

## National Bee Unit 2012 Wales Regional Review

### The Season

This year served, if nothing else, to remind us that in beekeeping, it's mostly about the weather.

Most stocks came through the mild winter well, with fewer losses reported than in previous years. A relatively dry early spring allowed colonies to build up steadily. This was helped by a lovely warm spell at the end of March and, even in more unsettled conditions the following month, the positive trend continued. Reports of starvation in some areas were largely associated with colonies being moved to oil seed rape that didn't flow well. Despite some poor weather, static hives carried on building up in April and were well placed to take full advantage of tree blossoms in the strong May sunshine when it finally arrived.

Too often when the sycamore flowers come out, the weather turns cool and wet and they just get blown away. This year was an exception. Bees worked the sycamore and there was a good flow from the hawthorn too. You could smell it if you went near the hives, making for a stronger tasting honey but a wonderful flavour. The old timers used to say that, if you got a crop from the hawthorn, it was the only crop you'd get that year. We had yet to see whether that would prove true.

By early summer, stronger stocks already had full supers and were still working hard. Out inspecting, the weaker hives we observed were generally those with a varroa problem. Of course, some strong colonies were more intent on taking advantage of the good weather days to get out there and find a new home. Swarming behaviour was encouraged by the 'stop/start' conditions: queen cells drawn down during periods of confinement in the hive and the swarm issuing on the next warm day.

The prolonged settled spell, allowing bees to simply forage, build comb and pack the honey away, eluded everyone. Queen mating was more successful earlier in the season, the process taking longer and proving less successful as time went on. The cool, wet June weather continued until Royal Welsh Show week. Suddenly, it turned glorious, ushering in a strong honey flow especially in upland sites where, for the final week in July, there was blackberry and clover still in flower.

August produced one warm spell in the second week, a good time to get the honey off, otherwise it was very variable. The only forage in lowland areas was the Himalayan Balsam giving good honey crops, particularly in South Wales. In areas with little forage and the honey crop removed, starvation was a real possibility. Almost universally, queens went off lay in late August and September. When they resumed, often stimulated by winter feeding, it was not with great gusto. The late flowering ivy failed to provide abundant autumn forage and, to cap it all, the Indian summer never arrived.

## The Team in Wales

This year, we welcomed two new SBI recruits to the team – Mike Davies and Edmund Thomas - both of whom have risen to the challenge and made excellent contributions to the Inspectorate's work in West and South East Wales respectively. The areas covered and contact details of the entire team are now as follows:

| <b>Inspectors</b> | <b>Area</b>                           | <b>Telephone</b> |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| John Beavan       | S Denbighshire, E Gwynedd, N Powys    | 07775 119487     |
| Ade Bowen         | Swansea, Gower, Neath Port Talbot     | 07775 119489     |
| David Coles       | Mid & S Powys                         | 07775 119485     |
| Mike Davies       | Ceredigion                            | 07775 119481     |
| Jonathan Garratt  | N Gwynedd, Anglesey, Conwy            | 07775 119479     |
| Frank Gellatly    | Carmarthenshire                       | 07775 119480     |
| David Hards       | Flintshire, N Denbighshire, Wrexham   | 07775 119488     |
| Peter Haywood     | W & S Gwynedd                         | 07775 119483     |
| Ceri Morgan       | Pembrokeshire                         | 07775 119486     |
| Dinah Sweet       | Cardiff, Bridgend & Vale of Glamorgan | 07775 119450     |
| Edmund Thomas     | Newport, Monmouthshire & Valleys      | 07901 517813     |

## Inspections

Despite the poor weather, it has been a busy season. The Welsh Inspectorate's visits totalled: 902 beekeepers, 1160 apiaries and 5831 colonies. This compares with 954 beekeepers, 1150 apiaries and 5308 colonies last year. The number of new beekeepers registering on Beebase in recent years has risen, progressively, from 102 during 2007 to 406 in 2011. This year, however, it has fallen to 242.

