WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT
BY DEPUTY M.R. SCOTT OF ST. BRELADE
QUESTION SUBMITTED ON MONDAY 9th OCTOBER 2023
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 16th OCTOBER 2023

Question

"Will the Minister advise whether he, or his department, are aware of any solution, including biological solutions such as genetic engineering, that has been effective or could be considered as feasible in effectiveness, to counter the spread of Asian hornet populations; and will he further advise what research has been undertaken in this area?"

Answer

The Natural Environment directorate at I&E has cultivated significant links to personnel involved in Asian hornet control across Europe and is secretariat and chair of a European Asian Hornet Discussion Group focussing on any and all possible angles and elements of practical control of this highly successful invasive species. The group includes researchers, beekeepers, entomologists, pest controllers and government officers. Through this group, additional research and other contacts, we are not aware of any "silver bullet" solutions, including biological solutions such as genetic engineering, that have been effective or could be considered as feasible in effectiveness, to counter the spread of Asian hornet populations.

However, across Europe there are a number of initiatives underway that may, in time, offer some hope. These include work on a fungal control, pheromones, poisoned baits and trojan-horse poisons. We also hear of some genetic engineering work in New Zealand to control Vespula species. Some of these proposals have huge political and regulatory hurdles to cross, aside from the scientific ones.

Since the introduction of Asian hornets into Europe in 2004 their spread has been relentless, with countries such as Germany, The Netherlands, Hungary and the mainland UK now experiencing significant rises in nest numbers in 2023. Jersey and the Bailiwick of Guernsey have experienced the same upward trend. In many countries there is no formal, coordinated management policy beyond perhaps the subsidised destruction of nests that are reported, which is largely ineffective. Jersey has led the way in developing methods of tracking Asian hornet nests and shared this information with other jurisdictions.

Those jurisdictions that intensely and actively manage their Asian hornet populations, including Jersey, rely upon receiving public reports, and tracking Asian hornets back to their nests, followed by their destruction. This method both removes Asian hornets from our environment, limiting their impacts and if achieved early enough in the season prevents the nests from reproducing.