



Baldfaced Hornet

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Description

The baldfaced hornet is a large, black and white hornet up to 1 inch (25.4 mm) in length. It is black and white in color with a mostly white head or face (Figs. 1 and 2). It is widely distributed in Virginia.

Hymenoptera: Vespidae, *Dolichovespula maculata* (L.)



Figure 1. Head of baldfaced hornet. (Joseph Berger, Bugwood.org)



Figure 2. Baldfaced hornet on ripe tree fruit. (J.A. Payne, USDA ARS, Bugwood.org)

Habitat

The oval-shaped nests are often quite large and are usually found attached to limbs of trees (Fig. 3). The nests are constructed of the same paper-like material as that of other wasps (yellowjackets). They differ a great deal from other wasp nests in being enclosed in a thick "paper" envelope. There is a single opening at the lower end of the nest and a few hornets always guard this. Nests are always abandoned at the end of the season.



Figure 3. Baldfaced hornet nest in a tree. (J.A. Payne, USDA ARS, Bugwood.org)

Life Cycle

The worker hornets are killed by frosts in the fall. Fertilized females (future queens) hibernate in barns, attics, and other sheltered places. Old nests are not reused the following year. After successfully

overwintering, each fertilized queen starts a new nest by herself in a new location in the spring.

Type of Damage

Hornets are beneficial insects that prey upon flies and caterpillars. Unfortunately, hornets can be a potential health hazard to people who are allergic to their stings.

Control

Hornet nests located in trees, lawns, or buildings away from the normal activity of people should not be considered dangerous. There is no need to remove these nests. If a nest is located in an area where people might be stung by the hornets, then precautions should be taken while removing the nest.

Wear protective clothing against being stung. Work at night when the temperature is low and it is fully dark; the hornets will have returned to the nest and be less active at that time. Use a red light to locate the nest as hornets cannot see red light very well. Stand with the wind at your back to avoid getting the insecticide on you. Use a wasp and hornet spray that jets from a safe distance. Spray the nest directly, starting with the entrance hole if at all possible. Saturate the nest thoroughly. Never use gasoline and/or fire to destroy a hornet nest.

Revised

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