

A Season of Wasps: What It Means for Scottish Beekeepers

It's been a good year for wasps. With the warm, dry conditions this summer, wasp populations have thrived across much of Scotland. While many people see wasps simply as a nuisance, their presence in such high numbers also brings important implications for beekeepers—and not all of them are bad.

As the season progresses and natural food sources dwindle, wasps often turn their attention toward beehives, drawn by the scent of honey and the chance to raid weaker colonies. This can lead to stress, robbing behaviour, and even colony losses. However, wasps are not merely pests—they play a valuable ecological role. They are effective pollinators, and many species are voracious predators of aphids and other garden pests, offering natural support to gardeners and even beekeepers by reducing the number of pests feeding on our flowering plants.

That said, the immediate concern is hive security. With wasp numbers on the rise, protecting your colonies without resorting to lethal measures should always be the first step before taking lethal measures.

First Steps: Preventing Wasp Intrusion

There are several actions beekeepers can take right now to reduce the risk of wasp attacks without trapping or killing them:

- 1. Reduce Entrance Size**
Narrow hive entrances allow bees to defend more easily against intruders. Use entrance reducers or a strip of foam to close gaps, particularly on smaller or weaker colonies.
- 2. Keep Colonies Strong**
Wasps tend to target vulnerable colonies. Combine weak hives where appropriate and ensure all are queenright and well-fed.
- 3. Remove Attractants**
Avoid spilling syrup or leaving exposed comb, honey, or feed around the apiary. Returning wet supers after extraction or feeding sugar syrup can be done in the evening when wasps are less active. Clear away dead bees and keep the area tidy.
- 4. Use Wasp Screens or Mesh Guards**
Specially designed wasp guards or screens can be fitted over entrances to allow bees through while confusing or blocking wasps.
- 5. Feed Inside the Hive**
If feeding is required, do so with internal feeders rather than open ones, which can attract wasps from afar.

When Prevention Isn't Enough

Sometimes, despite best efforts, wasps persist—and can pose a serious threat to the health of your bees. In these cases, more direct control measures may be needed to protect your colonies.

While it's always preferable to work with nature when we can, our priority must be the health and survival of the bees under our care. If non-lethal methods fail, selective trapping near hives may be warranted to reduce local pressure. Always use traps responsibly and avoid placing them directly at hive entrances to prevent confusing or harming your own bees.

A Balanced Perspective

As we move through late summer and into autumn, the balance between supporting ecosystems and protecting our livestock becomes ever more delicate. It's important to remember that wasps, like bees, are part of a broader ecological web. They are not the enemy—they are fellow pollinators, pest-controllers, and participants in the cycle of life.

So, while it has been a good season for wasps—and therefore a challenging one for some beekeepers—this moment also invites us to think holistically about our role as stewards, not just of bees, but of the wider natural world.

Let's remain vigilant, act wisely, and above all, continue supporting one another as a community of beekeepers facing both the gifts and challenges of a thriving natural season.

Scottish Government Bee Health Team