

# BAVBC European Wasp meeting

at the Braidwood Servicemen's Club on 6 September 2023.

## **Guest speakers: Michael Squires of Euro Wasp Control and Sue Murray and Judy Knowles of the Braidwood European Wasp Offensive.**

Michael told the meeting that the European Wasp season is being extended by the warming climate, meaning that the wasps are hibernating for shorter periods. The queens, which are already fertilised, are now leaving hibernation and looking to set up new nests. Within the next few months those nests will be well established with thousands of workers out foraging.

Now is the time to set lure traps, which the wasps can enter but can't escape, in an attempt to catch these queens before they start nests.

Later traps are needed that contain an attractant and a "poison" that the worker wasps will carry back to the nests to poison the larvae. Only contractors with chemical certificate can provide this bait.

If a nest is found in the ground – usually this is just a hole about the size of a sink plug – it can be poisoned by a contractor, such as Euro Wasp Control. The poisons and baits they use are not poisonous to other insects and animals.

It is extremely dangerous to try to deal with a nest yourself. European Wasps can sting multiple times and, when threatened, release a pheromone that calls in other wasps to help. They will attack en masse and the stings can be fatal for some people. For the same reason you should never swat at a wasp. Michael wears a full protective suit when dealing with nests and tells of how he can quickly become covered with attacking wasps, at times covering his whole visor.

The wasps, as natives to the northern hemisphere, prefer non-native plants and trees, such as pine trees.

They attack - and sometimes kill - any thing they perceive to be a threat or even competition to a food or water source. So for example they could attack a dog trying to drink from a water bowl or eat dog food outside. They have also been known to attack cattle and horses drinking from their water sources. They will eat any rubbish, food, dead animals etc left out.

Michael advised of a number of good practices for businesses - and others - to help reduce food sources for wasps. (There are more listed in the information pamphlet)

- \* Keep rubbish areas clean
- \* Make sure bins have self-closing lids so they don't remain open.
- \* Use bin liners and bags to help prevent a build up of sticky residue inside bins.
- \* Clean bins regularly
- \* Remove any untreated wood near your house (the wasps use it to build nests), if the wood is part of decking etc stain it, seal it or paint it to deter the wasps.
- \* Keep an eye on firewood piles - a favourite nesting place for wasps.

There is a particular risk for businesses that sell food and drink. Wasps will crawl into drink cans and, if accidentally swallowed, their stings can cause life-threatening allergic reactions.

In Braidwood's main street, European Wasps may be attracted to parked cars, feeding on dead bugs on the grilles.

The advice for businesses was to be proactive. Ignorance is not a defence in regard to liability. If you are aware of a risk and take steps to mitigate that risk then you have not been negligent in your duty of care to customers and employees. The speakers at the meeting were not medical or legal experts and advised people to seek further advice. This information is for guidance only.

- \* If a customer or employee is stung by European Wasps and has difficulty in breathing you should call 000 immediately. Some people will suffer anaphylaxis, a severe allergic reaction that can be life-threatening.
- \* Even if a person does not show an immediate allergic reaction, they should be monitored for several hours.
- \* You should apply ice to the site of the sting immediately to help reduce pain and swelling.
- \* Similarly monitor any pets that have been stung for signs of distress as they can also suffer anaphylaxis.

Michael suggested that businesses should keep an EpiPen (an epinephrine auto-injector used to treat life-threatening, allergic emergencies) in their first aid kits to enable a customer or employee who has been stung by a wasp to inject themselves in the case of an allergic reaction.

Sue Murray, representing the Braidwood European Wasp Offensive group, reminded the meeting that the council will deal with any European wasp nests on public land, that includes along creeks, in parks and on roadsides. To report a nest to the council call **1300 735 025**.

The group had secured some funding from the Bendigo Bank to provide educational material and information to better help the population to understand the magnitude of the problem and to know how to deal with a nest. They are planning a letterbox drop to distribute an information pamphlet (which you can find a link to on the news item).

The group had paid for some traps that had already been placed in “hotspots” around the town and is offering to subsidise the purchase of some traps on private land. They have a limited number of these traps available for urban residents in Braidwood at cost price (\$40 for season). Register your interest by emailing [Braidwoodwaspoff@gmail.com](mailto:Braidwoodwaspoff@gmail.com)

Michael said he has been mapping the area around Braidwood and villages where there has been high wasp activity. He conducts a survey of properties before setting traps. Each trap can attract wasps in an area of around 100m-300m. The bait in a trap is effective for around a month.

Euro Wasp Control is offering BAVBC members a 25% discount on traps paid as you go or 30% for a whole season service. They can be contacted on **0487 870 109**.