Wasps and Bees Information Leaflet

Wasps

Common wasps and German wasps are the species most likely to be encountered in Great Britain, less common is the larger European wasp.

Wasps are fairly easy to identify as they have pronounced yellow and black bands on their bodies, which are relatively hairless when compared to other similar insects such as bees.

Wasps do not carry any diseases and it is extremely rare for them to do any damage to building structures during their summer nest building. However, they are disliked immensely due to their painful sting.

Life Cycle

The young queens leave the nest at the end of the summer, mating with the male wasps that, incidentally, do not possess a sting. Then the queens select suitable locations to hibernate for the winter. All the remaining wasps and the old nest die. In late spring the queens emerge from hibernation and can be seen on sunny days searching for a suitable place to build their nest. Such places as lofts, garden sheds, bird boxes or holes in the ground are all commonly used.

The nest is made from pulped wood fibres and in its very early stages resembles a grey golf ball. However, once the young worker wasps emerge, nest building increases so very soon the nest grows to the size of a football and some may reach one metre across! Activity carries on all summer until once again the young queens and male wasps leave the nest.
Control

If the wasps are not bothering people nests can be simply left and they will die in the winter. The nest can then be safely removed or left in place as it will not be re-used.

In the early part of the summer nests about the size of a golf ball or tennis ball can be easily crushed while wearing a stout gardening glove.

**Remember that it can be dangerous to attempt to tackle a wasp nest without either the experience or the proper protective clothing.**

Ideally the services of a professional pest controller should be employed. There are number of local operators in the area who can be found in service directories or local advertising papers and it is advisable to seek quotations from two to three different companies. As a precaution, residents should ensure that the chosen company is registered with the National Pest Control Technicians’ Association or the British Pest Control Association. This does not guarantee quality of service but does give confidence of a minimum level of qualification and provides a means of seeking redress if the service received is not considered satisfactory.

Self Treatment

It is possible for people to treat wasp nests and there are an increasing number of products available in hardware stores and garden centres that can be used by householders. It is essential that the manufacturers’ instructions are read and always followed when using any products purchased.

- If the nest can be easily accessed, as in the picture above, there are now a range of products that shoot a “foam” onto the nest which will kill the wasps and can be used from a distance.
• If the nest cannot be seen but access where the wasps are landing before walking into the nest can, this area may be treated with a crawling insect powder which will then be tracked over 2-3 days into the nest and kill it.

• It is possible, if a length of hollow tubing is available, to fill this with insecticidal powder and blow it into the appropriate area by using a pump attached to the other end. If this is done care must be taken to ensure a good seal on any joints to avoid getting powder onto the skin. Good hand washing practices must be followed.

• It is always advisable that people carry out any DIY wasp treatment just as dark is falling as wasps are generally less active at this time.

Honey Bees

Honey bees differ from wasps, being brown and orange in colour and having furry bodies.

They are usually very docile and will only become aggressive if severely provoked. During May and June bees do tend to swarm when the old queen leaves the hive with a few thousand of her workers in search of a new nesting site. Sometimes a swarm will land on the bough of a tree, 'resting' whilst the scout bees are searching for a new home. If a swarm is encountered do not panic! The swarm nearly always moves off of its own accord.

Control

The Council does not encourage the destruction of any type of bees as they are considered very beneficial to the environment. If a swarm of bees does become a problem, the services of a local beekeeper should be sought.

Mortar Bees

Mortar bees generally appear in late spring. They are harmless and of no danger to people or property.
Many species of solitary bees and wasps make nests by burrowing into earthy banks and, of these, a few will occasionally use crevices in walls. Only one species, Osmia rufa, is commonly found nesting in mortar between brickwork and this habit has earned it the common name of mortar bee.

Osmia rufa is similar in size to a hive bee and is bronze/black in colour covered with orange hairs.

The bees spend the winter hibernating as adults in the nest and emerge between April and June. Nest building commences in late May to June and it is during this period that the nuisance is caused. The nesting site may be in soil or old, soft mortar, normally in ready made crevices, and there is little evidence to indicate that they will actually cause damage, particularly in sound mortar. There have been several dramatic reports in the press, which suggest otherwise but these have not been fully substantiated.

The nest is made up of 10-20 cells, arranged in a linear fashion, divided by walls made of saliva mixed with soil. Each cell is stocked with honey/pollen food, an egg is laid and it is then sealed off before work begins on the next one. When all cells are completed the nest is sealed with a more substantial end wall to protect it. Development takes place within each cell and adults emerge from the pupae in September or October but remain inside the nest till the following spring.

The bees are not aggressive and will only sting under extreme provocation.

**Prevention and control**

Since they almost exclusively nest in soft or damaged mortar the best method of control is to re-point with new mortar. Pointing is generally best carried out during late summer or autumn since this avoids both frost and the activities of bees.

Use of insecticides is discouraged and should only be used in extreme circumstances. If the pointing work can only be done in spring an insecticide solution should be injected into the gallery entrances, and the wall sprayed with the same solution after pointing to prevent attack on the mortar before it fully hardens. Emulsion or powder suspension insecticides approved as general purpose sprays for flying insects under the Control of Pesticides Regulations (as amended) are suitable. Remember to always read the label before using any product and to follow the instructions.

**Useful Link**

Kent Bee Keepers' Association
http://www.kentbee.com/