

Median Wasp

(*Dolichovespula media*)

Origin

A male median wasp was found in a house in Raglan and handed into the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF). No other median wasps have been found within New Zealand. Consequently, it is not known if a locally established population exists or whether this particular wasp was an isolated occurrence.

Median wasps are established in several countries which have a climate similar to that of New Zealand. This species of wasp has only been recorded in the Northern Hemisphere where it is found from England, across northern Europe, Russia and Asia to Japan.

Wasp Description

Wasps established in NZ



Fig. 1 Left – worker of common wasp (body length 13 mm) Right – worker of German wasp (body length 14 mm)

There are two Vespinae social wasps already established in New Zealand; *Vespula germanica* (German wasp) and *Vespula vulgaris* (common wasp) (Fig. 1).

Median Wasp



Fig. 2 Left – Queen (20mm body length). Right – Male (20mm body length). Specimen of queen supplied by Dr. B. Donovan

Colour markings vary considerably, but in general median wasps (Fig. 2) have less yellow than other New Zealand based social wasps and have a distinctive reddish-brown appearance with brown tinted wings. It is also considerably larger, ranging between 16 mm and 22 mm in length.

Nest Description

The median wasp constructs a small (up to 180mm by 240mm), grey, aerial nest (e.g. in trees, shrubs or under the eaves of buildings) (Fig. 3). In contrast, German and common wasps usually construct larger, subterranean nests, or if constructed above ground, are not attached to tree branches.



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Fig. 3
Note the outer paper layer on this median wasp nest (fig. 3). Compared to the opened celled nest of a paper wasp nest in Fig. 4.



There are also two Polistinae wasps established in New Zealand; Chinese paper wasp (*Polistes chinensis*) and Australian paper wasp (*Polistes humilis*). The nests of paper wasps are also constructed in trees and shrubs and could be confused with median wasp. However the cells of paper wasps are exposed (Fig. 4) whereas the cells of median wasp, and other Vespinae wasps, are protected by an outer paper envelope (Fig. 3).



Fig. 4
An example of an opened celled nest of a paper wasp.

Human Health Risk

If disturbed median wasps will defend their nests aggressively. The human health risk from this species is similar to that of wasps already present in New Zealand.

If you are stung by a wasp, relieve the pain by applying a cold compress (e.g. ice in a cloth, plastic bag or plastic wrap) on the site for 15-20 minutes. Paracetamol may be taken. Talk to your pharmacist about an over-the-counter antihistamine to spread on the bite or to take by mouth to reduce the itching and swelling. If you experience shortness of breath, a widespread rash or pronounced swelling seek immediate medical attention. If you are stung on the mouth, face or neck or if pain and swelling persist for a few days, seek medical advice.

Biology

Preferred habitats include forest margins, forest clearings and around human settlements. Workers collect nectar and honeydew (from sap feeding insects) and prey on flies and moths.

Pest Significance

Like other Vespid wasps, median wasp will have environmental significance by preying on native flies and moths and providing direct competition for honeydew resources to New Zealand's nectar feeding birds. As it is significantly larger than other Vespids established in New Zealand, median wasp may cause greater alarm to the general public.

Detection

Median wasp is most likely to be detected when an unusual, large, dark wasp is noticed on flowers or attracted to ripe fruit; or when an unusual nest is noticed in a tree or shrub or under the eaves of a house.

If you find what you believe to be a median wasp nest, or a median wasp, please call MAF Exotic Disease and Pest Emergency Hotline on

0800 809 966



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Exotic Pest Information Sheet

