

National Bee Unit 2011 Wales Regional Review

Overview

As usual the highs and lows of our beekeeping fortunes have been dictated by the weather. A warm April saw colonies build up very well. The blossom was two to three weeks ahead of average and the bees were out foraging well into the warm evenings. The rate of colony expansions took many beekeepers by surprise and, consequently, many colonies were swarming by the end of April.

May turned cool and wet in West Wales. In East Wales, it was also cool but with little rain in some areas and a serious soil water deficit. The tree blossom fell prematurely and all the nectar flow from the ground plants dried up in the east of the country. Those close to oil seed rape found that drought conditions caused the flow to end abruptly while it was still in flower and only pollen continued to come in. Intermittent poor weather resulted in some disappointing queen mating over the season as a whole.

Brood frames shaken during the last week of June scattered liquid nectar as the main flow got under way and there was some weight building up in the supers. July saw good crops from clover, bramble and rosebay willow herb where there was sufficient ground water in West Wales. For some, the foraging on Himalayan balsam and heather continued into late summer. Generally the heather crop was small, although some areas fared well. The main crop honey yield was better and some areas of Himalayan balsam in South Wales were excellent. Despite the mild autumn there has been a disappointing ivy honey flow, not enough to make up for insufficient feeding of winter syrup.

The Team in Wales

This year, we were able to welcome two new SBI recruits to the team - Dinah Sweet and Adrian Morris, both of whom have risen to the challenge and made a considerable contribution to the inspectorate's work in South East Wales.

I am sorry that Mike Pett has decided that this was his last year as a SBI. His energy and enthusiasm will be sorely missed by the team and beekeepers in Mid and South Glamorgan. We will be looking to recruit in 2012 and I am happy to receive expressions of interest and answer questions from anyone suitably experienced, particularly in South West Wales, prior to the post being formally advertised.

Inspectors	Area	Telephone
John Beavan	S Denbighshire, N Powys	07775 119487
Ade Bowen	Gower, W Carmarthenshire	07775 119489
David Coles	Mid & S Powys	07775 119485
Jonathan Garratt	N Gwynedd, Anglesey, Conwy	07775 119479
Frank Gellatly	E. Carmar & Mid Ceredigion	07775 119480
David Hards	Flints, N Denbighshire, Wrexham	07775 119488
Peter Haywood	S Gwynedd & N Ceredigion	07775 119483
Ceri Morgan	Pembrokeshire & S Ceredigion	07775 119486
Ade Morris	Monmouthshire	07775 119481
Mike Pett	Swansea, Amman Valley, Vale	07775 119484
Dinah Sweet	Cardiff & the Valleys	07775 119450

Inspections

It has been a busy season and I can report that the Welsh inspectorate's visits totalled: 954 beekeepers, 1150 apiaries and 5308 colonies. The number of new beekeepers registering on Beebase each year has progressively risen from 101 in 2007 to 404 in 2011.

Varroa

Those who took honey off in the first half of August were able to apply effective varroa treatments early enough to allow time for autumn feeding before the end of September. The continuing warm autumn has prolonged brood production which will require both careful varroa monitoring and also regular hefting of the hives to check for early depletion of stores. The importance of effective varroa prevention and careful investment in the health and strength of winter bees, is addressed in our *Integrated Pest Management (Wales)* factsheet which was revised this year and circulated to local associations.

