

## European Hornets *Vespa crabro* bark-stripping young Ash tree stems in Monk Wood Nature Reserve

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Whilst walking through Monk Wood on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2016 we noticed a lot of Hornet activity, especially around an ash coppice with two to three years' growth. It was a warm, sunny day and in the sheltered rides of the woodland the temperatures were high for early October. We could see that several Hornets, including one very large queen were crawling erratically around the stems of the ash. Closer examination showed that some of the stems had been ring-barked to a length of several centimetres (01) and that hornets were responsible, tearing pieces from the young bark and discarding them to reveal the sap which they consumed enthusiastically (02, 03). Even our close approach (very close in the case of Nicki's camera) failed to disrupt the feeding frenzy. But this was obviously more than just feeding, the Hornets appeared to be intoxicated and in need of another 'fix'. After a few minutes watching the fascinating activity, we moved on leaving the high insects to their drug picnic.



01. Ash stem damaged by Hornets 02.10.16 Monk Wood. N. J. Farmer.

So what was going on? It was early October, the time when Hornet nests break down and the individual insects find their own way. They will often feed on fallen fruit, for an alcoholic buzz from the fermenting fruit similar to the effect that the Hornets were getting from the sap. We were interested to find out if this behaviour is unusual but it was not easy finding information. An internet search failed to reveal much information, although there were a couple of reports from America where the European Hornet has become naturalised, giving details of tree species affected by this behaviour and the preference for three to five year old growth. There was also a report on the UK Safari website with similar observations to ours.

An email exchange with Harry Green resulted in two articles from *Worcestershire Record* (Green 2011 and Harrison 2013). Both of these articles include photos showing the same behaviour and both were from ash trees. So does this behaviour extend to other tree species in Worcestershire? And is this common behaviour?



02. Hornet feeding on Ash stem. N. J. Farmer.



03. Hornet feeding on Ash stem. N. J. Farmer

### References

- Green, H. 2011. Hornet stories: Hornet stripping bark and also catching a fly. *Worcestershire Record* 30: 33
- Harrison, P. 2013. Hornets stripping ash bark. *Worcestershire Record* 35:18
- Santamour, F.S. Jr. and Greene, A. 1986. European Hornet Damage to Ash and Birch Trees. *Journal of Arboriculture* 12(11):273. Available at: [joa.isa-arbor.com/request.asp?JournalID=1&ArticleID=2117&Type=2](http://joa.isa-arbor.com/request.asp?JournalID=1&ArticleID=2117&Type=2) (Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2016).
- UK Safari website <http://www.uksafari.com/hornets4.htm>.

### Images

01. Ash stem damaged by Hornets 02.10.16 Monk Wood. N. J. Farmer.
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