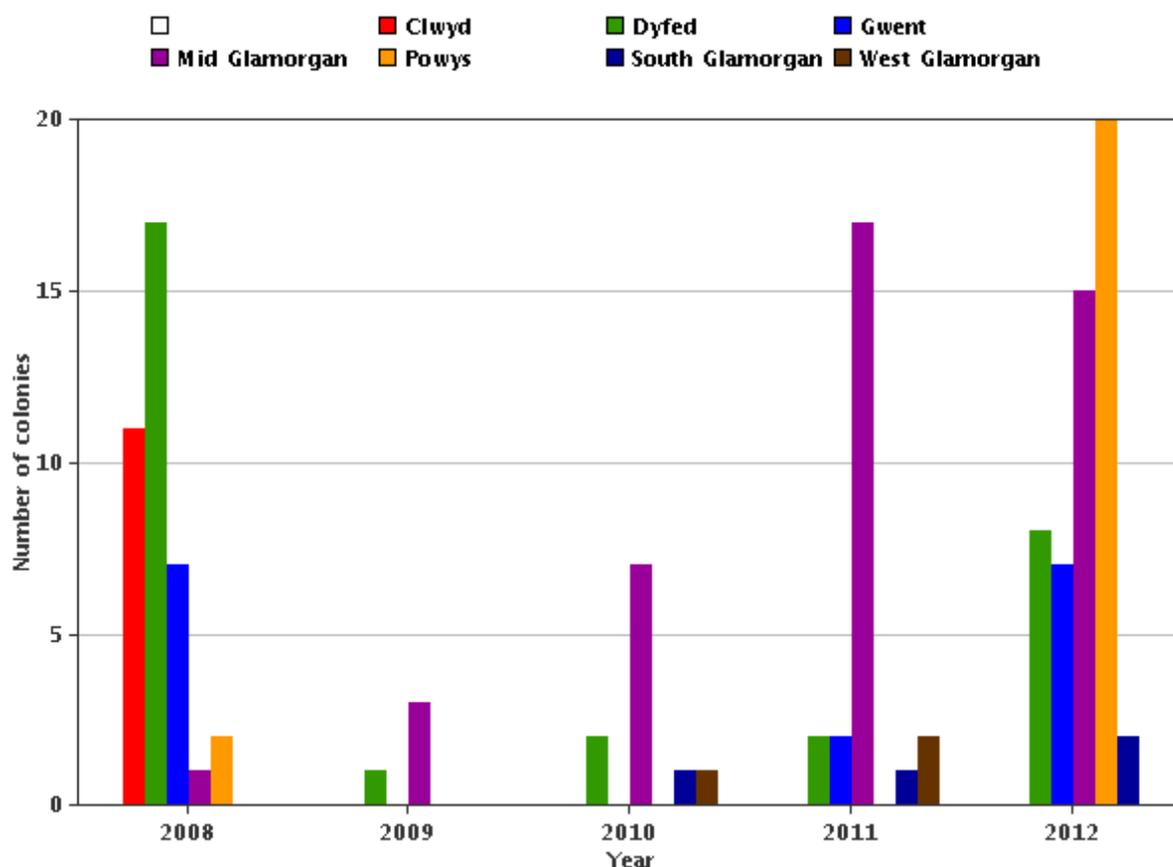
## Varroa

Interestingly, we are seeing pockets in Wales where some beekeepers find they have no need to treat for varroa for long periods. But it is equally disappointing to see, as we do too, the hugely damaging effects of Deformed Wing Virus in hives that are not, and should have been, treated. Broodless periods induced by swarming, making nucs and queens going off lay, restrict the breeding capability of mites but are no substitute for more proactive control measures. NBU advice remains to monitor and treat, using thymol, oxalic acid and other methods, as appropriate, based on our Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach.

## Notifiable disease levels

This season, we found foulbrood in 31 apiaries, affecting 72 colonies. This represents an increase compared with 2011 levels when 24 apiaries were found with 50 diseased colonies. Beekeepers can take some comfort from the fact that the likelihood of their bees being affected by foulbrood remains very low: 0.6% (5 in number) of beekeepers inspected had AFB and 2.2% (20 in number) had EFB. The following graphs and tables show the areas affected.