Notifiable disease levels

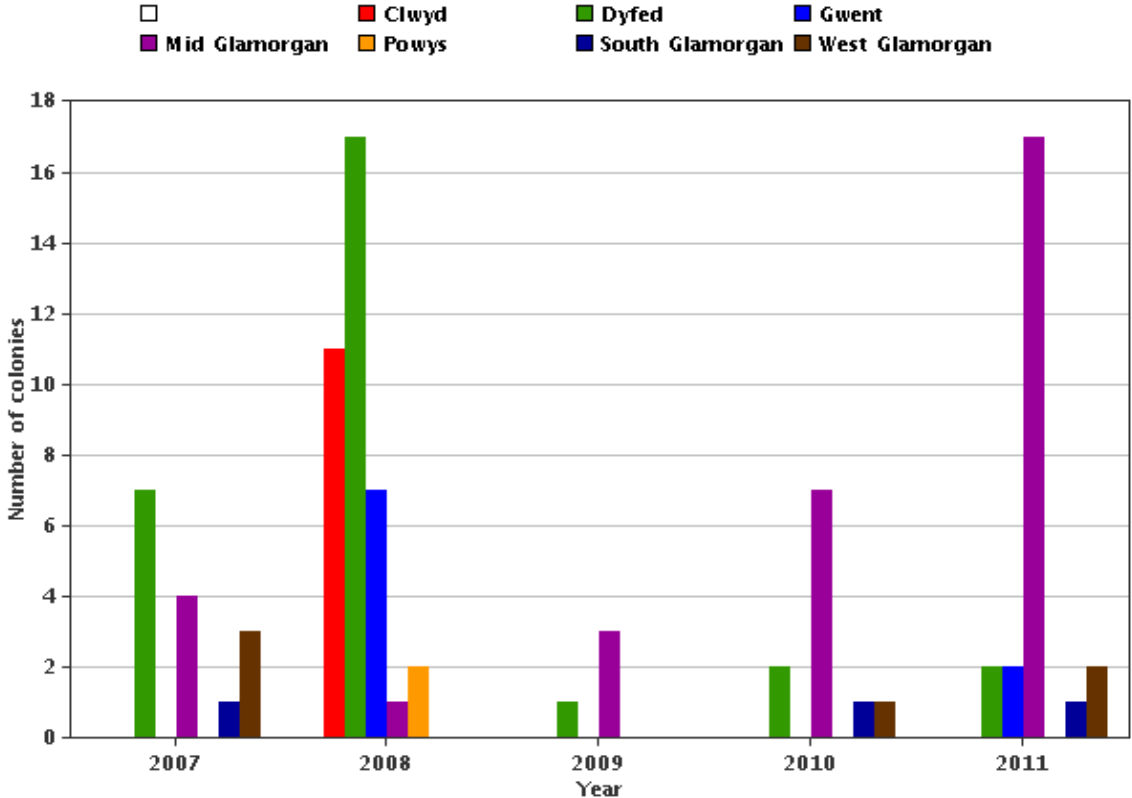
This season, we found foulbrood in 50 colonies affecting 24 apiaries in all. This represents a fourfold increase in the number of colonies and threefold increase in the number of apiaries, compared to 2010 levels when only 12 diseased colonies in 8 apiaries were found. Beekeepers can take some comfort from the fact that the likelihood of their bees being affected by foulbrood remains very low: less than 1% of beekeepers inspected had AFB (8 in total) and less than 1.5% had EFB (14).

This rise in the incidence of foulbrood seems dramatic but it comes in the wake of a recent year-on-year decline to an all time low last year. Incidences are now more like 2007 levels and Welsh figures are consistent with UK-wide levels where foulbrood has shown a similar proportional increase across the board.

The increased incidence of EFB largely coincided with the spell of bad weather over May/June which led to stress and starvation in some colonies. This combination of events is likely to make bees particularly vulnerable to subclinical disease. Whilst I would like to think that the increased detection of AFB is entirely down to the

vigilance of our inspectors, I suspect it may also have had something to do with old, infected equipment being brought out of store to cope with a better season and honey flow. Through regular articles in the WBKA's quarterly publication, The Welsh Beekeeper, I have been keen to advise beekeepers on how to minimise their chances of being that unlucky one individual in a hundred affected by EFB.

