

International project "Before it's too late - the Asian hornet"

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" Education, training and capacity building in beekeeping and civil defence"

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The Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina nigrithorax*) was accidentally introduced to France in 2004 with the import of ceramics from China. It is now present in the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, and north-eastern Germany.

The aim of the project "Before it's too late - the Asian hornet" is to prepare for the possible introduction of the invasive Asian hornet *Vespa velutina nigrithorax* in Central Europe.

The Secondary Vocational School, Pod Bánošom in Banská Bystrica is the coordinator. The project partners are The Working Society of Beekeepers CZ, z. s. (from the Czech Republic), the ECODESIGN company GmbH (from Austria) and ApiSaveurs SARL (from France). This project runs from November 2021 to November 2023.

There are various reasons why the invasion of the Asian hornet is of concern. Its ability to adapt and establish populations in new areas is extremely high, causing in many cases considerable damage to honeybee colonies, orchards and vineyards, and having a negative impact on biodiversity. Moreover, the Asian hornet, unlike the European hornet (*Vespa crabro*), builds its nests practically everywhere close to human dwellings, and defends them aggressively when disturbed. The nests can be up to 1 meter large, and reach up to 70 cm in diameter. A single colony of Asian hornets will rear 300 to 500 queens, which disperse to new areas for further reproduction.

French scientists have developed a model of the distribution of this invasive species based on its actual presence in Europe. This model shows that Asian hornets can advance 100 km per year, and move more to the north than to the south of Europe, possibly due to the water shortages in southern European countries. In France, the nests of this predator are even found in mountain areas, at an altitude of 1500 metres.

It is not possible to predict when the Asian hornet will naturally arrive in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Austria, but climate warming and intensive transport of goods, might play an important role on its spread. These have been main drivers for the introduction of the Asian hornet in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany in the recent years.

The project partners gathered and studied the most up to date available information on the Asian hornet, and reached out to experts in countries like France, to learn more about their experience in dealing with this species. A dedicated training session with beekeepers, rangers and firefighters took place in France, focusing on the monitoring, prevention and destruction of nests of *Vespa velutina*. This first-hand experience and new knowledge confirmed to the partners the importance to prepare key personnel beforehand, as well as the need to secure financial and material resources to effectively deal with the arrival of the Asian hornet before it is too late.

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The experts from France who delivered this training to the project partners strongly recommended to take advantage of the time available without the Asian hornets in our territories, in order to prepare a solid response plan to deal with an invasion. The French experts particularly welcomed the serious interest of the project partners on this issue, and the commitment to learn and take actions.

Within the framework of this ERASMUS+ project, the partners have also developed numerous outputs, which include multi-lingual documents such as the Technical Manual about the Asian hornet, the Asian hornet information leaflets, and the dedicated project website: blesabee.online.

On 15 January 2023, an international webinar for German-speaking beekeepers, representatives of beekeeping organisations, and experts from scientific institutions focusing on the Asian hornet. Dr. Wolfgang Wimmer from the Austrian project partner ECODESIGN company engineering & management consultancy GmbH presented the international ERASMUS+ project **"Before it's too late - the Asian hornet"**, and then invited Dr. Lukas Seehausen, entomologist and expert from CABI Switzerland on invasive species to deliver a keynote presentation on the Asian hornet, its biology, its impacts on apiculture, the plans and the possible measures to reduce and avoid these impacts. Around 200 participants attended this successful webinar, and received the slides of both presentations, and access to download the project's Technical Manual about the Asian hornet in German, available in the project's website.

On 23 February 2023, the **international conference "Before it's too late - the Asian hornet"** took place in Prague, impeccably organized by the Czech project partner Working Society of Beekeepers CZ z. s. This was the first international conference with a Slovak and Czech focus, with regards to the invasion of this honeybee predator. It included the participation of the project partners from Slovakia, France and Austria, as well as scientists, veterinarians, beekeepers and firefighters who presented their specific perspectives, capacities and roles when developing response action plans. These inputs were then broadly discussed in a panel session with questions and answers. This successful event engaged simultaneously 100 participants from various interested groups in the plenary session on-site, and more than 190 participants online. This demonstrates the keen interest of various socio-professional groups on the potential incursion of the Asian hornet in other European countries. The project partners have also prepared and released a 80-page long Handbook in Czech language about the biology, monitoring and control of the Asian hornet, as well as an information leaflet, which were distributed at the conference and are also available in the project's website: blesabee.online.

Recent articles about the Asian hornet were prepared and published by the project partners in the beekeeping magazine *Moderní včelař*, in the editions 11/2021 (<https://www.modernivcelar.eu/8601-stop-vespa-velutina-driv-nez-bude-pozde>), and 11/2022 (<https://www.modernivcelar.eu/8886-jak-na-srsen-asijskou>).

A special edition was also released in 1/2023: <https://www.modernivcelar.eu/8953-driv-nez-bude-pozde>.



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These project outputs and effective dissemination actions are mobilizing key actors, such as the State Veterinary and Food Administration of the Slovak Republic, which already established dialogue and coordination with representatives of municipal regions and the State Nature Conservancy and other interested groups i.e., Forest rangers, wine growers, fruit growers, and researchers at universities, to prepare a procedure for response in case of Asian hornet invasion in Slovakia. This is an important milestone of this ambitious project.



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