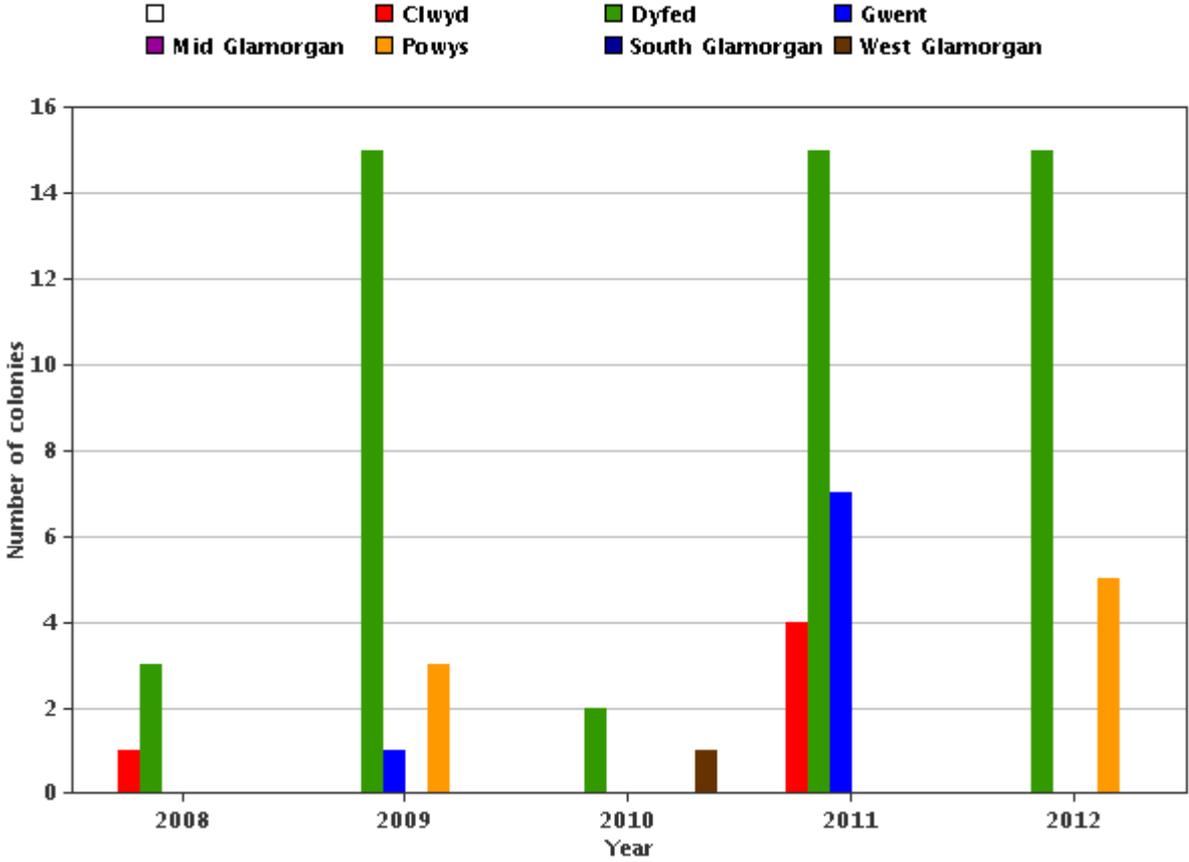
**Trends for EFB 2008 – 2012 (per preserved counties):**



**Location and incidence of EFB affected hives (per unitary authorities, colour linked to preserved counties above):**

| County             | Grid square | Area            | No. colonies infected | Month found       |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Bridgend           | SS88        | Pyle            | 4                     | May, June         |
| Caerphilly         | ST18        | Caerphilly      | 3                     | May, July         |
| Caerphilly         | ST19        | Blackwood       | 5                     | May, June, July   |
| Caerphilly         | SO10        | Ebbw Vale       | 1                     | May               |
| Ceredigion         | SN34        | Newcastle Emlyn | 2                     | August            |
| Monmouthshire      | ST59        | Chepstow        | 6                     | August, September |
| Monmouthshire      | SO50        | Whitebrook      | 1                     | September         |
| Pembrokeshire      | SN01        | Canaston Bridge | 6                     | September         |
| Powys              | SN92        | Sennybridge     | 2                     | August, September |
| Powys              | SO03        | Garthbreny      | 6                     | May, June, August |
| Powys              | SO13        | Three Cocks     | 1                     | June              |
| Powys              | SO14        | Paincastle      | 1                     | July              |
| Powys              | SO25        | Gladestry       | 8                     | May, July, August |
| Powys              | SO26        | Beggars Bush    | 2                     | August            |
| Rhondda Cynon Taff | ST08        | Llantrisant     | 2                     | May, June         |
| Vale of Glamorgan  | ST07        | Cowbridge       | 2                     | June, September   |

**County trends for AFB 2008 - 2012 (per preserved counties):**



**Location and incidence of AFB affected hives (per unitary authorities, colour linked to preserved counties above):**

| County          | Grid square | Area            | No. colonies infected | Month found |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Carmarthenshire | SN41        | Llangyndeyrn    | 1                     | August      |
| Ceredigion      | SN34        | Newcastle Emlyn | 2                     | August      |
| Pembrokeshire   | SN10        | Wisemans Bridge | 12                    | May, August |
| Powys           | SO14        | Painscastle     | 1                     | April       |
| Powys           | SO24        | Hay on Wye      | 4                     | April, June |

**Exotic Pest Surveillance**

We carried out 164 specific exotic pest inspections this year and helped to monitor 15 sentinel apiaries, surveying for exotic pests. Our inspections target a combination of identified risk points and randomly situated sites. Identified risk points are ports, airports, crude hive product importers, fruit and vegetable wholesale markets and landfill sites associated with imported products. As well as visual inspection, floor debris from the sentinel apiary hives is sampled twice a year and monitored for Small Hive Beetle and Tropilaelaps by the NBU laboratory.

