

**Summary Note of the Bee Health Advisory Forum
45th Meeting - 25 October 2024, 10:30 – 12:40
Microsoft Teams meeting**

Present:

Belinda Phillipson - Chair (BP)	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy
Louise Mount (LM)	
Shaun Cook	
Rebekah Clarkson - minutes (RC)	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Nigel Semmence (NS)	
Margaret Gill (MG)	
Cristina Ruiz Martin (CRM)	
Kate Wilson (KW)	
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government – Bee Health Policy
Ben Jones (BJ)	Fera Science Ltd.
Nicola Kerr	Scottish Government
Linsey Watt	
Claire Gill	
Rob Nickless	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
Paul Barton	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Wally Shaw	
Jane Medwell (JM)	
Anne Rowberry (AR)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Norman Carreck (NC)	Science Adviser
John Haycock	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Adam Leitch	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers' Union
Martin Smith (MS)	Bee Disease Insurance

Apologies:

Tim Andrews	Defra
John Bowles	WBKA
Giles Budge	Science Adviser
Diane Stephenson	DAERA, Northern Ireland Executive
Tom Williamson	

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the 45th meeting and apologised for the meeting not being face to face at the Honey Show as planned. The Chair welcomed Paul Barton, a new Bee Farmer Association (BFA) representative and Kate Wilson who has been appointed as the temporary Head of the National Bee Unit (NBU) following Julian Parker's retirement at the end of August. The Chair also explained Kirsty Stainton has stepped down as a BHAF Science Advisor because she recently joined the NBU as a Technical Manager.

JM explained how the BBKA's Spring Conference was an important event for calendars. RC said she had list of events to discuss as AOB for Forum members to review. meeting.

The minutes had only recently been circulated for the June meeting.

Action 1: Forum to advise of any comments to the June Minutes by 3rd November.

Action 2: RC to circulate a list of events and stakeholders to edit as required.

No BHAF actions had been completed since the last meeting and items were deferred to the December meeting.

Action 3: CH and MS to discuss the effectiveness of Bee Connected (a communication tool to connect beekeepers and neighbouring farmers to be alerted to the timing of insecticide applications). CH extended an open invitation to Forum members.

2. Asian Hornet 2023

2.1 Update from NBU

NS provided an update on the Asian hornet incursions and response to date. He confirmed that nest analysis was ongoing for the 70 nests found in 54 locations as of the date of the meeting. 12 of the nests have had a primary and secondary in the same location. NS provided his suggestions for the reasons there had been an increase of incursions during 2023 – increasing populations in Jersey and France, combined with a warm summer last year.

NS used similar slides in his presentation to the Honey Show on Friday 27th October, a recording will be publicly available: <https://www.honeyshow.co.uk/lecture-videos.phpv>

MS asked if the Asian Hornet Team (AHT) map is useful and if the NBU is using it. NS confirmed gaps in the map help identify where awareness talks are needed. RC said that the NBU also use the map during the weekend to find contacts for AHTs.

JM had a number of questions which had been gathered by the BBKA about the Asian hornet response.

- I. How long the average time between location of a nest and destruction was? NS said that this time has not been calculated formally. NBU has recently trained more people in nest destruction procedures and aims to do this as quickly as possible.
- II. When do gynes appear? NS answered that this was at the end of season when they are produced and in Spring when they emerge from hibernation.
- III. Will there be a protocol for spring gynes? NS confirmed NBU/Defra policy would clarify best practice activities for Spring once the evidence from the season had been evaluated.
- IV. Will it be possible for local AHTs to know what is going on in more detail? NS stated that the NBU use small teams to track and trace. Providing the exact location of a nest during a response means that valuable time is then spent dealing with phone calls and visitors to the site. The public, beekeepers and AHTs are essential in the response by monitoring their homes, workplaces, and apiaries vigilantly, which widens the surveillance area – these are tasks the NBU cannot easily do.
- V. Will there be a change to the trap and release licencing arrangements? NS said that there wouldn't be. Anyone can apply to Natural England for a licence.

NC reminded the Forum that at the 25th meeting (22/11/18) he had asked whether there was a plan to cope when (as had occurred in other countries, especially northern Spain) the number of nests increased from the 4 found in 2018 to 40, 400, 4,000, 40,000 or 400,000. He had stressed the need for a coordinated approach between interested parties. The minutes for that meeting read: "Concern was expressed including the need to agree a future approach. There are benefits to working in partnership and we need to find methods to investigate and agree what are our long term plans are going to be".

NC once again asked the Forum to consider the experience of other European countries in dealing with Asian hornet. While NC believed the current contingency plan had worked well so far, it relies on a manageable number of nests and this year's large increase in nests had been a tipping point. NC went on to say that coordination between government, local authorities and volunteers would be essential in the continued response. NC and AR were concerned about the impact of the AH response on the number of foulbrood inspections done this year. Furthermore AR had concerns over the costs of NBU inspectors working on detached duty in the South-East. NC also expressed concern that the risk assessment was last updated in 2011, suggesting that it was now outdated. The current risk assessment does not consider Asian hornet's spread in northern Europe, i.e. it is now in the Channel Islands, Belgium and the Netherlands. NC stated that in terms of the science a huge amount has been written since 2011. NC also asked why the risk assessments were not updated every year.

BP agreed that there was an increasing wealth of information about Asian hornet but that the key finding of the risk assessment has not changed: i.e. that there is a high risk of incursion, and it would not be a good use of government resources to update the risk assessment every year.

NC was concerned about the dangers of Asian hornet to people. There have been a number of recorded fatalities in France and Spain from AH, perhaps because compared to European hornets and wasps, AH nests are often in places that are easily disturbed. Also, the damage to agriculture through the decreasing populations of wild pollinators caused by Asian hornet predation and direct damage to fruit crops. NC and AR requested a bigger plan with careful collaboration with other agencies. NC reflected that this work will not fit neatly within government departmental responsibilities.