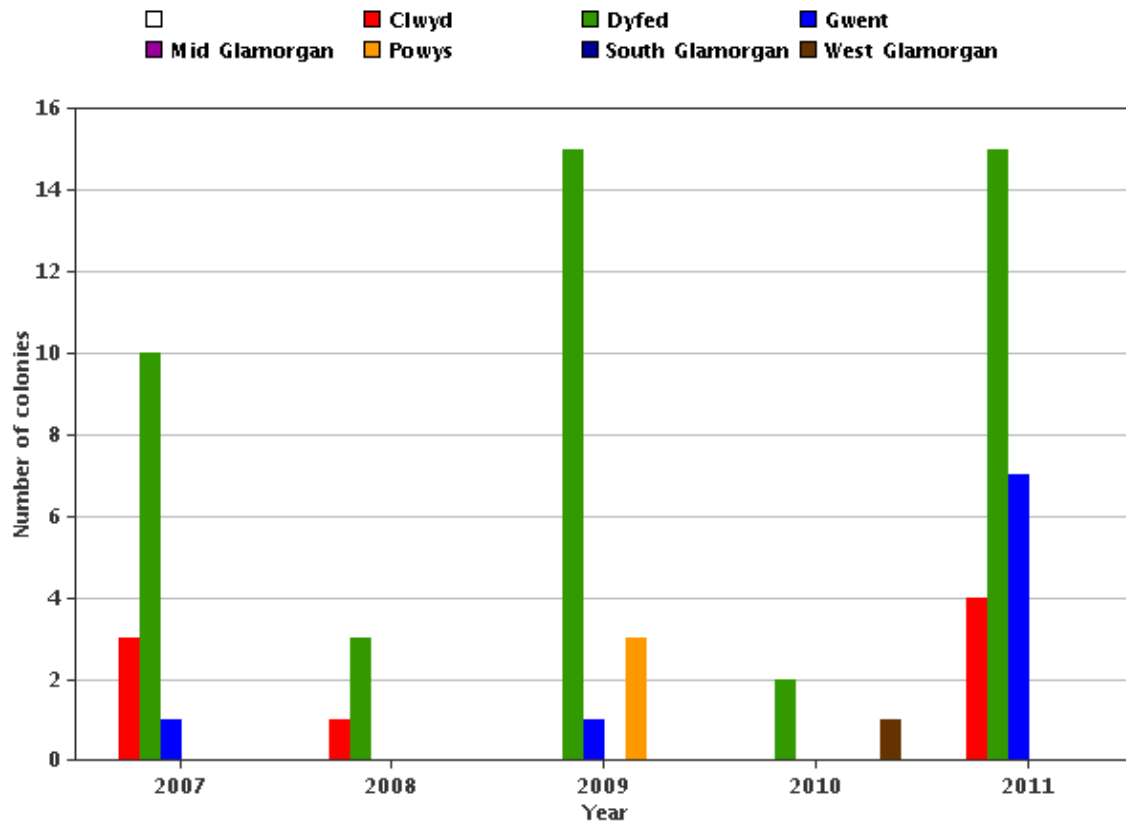
Trends for EFB (per historic counties, 2007 – 2011):



Location and incidence of EFB affected hives (per current counties, colour linked to historic counties above):

County	Grid square	Area	No. colonies infected	Month found
Bridgend	SS87	Porthcawl	2	June, July
Bridgend	SS88	Pyle	7	April, May, June, August, September
Caerphilly	ST19	Blackwood	7	June, July, August, September
Carmarthenshire	SN50	N Llanelli	2	April
Ceredigion	SN45	Mydroilyn	1	August
Monmouthshire	SO40	Gwernesney	1	August
Neath Port Talbot	SN70	Ystalyfera	1	June
Powys	SO21	Crickhowell	1	September
Rhondda Cynon Taff	ST08	Llantrisant	1	April
Swansea	SN60	Pontarddulais	1	June

County trends for AFB (per historic counties, 2007 - 2011):



Location and incidence of AFB affected hives (per current counties, colour linked to historic counties above):

County	Grid square	Area	No. colonies infected	Month found
Carmarthenshire	SN12	Login	2	May, June
Denbighshire	SJ07	St Asaph	2	August
Monmouthshire	SO30	Clytha Hill	5	July
Monmouthshire	SO40	Gwernesney	1	September
Pembrokeshire	SN90	Neyland	4	May, June
Pembrokeshire	SN10	Wisemans Bridge	9	April, July
Powys	SO21	Crickhowell	1	July
Wrexham	SJ34	Ruabon	2	April, May

Exotic Pest Surveillance

We carried out 129 specific exotic pest inspections and helped to monitor 15 sentinel apiaries to survey for exotic pests. The process targets identified risk points and randomly situated sites. As well as visual inspection, sentinel apiary hive floor debris is sampled twice a year and monitored for Small Hive Beetle and Tropilaelaps by the NBU laboratory. Identified risk points are ports, airports, crude hive product

importers, fruit and vegetable wholesale markets and landfill sites associated with imported products. Used honey drums are also a potential risk and we welcome notification from beekeepers on where these are being bought and sold.

