the moment only a few wasps have been found in only one county in the far northwest corner

of the U.S. Also, hornets are less likely to be transported by humans than many other exotic insects, like fire ants or emerald ash borers.”

As with any social insect, hornets live and survive in colonies, not as individuals. So, an individual wasp that accidentally flies into a vehicle and gets transported cannot survive away from its colony. The only way to spread the wasp is by transporting an entire subterranean nest or to transport a previously mated queen (which would be a rare occurrence), capable of starting a new nest on her own. Currently, Texas does not seem to have the ideal conditions or habitat for Asian Giant Wasps.

Besides the Washington State Department of Agriculture, the United States Department of Agriculture, neighboring state Departments of Agriculture and entomologists from all over the nation are involved and aware of the threat. All these agencies are monitoring, setting traps and studying the insect to isolate and hopefully eradicate it as soon as possible.

In Texas, at the request of Gov. Greg Abbott, a specialized task force led by Texas A&M AgriLife experts is spearheading an Asian Giant Hornet initiative to protect Texas citizens, agriculture and honey. The initiative will involve the diverse expertise and knowledge base that exists within Texas A&M AgriLife to collaborate with federal partners and extension agents across the country to protect our state and the global food supply.

I’ve already received calls from owners of two local pest control companies asking whether the Asian Giant Hornet has arrived in Texas. Both owners reported that their clients stated that they were concerned that the giant wasps in their home landscapes matched the description reported for Asian Giant Hornets. Consider this update a heads-up in case you are worried that you might have Asian Giant Hornets in your home landscape.

We already have our own giant size wasps that are typically encountered during summer. It’s known as the Cicada Killer Wasp. This wasp is native to Texas and is the largest wasp occurring in the state. While Cicada Killer Wasp can be confused with Asian Giant Hornets, our Cicada Killer Wasps are slightly smaller than Asian Giant Hornets but more importantly it is mild-mannered and not aggressive.

Cicada Killer Wasps are solitary wasps and are considered beneficial because they hunt cicadas to utilize as food for their offspring.

It is highly unlikely that the Asian Giant Hornet will become established in Texas. There have been no confirmed sightings anywhere near Texas. So, let’s call it what it is, and just remember the Asian Giant Hornet, *Vespa mandarinia*, is NOT IN TEXAS.

