

Giant wood wasp

Description

The Giant wood wasp (*Urocerus gigas*) is a large (10–40 mm long) black and yellow coloured wasp with a black and yellow head, black thorax and a yellow and black abdomen. This species of wood wasp occurs widely in North America, Europe and Asia as well as in parts of South America and northern Africa, attacking members of the Pinaceae family of trees, particularly Pines, Firs and Spruce.

The 30 mm long larvae are a cream-white colour and cause extensive boring damage while feeding. Larvae spend between one and three years feeding before pupating. They usually attack stressed, dying or damaged pine trees, but relatively healthy trees can be attacked when large populations of wasps develop. Timber in service cannot be re-infested, though live adults can complete development in such timber. A pathogenic fungus is also spread by these wasps and can cause serious damage to pine plantations.

Primary hosts

The larvae of Giant wood wasps feed on fungi contained in the sapwood and heartwood of:

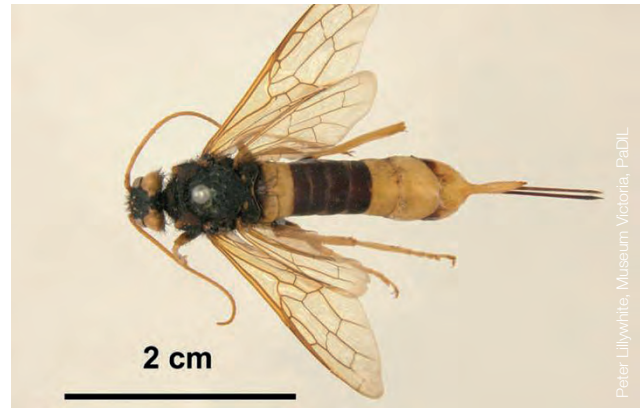
- a range of conifers including Pine (*Pinus*), Fir (*Abies*), Cedar (*Cedrus*) and Spruce (*Picea*)
- some broad leaf species such as Ash (*Fraxinus*) and Willow (*Salix*).

Symptoms

Eggs are laid on the lower three metres of the trunk of damaged or weakened trees in spring and summer. The larvae hatch and develop inside the host plant, creating feeding galleries. Females have also been reported to lay eggs on logs and sawn timber. When larvae exit the host they create round 3–8 mm diameter exit holes.

What it can be confused with

At first glance this species is similar to the naturalised *Sirex* wood wasp (*Sirex noctilio*). Males of the two species are very similar and require close examination to be identified. A distinguishing feature is that male Giant wood wasps have some yellow on the sides of



Adult female. Note black stripe on abdomen



Adult female ovipositing



Adult male. Note yellow on head and abdomen



their heads, unlike the completely black head of the male *Sirex* wood wasp. Females of the two species are more easily separated. Female Giant wood wasps have a yellow abdomen with a black stripe; while the female *Sirex* wood wasp has a completely black abdomen.

Plant part affected

The Giant wood wasp attacks the trunk of damaged or weakened trees.

Age of plant

This species typically prefers to attack larger, often damaged trees.

Time of year pest is most likely to be seen

Overseas, adults typically emerge during late spring and early summer. Damage caused by larvae can be detected at any time of the year.

Further information

Davis EE and Venette RC (2005) Mini risk assessment. Giant wood wasp, *Urocerus gigas* L. [Hymenoptera: Siricidae]. US Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Available from extension.entm.purdue.edu/CAPS/pdf/datasheets/GiantWoodwasp.pdf

If you see anything unusual, call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline



Female (left) and male (right) *Sirex* wood wasp. Note colouration



Larval form of Giant wood wasp



Damage (pupal galleries) caused by Giant wood wasp

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