

National Bee Unit

2013 Wales Regional Review

The Season

The 2012 legacy

Any review of beekeeping in 2013 has to make reference to the dreadful season of the 2012 to put this year in context. It was a wet summer in 2012 and many of the virgin queens produced were inadequately mated or did not mate at all. Brood rearing was limited from late August through to the autumn with a dearth of fresh pollen. Consequently many colonies went into the winter with poor or sterile queens and/or undersize clusters which proved to be non viable. A drier winter was lengthened by a significant cold spell in March that ran into April. At the eleventh hour, many of the colonies that were still hanging on, despite the odds, succumbed.

A late spring into summer

By mid April the most advanced colonies were only on their second brood cycle as the remaining winter bees and young nurse bees struggled to expand their brood nests. The demands of maintaining adequate incubation temperatures was retarding growth and many colonies were down to a couple of frames of bees and a small patch of brood.

Even in the most challenging of conditions, there are always those colonies headed by good queens which forge ahead and expand rapidly when conditions improve. We had to wait until late May and into June before the weather really picked up but, come July, the extended warm spell gave rise to a prolific honey flow, principally from the blackberry and clover. Strong colonies were bringing in 100lb and more, with ease. Even those colonies teetering on the brink of survival back in April, had rallied and were expanding rapidly. Many beekeepers used these excellent conditions to make increase and recoup colony numbers, rather than solely going for honey production. The dead colonies and empty hives that had been cleaned out in the spring were restocked and young queens mated with much greater success this year.

In August and despite reasonable temperatures, the honey flow dropped off markedly and, once again, the heather crop in Wales was poor. Weak hives were plagued by a high number of wasps which, like bumble bees and other wild pollinators, had

enjoyed a good year. Any appreciable honey flow from the Himalayan Balsam came in September and the sustained mild temperatures allowed colonies to work the abundant ivy flowers in October. Pollen gathered from these crops have enabled more prolific brood rearing this autumn. Colonies are in a much better state for winter than they were at this time last year.

Honey yield : *The average honey crop per hive recorded by the seasonal bee inspectors in Wales from their own apiaries in 2013 was 50lb per honey producing hive or 35lb per overall number of hives at the start of the season.*

The NBU in Wales

The team

This year, we said goodbye to one of our longest serving SBIs, Peter Haywood, who left after being with the National Bee Unit (NBU) for 12 years. We also welcomed Paul Aslin who has, since July, been covering S Gwynedd and N Powys from his base near Dolgellau.

There are now nine Seasonal Bee Inspectors (SBIs) who work from the beginning of April until the end of September, and full time Regional Bee Inspector (RBI) who works all year round. Between us, we cover the whole of Wales and can be contacted on the numbers below during the season. The RBI is contactable all year round:

Inspectors	Area	Contact
Jonathan Garratt (SBI)	N Gwynedd, Anglesey, Conwy	07775 119479
David Hards (SBI)	Flintshire, Denbighshire, Wrexham	07775 119488
Paul Aslin (SBI)	S Gwynedd, N Powys	07867 351605
David Coles (SBI)	Mid & S Powys	07775 119485
Mike Davies (SBI)	Ceredigion	07775 119481
Frank Gellatly (RBI)	Carmarthenshire	07775 119480
Ceri Morgan (SBI)	Pembrokeshire	07775 119486
Ade Bowen (SBI)	Swansea, Gower, Neath Port Talbot	07775 119489
Dinah Sweet (SBI)	Cardiff, Bridgend & Vale of Glamorgan	07775 119450
Edmund Thomas (SBI)	Newport, Monmouthshire & Valleys	07901 517813

Beekeeper numbers

There are over 2,733 beekeepers in Wales, responsible for 14,084 colonies in 3,682 apiaries – on average, 5 colonies per beekeeper and 4 colonies per apiary. Over the past 6 years, the number of new beekeepers registering on the NBU's online database, Beebase, has risen progressively: from 102 in 2007 to 406 in 2011. Last year, new registrations dropped to 242. This year they have fallen again, to 208.

Wales beekeeper, apiary and colony numbers on Beebase (October 2013)

County*	No. Beekeepers – <i>and as a % of the total</i>		No. Apiaries – <i>and as a % of the total</i>		No. Colonies <i>and as a % of the total</i>	
Gwynedd	408	15 %	587	16 %	2,046	14.5%
Clwyd	348	13 %	466	12.7%	1,477	10.5%
Powys	397	14.5%	497	13.5%	1,837	13 %
Dyfed	778	28.5%	1119	30.4%	5,223	37 %
Mid Glamorgan	195	7 %	250	7 %	944	6.7%
West Glamorgan	171	6 %	214	6 %	739	5.3%
South Glamorgan	147	5.4%	192	5 %	608	4.3%
Gwent	289	10.6%	357	9.7%	1,210	8.6%
WALES totals	2,733		3,682		14,084	

* Funding restraints mean that Beebase is still configured in the preserved counties of Wales. We hope to update it to the current local authority boundaries.

