



## **Us Vs Them**

I have been asked on a number of occasions whether I feel conflicted in my role within the Wildlife Group and my job as a pest controller and the answer has to be, yes, I do.

Summer for me for the last 35 years has meant one thing .... wasps. An insect we now know has a very important place within our ecosystem as a pollinator and predator. The trouble is that being stung by a wasp very quickly brings out the insect killer instinct in us. Even the gentlest vegan or principled environmentalist will want them destroyed. It is rare to find a person who will rub along with a wasp nest over their bedroom window, in their riding boot, beneath their bed or expect a painter and decorator to grow a pair and get on with the job at the top of a ladder with a wasp nest six inches from the end of their paint brush.

One sting will bring out our primal fight or flight instinct and for the last 40 years we have had a cheap pesticide developed by the pharmaceutical giant Bayer in our armoury. That is up until January 2024 when the EU biocide directive initiates a ban on the sale of Bendiocarb as an insecticide.

I don't need to explain to anyone why you would want to kill a wasp nest, however I do often discuss why it might be possible to live with them. Two adjacent parishes to us, Ditchling and Chailey, have suffered from an annual chronic infestation of *fannia canicularis* (lesser house fly). Wasps are one of the top predators of this fly so has removing so many wasps from our ecosystem created this imbalance leading to the increase in fly numbers? Which also begs the question as to where the insecticide accumulates in the food chain. It is for this reason that the EU biocide directive has recommended the chemical be withdrawn.

This got me wondering how mankind would have lived alongside a wasp nest prior to the invention and use of insecticides. The very nature of a wasp and a wasp nest is that there is no half measure when it comes to controlling it. As soon as you touch it the nest it explodes violently administering pain in every direction. The insecticide and the treatment up to now has almost always been 100% effective and quick, largely because the chemical did not irritate or anger the nest. The replacement insecticides are much weaker and slower to act causing the wasps to become aggressive often driving large numbers from the nest deeper into the property or only killing some of the wasps thereby creating more of a hazard for everyone involved. It has also become apparent that a single application of the newer weaker chemical is not sufficient and repeated treatments to the same nest are required. Ironically resulting in more chemicals into the environment.

There are of course many other creatures living in our houses, beneath our tiles and feeding on the flowers in our gardens, so even a small imperceptible quantity of chemical applied however carefully to a nest with 5,000 insects in it, has potential to enter a food chain at some point down the line. This could be via a house martin or swallow eating a treated wasp or a treated wasp landing in a pond. The damage going quietly unnoticed to spiders, bats and butterflies.

We have taken for granted the immediate cheap convenience of using pesticide yet have known about the damage they leave in their wake for years. What situations and consequences justify their use? Is it to help feed an exponentially growing global population, is it to stop the spread of a plague of rats on an island home of nesting albatross or because someone has put the village fete marquee on top of a wasp nest and no one can get at the jam sponge?

Whilst there are very valid reasons for having to destroy a wasp nest, in light of the imminent withdrawal of the pesticide and my awareness of the vital importance of the wasp in our ecosystem, I have decided it's a battle with a creature I feel I no longer want to have.