



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

Invasion of the giant bee snatchers!

The Xerces Society, one of the leading world-wide insect conservation organizations, put on a four-hour Bumble Bee Atlas webinar a couple of weeks back. Right in the middle of it, the presenter, Professor Rich Hatfield, paused in his recitation on bumble bees and placed an illustration of the Asian giant wasp on the screen, saying: "This is *not* one of our local bumble bees, it is the "murder wasp" that's hit the headlines recently. The reason I put this in my program is because I have heard of misinformed people killing our native bumble bees, thinking they are the infamous invader, the Asian yellow-faced wasp."

Please, Good People, be sure of what you are killing

before you do it. Our native bumble bees are among the most important plant pollinators on this beautiful old Earth we call home. They have enough trouble staying alive without being killed because they are being mistaken for the alien Asian giant wasp.

As near as I can discover, about 15 of these giant invaders have been observed in the USA proper, and that was up near Tacoma, Washington. If a group somehow got trapped in a shipping container in the home range of these giants, and then got loose when they arrived in the Seattle docks, they could have flown to the Tacoma area, but...

Entomologists at Washington State University (WSU) are looking into the sudden appearance of these giant wasps, *Vespa mandarinia*. The invaders are as long as a child's little finger — the world's largest wasps — and they are fearsome-looking creatures.

They have a sting that can kill humans if one is stung multiple times, earning them their nickname, "murder wasps." Beekeepers in the area of discovery have reported piles of dead bees with their heads ripped off, an alarming sight and apparently the sign of the giant wasp's actions. Obviously, the U.S. doesn't need another factor endangering our native pollinators and

the honey business.

Back in their home range, these monsters are found in the forests and low mountains of eastern and southeast Asia. They live in dens in the ground (as do our native bumble bees), and feed on large insects, including native wasps and the European honey bees, which they are devastating in Japan.

The newest report on the wasp's presence in the U.S. came in at the end of May from the little town of Custer, Washington, near the British Columbia border. The monstrous insect was found dead and has been reported by WSU to be a mated queen, which to me, as a former bee-keeper, spells bad news. She may have come from a colony of her own, or — worse news — she may have come from a colony already spreading out and she was looking for a new place to build a colony.

If so, she may have sisters out looking for the same thing...

While they are not usually aggressive towards humans, they can be if provoked, claim WSU scientists. Their stingers are big and painful, and inject a potent neurotoxin.

So, what do you do if you spot an Asian giant wasp? I would call our local county health department (541-322-7400). If the insect is dead



PHOTO COURTESY THE XERCES SOCIETY

This is the dreaded Asian wasp.

or in pieces please do all you can to obtain the specimen for further study and identification. No matter how loathsome it may appear, please do not dispose of it;

save it in a jar.

The last thing we want to see happen is for these huge invaders to get their feet on the ground — literally — and reproduce.



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

This is not; it is one of our 30 species of treasured native bumble bees! Please treat our native bees kindly, and get to know them.

We've Gone Blue

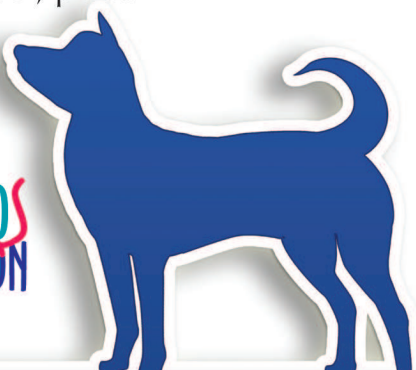
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