Inspections

This year, Welsh Inspectorate visits totalled: 1002 beekeepers, 1282 apiaries and 5616 colonies. This represents 101 more beekeepers and 124 more apiaries but 219 fewer colonies than the previous year. We also carried out 9 import inspections following up the importation of queens from other EU countries.



Pest and diseases

Varroa

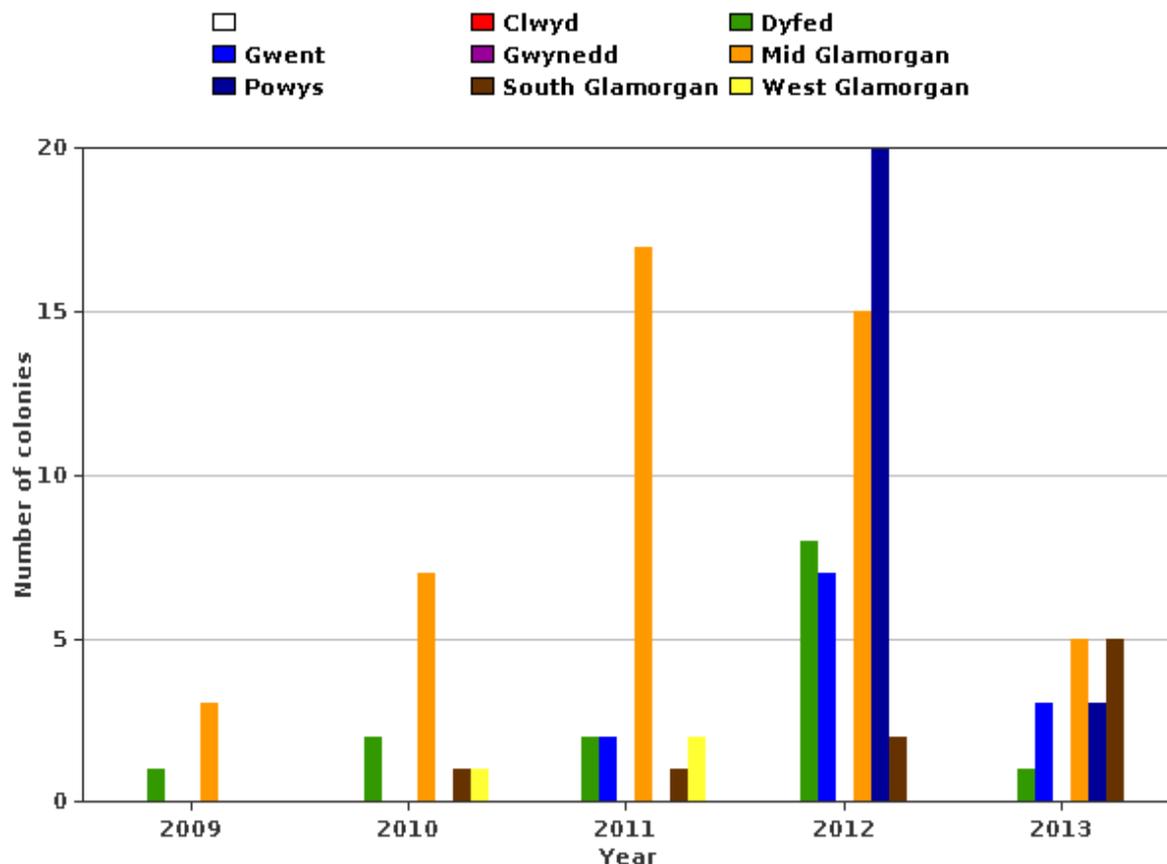
Many beekeepers, in England and Wales, are recording low Varroa mite levels. This could be attributed to improved Varroa control and the wider range of treatment products and methods available. The absence of high mite numbers also suggests less successful breeding by the mites themselves, consistent with the prolonged broodless periods over the last 12 months and especially during the long, cold spring.

Notifiable diseases : European Foulbrood (EFB) and American Foulbrood (AFB)

This season, we found foulbrood in 23 apiaries, affecting 37 colonies. This is a decrease on 2012 levels when 31 apiaries were found with 72 diseased colonies. It represents a 26% drop in infected apiaries and a 49% drop in infected colonies.