## Talks and Demonstrations

We ran 14 disease recognition and comb workshops over the summer. Prompted by Welsh Government, these were hosted and publicised by local associations and attended by 427 participants. We were able to amass some excellent examples of diseased combs to display under licence from FERA. One notable comment on the feedback/ appraisal forms was that they were “not too depressing at all”! In fact we had some excellent feedback commenting on the different disease recognition features and range of diseases covered:

- 97% rated the workshop as excellent or good;
- 98% thought the coverage of the workshop was right;
- 94% felt that they had all of their questions answered.

The practical and visual elements, especially the chance to see and handle diseased comb “in the flesh”, was an opportunity appreciated by participants. We enjoyed being able to demonstrate the work that we do to a wider audience in an informative and accessible way. Beekeepers came away understanding more about biosecurity, hygiene and good husbandry measures and the importance of inspecting, as well as how to inspect for disease. Most importantly, the workshops appear to have conveyed their message and prompted participants to apply their new learning to their own beekeeping practice:

- more than half (51%) of people felt that disease recognition was the most useful thing they learned;
- ‘recognition’, ‘confidence’ and ‘responsibility’ emerge as key themes from participants’ feedback;
- one in three (38%) were going to improve their biosecurity and bee husbandry whilst a further third were going to start inspecting for disease themselves;
- one in five (21%) felt they could now recognise disease and would know what to do if they found some.

Asked to comment in general on the events:

- over half (57%) commended the content, style and work that had gone into the events – especially for being so informative, accessible and friendly;
- a further 7% had good things to say about the venue and the logistics of the event.

The workshops also uncovered an appetite amongst beekeepers for more learning with over 100 suggestions made for topics for future events, including:

- disease, biosecurity and disease prevention – or the ‘same again’ (32%);
- remedial techniques and updates on new research and treatments (17%).

In other education work the inspectors in Wales have been involved in local association beginners’ and improvers’ classes, along with talks and demonstrations covering swarm management, queen rearing, varroa control and winter preparation.

## **Beebase**

The graphs and figures in this report are available from the public pages of Beebase, the National Bee Unit website ([www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com)) in 'Bee Pests, Diseases and Maps'. There are also advisory leaflets, factsheets and an FAQ section on the site. If you have been inspected you will be registered on Beebase. If you belong to a beekeeping association you will not automatically be registered but can self-register via the link on the Beebase homepage. You can edit your personal details and your own apiary records and add changes to colony numbers at each apiary site by logging on using your user name and password. If you do not have a username and password, please phone or email the NBU office to be issued with one.

## **Strategic work**

We are glad to have forged ties with the newly opened National Beekeeping Centre for Wales at Bodnant Welsh Foods in the Conwy valley. I will be pleased to see that venture grow and promote beekeeping to a wider audience.

The Welsh Government has just started work developing its pioneering Pollinator Action Plan. I anticipate being able to input into that through my involvement on the Evidence Working Group. It is now in its formative stages and is likely to be formalised next year.

Towards the end of the year, we rolled out a Honey Survey, modelled on the South East of England's survey, via the local Welsh BKAs. My thanks go to all the beekeepers in Wales who filled in our honey survey form. The results will be published in the Spring edition of Welsh Beekeeper magazine. From early returns, I have to say that we can only hope for better figures next year!

## **The year ahead**

I hope that we will be in the fortunate position of having a full complement of inspectors when we start inspecting in April next year and be able to get off to a flying start. Even though I do not anticipate recruiting in 2013, I am always happy to receive expressions of interest and answer questions from anyone suitably experienced, should an opportunity arise in the future.

As this season draws to a close, I would like to thank both the team of Seasonal Bee Inspectors for all their hard work and also the association secretaries who helped us to roll out the disease recognition workshops across Wales. We will be prioritising workshops next year for those associations that we did not manage to hold events with this year and inviting non members who wish to come too.

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