



South-East Honey Survey 2013

Each year I ask beekeepers on my mailing list for information on honey yields and prices in the South East Region. My thanks are due to those who have contributed to the 2013 survey. This year I have had 414 replies, so thank you very much. Many of the forms have comments, which are interesting and assist with the remarks that I make below.

The average take per colony this season was only just above last year's all time low (19lbs) at 21lb per colony, continuing the current run of poor honey crops that began in 2011.

The year started badly with much rain and very cool; this combining with the effects of the poor summer last year caused many colonies to fail, leading beekeepers to spend the season splitting their remaining colonies to replace losses rather than produce honey. Another contributing factor to the poor yields was highlighted by the repeated comment on many of the returned surveys about poor queen matings and the difficulties getting good queens in colonies after swarming or queen loss.

Obviously having poor queens, drone layers or laying workers led to little or no crop.

Year	Average crop/col
2006	51
2007	38
2008	47
2009	36
2010	46
2011	31
2012	19
2013	21

A further problem was the lack of spring crops available to bees. In many areas of the South East overwintered crops, such as Oil Seed Rape, drowned in the fields and farmers ploughed them in and replanted with spring sown crops, which meant the only chance of collecting any honey crop was during the summer flow. Unlike last year, any crop that was gathered was generally well below the 21% legally allowed water content, as by the end of the summer the weather had improved dramatically and was hot and sunny. This year there has been a late flow from Ivy, which doesn't show in these figures but the long mild autumn means that colonies are consuming their hard gained winter stores early which may lead to starvation, so be warned!

In the results below, I have made comparison with the final results from the previous survey asking the same questions about the 2012 season, so that you can compare this directly to last year's survey.

Results 2013

- **Average Honey Yield per colony:**
414 replies ranging from 0.0lb to 134.0lb per colony
2013 average = 21lb (2012 = 19lb)
- **Direct Sales Price (Flower):**
149 replies ranging from £2.00/lb to £14.00/lb
2013 average = £5.32/lb (2012 = £4.92/lb)
- **Wholesale Honey Price (Flower):**
48 replies ranging from £3.00/lb to £13.00/lb
2013 average = £4.83/lb (2012 = £4.20/lb)
- **Bulk Honey Price (Flower):**
4 replies ranging from £2.00/lb to £7.00/lb
2013 average = £3.91/lb (2012= £4.16/lb)
- **Cut comb:**
10 replies were received ranging from £6.00/lb to £12.50/lb.
2013 average = £9.13/lb (2012 = £9.52/lb)

Discussion

These results are compiled from beekeepers owning between 0 and 45 colonies with total yields between 0lbs and 1800lbs. The average honey yields were 0 to 134lbs per colony. This year 86 beekeepers gave a zero honey return; a total of 141 colonies varying between 0 and 17 owned. 39 indicated they were new beekeepers. Of the 39 new beekeepers, 24 did not gather any honey crop. A number of beekeepers indicated that the colony collected honey but it was left for winter feed. These amounts are not included in the average, only honey that was taken for sale or personal consumption. As always, cut comb honey is mainly an afterthought, rarely do beekeepers aim to produce this premium product that commands a justifiably high price. Initially it can be hard to market but once you have persuaded the buying public that this is the way to buy honey straight from the bees with the best flavour, they will come back for more.

As in recent years, I have worked out an average figure for 'producing' colonies, being those colonies from which a beekeeper says they collect honey, rather than the total number that they own. This year the average from producing colonies is 36lb, which seems a much better average than the 21lb for all colonies owned. As I said last year the risk is that trying to 'big up' the crop, by giving the average of those colonies that produced rather than those that are owned, may be misleading. According to this season's survey, 1014 colonies of the 1756 owned, produced honey. I use the average honey yield, 21lbs/col, for all the calculations below.

Figures for average turnover per colony

Direct sales:

149 replies provided a figure for this.

Price range £2.00/lb to £14.00/lb.

Average price £5.32 – 8.1% higher than 2012

An average crop of honey per colony was worth £111.72 when sold direct at average price. (2012 = £93.48)

Wholesale sales:

48 replies provided a figure for this.

Price range £3.00/lb to £13.00/lb

Average price £4.83 – 15.0% higher than 2012

An average crop of honey per colony was worth £101.43 when sold at wholesale price. (2012 = £79.80) £21.63 more per colony than last year.

Bulk sales:

4 replies provided a figure for this.

Price range £2.40/lb to £7.00/lb

Average price £3.91 – 6.00% less than 2012

An average crop of honey per colony was worth £82.11 when sold at bulk price. (2012 = £96.35) £14.24 less than 2012

Cut Comb sales:

10 replies provided a figure for this. 29 beekeepers said they collected cut comb honey. Max crop 50lbs

Price range £6.00/lb to £12.50/lb

Average price £9.13 – 4.1% less than 2012

An average crop of honey per colony was worth £191.73 when sold at cut comb price (2012 = £276.52) £84.79 less than last year!

Heather honey sales:

No Heather honey crop was reported in the 2013 survey

County results

Below are the averages for the separate counties in the SE region indicating whether there was any appreciable difference in crop or price:

County	No of replies	Av crop lbs	Av direct sales price	Av turnover per col	Diff from SE Av turnover £111.72
East Sussex	30	27	£4.88	£129.60	+ £17.88
Greater London	128	19	£6.31	£119.89	+ £8.17
Kent	77	16	£4.64	£74.24	- £37.48
Surrey	95	22	£5.22	£114.84	+ £3.12
West Sussex	72	24	£4.74	£113.76	+ £2.04

These figures show that Kent beekeepers lose out both ways: with the lowest average honey crop per colony and the lowest average price, to the tune of £37.48 per colony!

Some figures of interest from the survey:

Total number of responding beekeepers	414
Total number of colonies	1756 (on 31 st August 2011)
Average number of cols/beekeeper	4.2
Average honey crop/beekeeper	88.1lbs
Total number of colonies 'producing'	1014
Total honey crop	36493lbs 16.29Tons
Of which	
Heather honey	0lbs
Cut comb	244lbs
Flower honey	36249lbs

Approximate total honey production in the SE area:

Number of beekeepers registered to BeeBase in SE	4903
Total number of colonies 4903 x 4.2	20593
Total honey crop 20593 x 21lbs	193.06Tons

National average figures

Unfortunately, as I write this, I don't yet have any comparison figures for other regions but will try to give some idea of total honey yield using the SE region figure (21lb) but please remember that other regions may have had considerably different averages for the season:



Approximate total honey production in England and Wales:

Number of beekeepers registered to BeeBase	31047
Beebase average colonies per beekeeper	4.43
Total number of colonies 31047×4.43	137538

Approximate total honey crop $137538 \times 21\text{lbs}$ using SE average per colony
1289.42 Tons

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