As well as the vigilance and ongoing effort of the inspectorate, the reduction in cases of notifiable disease is also attributable to weaker colonies dying out last winter and EFB suppressed in the good season of 2013. Beekeepers should not drop their guard but can take some comfort from the fact that the likelihood of their bees being affected by foulbrood remains low: 0.6% (6 in number) of beekeepers inspected were found to have AFB and 1.2% (12 in number) EFB.

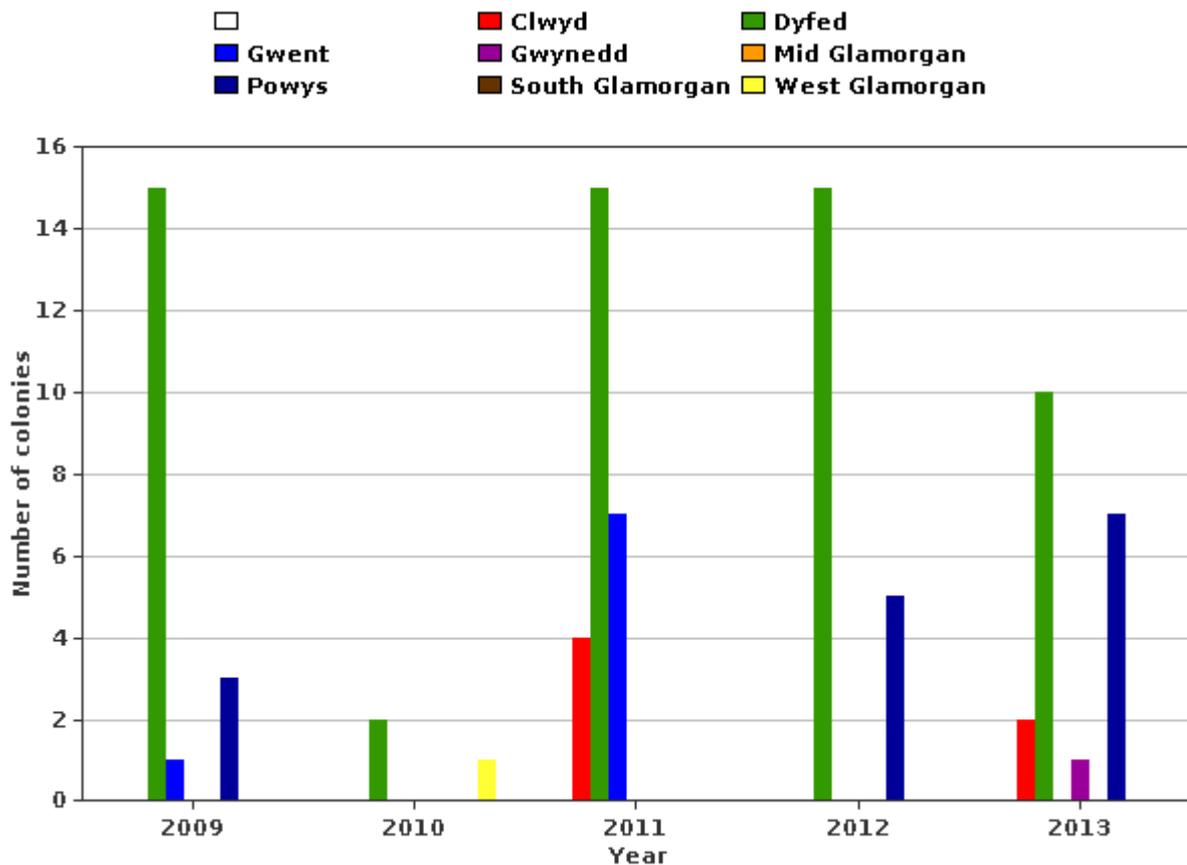
INCIDENCE OF EUROPEAN FOULBROOD 2009 – 2013 (per preserved county)



Location and incidence of EFB affected hives per unitary authority (colour referenced to preserved counties data above)

County	Grid square	Area	Colonies infected	Month found
Bridgend	SS88	Pyle	2	April, May
Caerphilly	ST18	Caerphilly	1	June
Caerphilly	ST27	Rumney	1	May
Monmouthshire	ST59	Chepstow	1	May
Monmouthshire	SO50	Whitebrook	2	July, August
Pembrokeshire	SN10	Wisemans Bridge	1	May
Powys	SN83	Halfway	1	July
Powys	SO12	Llangorse	1	June
Powys	SO13	Three Cocks	1	June
Rhondda Cynon Taff	ST09	Abercynon	3	May, July
Vale of Glamorgan	ST07	Cowbridge	3	May, July

INCIDENCE OF AMERICAN FOULBROOD 2009 – 2013 (per preserved county)



Location and incidence of AFB affected hives per unitary authority (colour referenced to preserved counties data above)

County	Grid square	Area	Colonies infected	Month found
Flintshire	SJ17	Holywell	2	July
Gwynedd	SH50	Tywyn	1	August
Pembrokeshire	SN10	Wisemans Bridge	10	April, May, June
Powys	SO14	Painscastle	1	May
Powys	SO19	Newtown	5	August
Powys	SO24	Hay on Wye	1	April

Exotic pest surveillance

We carried out 197 specific exotic pest inspections this year targeting a combination of identified risk points and randomly situated sites. The identified risk points are ports, airports, crude hive product importers, fruit and vegetable wholesale markets and landfill sites associated with imported products.

