

Hornets are heading this way!

Well not exactly.

Until recently I had never seen a Hornet. I always presumed that I had never lived in the right areas to see them - those areas being woodlands in South and South-east England. So I was quite excited to see one of these impressive beasts foraging in the area around the pond at Pembrey Country Park a few years ago. And this year I spotted another one when visiting Picton Castle, in amongst the bird cages. I asked one of the people there if they regularly saw them but she didn't know. Then a few days later there was a post on the Pembrokeshire Bird Blog to say that, while looking for Ospreys at Picton Point, the writer had come across a Hornet nest in a tree in the nearby woods.

A bit of investigation revealed that Hornets appear to be moving into Pembrokeshire. Annie Haycock (local fount of Pembs wildlife knowledge) said:

"We've had hornets in Pembrokeshire for the past few years, with sightings becoming more common. Records are scattered, probably more in the Picton area than anywhere else. I've seen them here at Landshipping, also at Blackpool Mill, and on the West Williamston reserve."

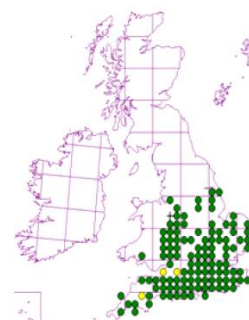
Even more recently I had a close-up view of a Hornet in my moth trap when trapping by our caravan near Machynlleth. Both Pembrokeshire and Machynlleth are well outside the published range of Hornets - see the map to the right:

However there is no need to panic. Hornets live in wooded areas so they are unlikely to be attracted to our rather sparsely tree-ed peninsula. And even if they were, although they are large, they are quite docile, except when near the nest. They are also not attracted to jam sandwiches, though are they attracted to light at night, as they fly at night unlike wasps.

So how do you identify a Hornet? Well it is large, slightly bigger than a queen wasp. And it is mostly brown, with yellow and black at the back end. It is not as stripy-black-and-yellow as a wasp. They make quite a loud buzz when flying.

The Hornet we should all be on the lookout for is the Asian Hornet, which is a serious bee predator. It is spreading over Europe but has not yet been reported in Wales. It is very dark in colour and quite unlike a normal Hornet..

Rosemary Royle



UK distribution of the Hornet, *Vespa crabro*