2.2 Impact of Asian hornet on BBKA

AR thanked NC for his input. AR reminded attendees that she had met with ministers and asked for a 5-year (contingency) plan. AR was particularly concerned about how many nests we may have missed.

AR also shared that the baits used by BBKA members in their Asian hornet traps are expensive and asked for financial support for beekeepers from Defra. BP explained that the Government is under financial pressure and said that funding was not available for this.

AR explained how there is much work to be done to motivate and create more AHTs. She gave two examples where after giving a talk on hornets in Canterbury and Gerard's cross, hornets were found soon after. BBKA's AHTs have worked across the country to raise awareness, go to sightings, deliver a biannual conference looking at AH science and promoted Asian hornet Week. AR stated that Asian hornet is not just a beekeeping problem, it's everyone's problem, to all pollinators and to agriculture. She reflected that Professor Steve Martin suggested we cannot stop them establishing, but suggested that perhaps we can continue to keep them at bay.

AR emphasised the BBKA request for swifter communications from the NBU when a nest has been located. Many AHTs are becoming disengaged and BBKA have received complaints about the lack of information. AR asked if DNA testing results could be shared sooner. Despite this she said that BBKA members are supportive of the response, with many deploying traps; but the information shared by the NBU is limited and she would like this to change. Some AHTs have now chosen to

mark and track hornets, without informing the NBU. Overall AR summarised that AHTs desire more autonomy in the response.

AR explained Asian hornet behaviour is different to wasps. Hornets are not aggressive when they are feeding except if squashed e.g., if crushed when picking grapes.

AR asked why is the NBU travelling up to 400 miles to confirm hornets when there are local AHTs teams that could do this? Later in the meeting CRM clarified that no Inspector had gone 400 miles to identify a hornet, although many have travelled from further afield to work in the response in Kent. Cristina said that whilst the NBU has not delivered the normal level of Foulbrood inspections, every call-out from beekeepers has been responded to. Christina thanked the BBKA AHTs for their support.

NC attended from the COLOSS Vespid meeting in Pisa, Italy with colleagues reporting on AH from 11 countries. He reflected that there was interest from countries without Asian hornet such as Austria, where they explained it is difficult to receive funding prior to having Asian hornet. COLOSS is reviewing information on the fundamental biology, the effect on beneficial insects and the costs of different models of response, there is much to learn. Norman asked us to consider how we can learn from 2023 and do better in the future.

JM congratulated APHA who have done well using fixed resources and reminded attendees that the NBU and BBKA need to continue to work together. For awareness JM said that BBKA have been asked by their members for guidelines on the best traps to minimise bycatch and detailed guidance for track and trace teams. AR summarised that AHTs desi something missing?

Assessment and review of 2023

BP thanked everyone for their input. Fera Science is busy working on genetic fingerprint analysis to inform our understanding of the current incursions, and future response. There are a number of potential scenarios:

- (i) All the nests were produced from new incursions in 2023,
- (ii) All the nests were produced from an established population that overwintered in 2022,
- (iii) A combination of (i) and (ii),
- (iv) Other.

MS asked when will the BHAF be informed of the results and scenarios? AR reiterated that AHTs desire more autonomy to deal with Asian hornet incursions.

BJ shared that the laboratory is currently working hard to confirm to the field whether lone hornets are a genetic match to nests. Approximately 30% of this work is outstanding, or 2,500 samples.

BP suggested that we will discuss the analysis and confirm what scenario applies in Spring. Any significant changes in our contingency response will require ministerial approval.

3. Apimondia

AR, RC and MG had attended Apimondia – an international beekeeping conference in Chile.

AR had attended as a judge for honey alongside 7 other people from BBKA. AR said that it was a fantastic opportunity to connect with beekeepers across the world. MG had presented two papers: 'Assessing the efficacy of in-field and laboratory methods for the detection of *Tropilaelaps spp.*' and 'Considerations when sampling honey bee (*Apis mellifera*) colonies for volatile organic compounds (VOCs) associated with honey bee diseases, pests, and environmental contamination'. RC had presented a poster about the Healthy Bees Plan.

AR, RC and MG reflected on the common issues across the world;

- Impact of social media and YouTube – confusing for beginners.
- Awareness and appropriate use of veterinary medicines.
- Balancing the needs of wild bees and managed bees.
- Pests: Varroa, Asian hornet and *Tropilaelaps*.
- Africanized honey bees.

4. Trade – LM

LM advised the Forum that the Target Operating Model (TOM) for borders has now been published. Import conditions remain the same and certificates have been simplified. The IPAFFS form is changing to a CHEDA form from 2nd of Nov, it will be the same information, but in a different format. BeeBase and importers will be updated directly with any changes that affect them.

5. AOB Comm's/news

5.1 MS updated the Forum that work was progressing on HBP2030, Action 46 (ER2 and BeeBase) and hoped to share the results soon.

5.2 The annual hive count will go live on 1/11/2023.

5.3 JM asked has there been any changes regarding Foulbrood policy and if BeeBase has changed. Kate confirmed the policy has not changed.

6. Forward Look:

6.1 Future Meetings: The Forum agreed the best time for a face-to-face meeting is winter.

Action 4: RC to organise a face-to-face meeting for December.

6.2 Science Meeting

RC proposed that the 2023 Science Meeting should focus on Tropilaelaps, however the consensus from forum members was that reviewing Asian hornet science was the priority.

No	Dates/info	Location
46	Thursday 7 th December 2023 10:30 - 13:00	TBC
	Wednesday 14 th February 2024 13:30- 16:00	Virtual - MS Teams

7. Meeting closed 12:57