



**Scientific Name:**

*Vespa orientalis*

**English:**

Oriental Hornet

**Maltese:**

*il-bagħal taż-żunżan*

The Oriental Hornet is a social insect distinguished by a yellow patch between its eyes, its reddish-brown colour and thick, bright, yellow bands on its abdomen. This hornet is indigenous to Southern Europe, Asia and North Africa. *Vespa orientalis* occurs in seasonal colonies, formed in spring by one fertilized queen from the previous season.

Despite its English name 'Oriental', this hornet is native to the Maltese Islands, meaning that it has been part of Malta's biodiversity for a significant period of time. It was previously locally common, but decreased drastically in the late 60s and 70s due to unknown reasons and was considered very rare. Consequently, the species was included in the Red Data Book for the Maltese Islands, published in 1989. Recently, the local population has increased again in a number of sites, mostly along urban areas. Although the reason for this increasing population trend is unclear, it might be possibly linked to increased adaptations of this insect to urban environments, including increased food and water availability in summer due to inappropriate waste disposal or air-conditioning water disposal systems.

Adults feed on honey, nectar and other sugar-rich sources for carbohydrates, and on various insects or dead animal matter for protein. The species is beneficial since it preys on several pests, including grasshoppers and locusts; however, it is also a primary predator to honey bees. It is also not harmful to people unless threatened and therefore, one should avoid touching or performing actions which may appear as a threat to the hornet (such as rapid waving of hands).

Albeit its importance in rural areas and the natural environment, the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) notes that control of this species is required in certain instances. There are no current plans for the control or management of this species in the wild, but if such hornets are being a nuisance within urban areas and homes, relevant pest control facilities can be alerted. In addition, ERA is currently working to develop an action plan for pollinators to act as the national framework, promoting the protection of pollinators and their services through numerous short and long-term actions.