Beebase

All the figures presented here are available from the public pages of Beebase, the National Bee Unit website (www.nationalbeeunit.com) in 'Bee Pests, Diseases and Maps'. As of this year, Beebase also delivers a disease 'alerts' system which sends an automated email to beekeepers if they have an apiary within 5km of a known disease outbreak. Other Beebase improvements include the facility for beekeepers to add and edit details of their own apiary records and changes to colony numbers at each apiary site. There are also regular amendments and additions to the advisory leaflets section and a new FAQ section.

Beekeepers will only benefit from these developments if they are registered on Beebase and make sure that their personal details, especially email address, are kept up-to-date. Anyone who has been inspected recently will be registered on Beebase. However, the widespread assumption that beekeepers' details are automatically added to Beebase if they join a local Beekeeping Association is not the case! Self-registration is straightforward via the link on the Beebase homepage. Those who are unsure as to whether they are registered or unable to log in should email nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk. Alternatively, you can notify me directly if any information needs updating or you wish to add your e-mail address to your personal details.

I would encourage everyone to check that they are signed up to and able to log onto Beebase. Only then can you ensure access the full range of services and information available from the NBU – and the NBU is able to improve its understanding of beekeeping activity around the UK.

Random Apiary Survey (RAS)

The Random Apiary Survey (RAS) sampling concluded at the end of May. Checking for *Nosema* spp, Acarine & various virus types, as well as foulbrood and exotic pests, the analysis is now complete and early indicators available. Beekeepers who had samples taken can access their specific results from their Beebase personal page. Results for any foulbrood identified by the RAS will not be shown in order to avoid confusion as to a colony's infection.

As this is the largest apiary survey ever conducted, we are expecting some very useful information from it. Preliminary results suggest that the NBU's risk based approach to inspections is the most effective way to find disease and gives us a good idea of where foul brood is located. Other findings suggest that: jointly shared apiaries are more likely to have EFB than apiaries run by a single beekeeper; DWV is the most common virus, and; those viruses causing colony loss in the US are not prevalent in the UK. Further results will be published when the statistics are fully calculated.

Talks and Demonstrations

This year in Wales, we have been involved in 147 talks, demonstrations and educational events. These are summarised in terms of theme and numbers in attendance.

SUMMARY	no. events	as % total	attendees	as % total
beginners' classes/demos	30	20.4	469	12.8
bee husbandry	8	5.4	151	4.1
queen rearing & nucs	16	10.9	169	4.6
disease	24	16.3	468	12.8
exotic pests	8	5.4	166	4.5
honey	2	1.4	53	1.4
general meetings	23	15.6	347	9.5
about NBU/inspection work	4	2.7	135	3.7
public events/shows	25	17.0	1,458	39.9
liaison meetings	7	4.8	240	6.6
Total	147		3,656	

Taking this year's experience into action for next year, the general rise in the incidence of notifiable disease throughout England, Scotland and Wales coincides with Welsh Government's concern that beekeepers are enabled to shoulder disease responsibilities in relation to their own bees. Disease recognition will, therefore, be the main theme of talks and workshops from the inspectorate in Wales next year.

Starting with our involvement in the BBKA Disease Recognition Workshop at its Spring Convention in April, we plan to run comb workshops during the season in collaboration with all the local associations. Spaces will be limited and an effort made to reach out to all beekeepers, including those who are not members of local associations. For this reason, local associations are already starting to book their disease recognition/comb workshops with us. If your association wants to take advantage of the opportunity, please let me know and I can make arrangements in conjunction with your local inspector.

At the season's end, I would like to thank both the team of Seasonal Bee Inspectors and all those beekeepers in Wales who have been working hard this year to keep our bees healthy.

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