In order to improve our capacity to combat the arrival of pests in Britain from abroad, we have established 14 Sentinel Apiaries in Wales. In those areas considered 'at risk', a volunteer beekeeper agrees to check their colonies specifically for exotic pests. As well as visual inspection, floor debris from the designated sentinel apiary hives is sampled twice a year and monitored for Small Hive Beetle and Tropilaelaps. All necessary equipment and paperwork is supplied to the beekeeper who collects samples as directed and sends these to the NBU laboratory for screening. SHB traps are provided and checked at normal colony inspections and noted on a log sheet. We very much value the work done by local beekeepers and would encourage others to participate in the scheme.



Strategic work

Pollinator Action Plan

I attended the launch of Welsh Government's Pollinator Action Plan at the Royal Welsh Show having contributed to the evidence working group. The Plan aims to raise awareness and bring a new emphasis to the work of government departments, other public sector bodies and voluntary groups in order to improve habitats and opportunities for pollinators. I now represent the NBU on the Action Plan Taskforce and, alongside representatives from the Welsh Beekeeper's Association (WBKA), will continue to make sure that honeybee health remains an important part of the plan.

Education and events

All the inspectors in Wales are involved in local association beginners' and improvers' classes as well as giving talks and demonstrations on a wide range of topics – from good husbandry, swarm management and making increase to varroa control, nosema and winter preparation. In total, they have participated in 68 events reaching some 1161 beekeepers.



Following the success of last year's programme, we ran another five Disease Recognition and Comb Workshops in May and June. They were hosted and publicised by 6 local beekeeper associations, open to members and non-members alike, and attended by 115 people in all. Under a special licence from FERA, we were able to show some good examples of diseased combs collected during our inspections. The practical and visual elements of the events, especially the chance to see and handle diseased comb "in the flesh", was an opportunity much appreciated by participants. As well as beekeepers going away with a better understanding of biosecurity, hygiene, good husbandry and the importance of inspecting for disease, we enjoyed being able to demonstrate the work that we do to a wider audience in an informative and accessible way. More will be on offer next year.

The inspectorate in Wales is fortunate in maintaining close ties with the WBKA and, to this end, SBI Dinah Sweet and I sit on its Education and Exam Committee. We are currently updating its information on the new WBKA website and look forward to improving the educational facilities which are on offer to beekeepers.

Research

During 2012 – 2013 the NBU has been participating in the European Union Pilot Surveillance Programme. It is gathering data both about winter and in-season losses in order to discover the reasons for those losses. One of its primary aims is to gain an accurate estimation of the health of colonies and a standardised measure of colony losses across the 17 EU member states involved. As a part of our contribution to the research, we have taken samples and details from 22 beekeepers participating in Wales in autumn 2012 and then in spring and autumn of this year. Sample results are shown on the individual beekeeper's pages on Beebase and, once the project is complete, an anonymised and overall assessment of the results will be published.

Beebase

The graphs and figures in this report are available from the public pages of Beebase, the NBU website (www.nationalbeeunit.com) in 'Bee Pests, Diseases and Maps'. The site also offers many pages of tips, advice and downloadable leaflets on disease control and husbandry.

If you have been inspected you will be registered on Beebase. (It is not an automatic consequence of joining a local beekeeping association.) There are substantial benefits in registering including: automatic alerts in the event of foulbrood or exotic pests being found in the vicinity of your apiary; emails with timely advice on the basis of the inspectorate's findings during the season; and a facility to maintain your own beekeeping and apiary records. In addition, we can come and check your bees and give advice in person if foulbrood or exotic pests are found nearby.

I would urge everyone to check that they are on Beebase and, if registered, to update any changes to their personal details and apiary information. If not, registration is free, quick and confidential, using a link on the home page. You can also request a reminder of your username and password from there (or phone the NBU head office).

A final note

As this season closes, I would like to thank the team of Seasonal Bee Inspectors for all their hard work and the local association secretaries who helped us to manage the programme of workshops across Wales. I anticipate recruiting another SBI in 2014 and would be happy to receive any expressions of interest or answer any questions from anyone suitably experienced, and to hear from any beekeepers interested in participating in the sentinel apiary programme.

Frank Gellatly

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