



Annual Report – National Bee Unit North East Region December 2013

The 2013 Season – An Overview

This time last year, concerns that I expressed about the condition of colonies going into winter and the possible effects of a prolonged late spell of bad weather were realised, with problems associated with the poor summer – weak colonies, a lack of pollen and poorly mated queens – compounded by the seemingly never-ending winter which prevented colonies building up in the New Year. Many colonies continued to dwindle right through to May as the winter bees died off with little or no new brood developing and too many reaching the point of no return – falling below the critical mass of bees necessary to maintain a viable brood-nest. Spring itself was very late, up to 6 weeks behind in some areas and great swathes of winter sown oil seed rape failed altogether. Some fields were re-sown in spring with rape or field beans but others were just left fallow. The weather did finally start to improve in May and most beekeepers were able to dispense with the feeders, stronger colonies bringing in some surplus and weaker ones building up on the available forage. In arable areas the continued nectar and pollen from oil seed rape and field beans saw colonies steadily building throughout June. However, in areas without these crops the meagre returns were soon consumed and a late 'June gap' saw colonies in the Pennines desperately short of food in early July. Summer came a week later and with it an amazing transformation! Blackberry, willowherb, clover and late flowering trees blossomed like never before and gave some beekeepers the best summer nectar flow for many years. The usually reliable Himalayan balsam wilted in the intense heat of July making for a short season, though beekeepers taking colonies to the Pennine, South Yorkshire and Derbyshire heather moors did very well. Further north the heather also did quite well in inland and sheltered areas, but those moors exposed to the earlier bitter north-east winds or affected by heather beetle were not so productive. For more information on the heather beetle and the damage that can be caused by this pest see <http://www.heathertrust.co.uk/#!/heather-beetle/c58r>.

The mild weather allowed the bees to continue working late into autumn, bringing in winter food and that all important pollen to keep queens laying and colonies well founded for winter. Feeding where necessary was possible well into October and most hives are quite heavy. However, beekeepers should be mindful that large colonies will consume more food and should check if additional feeding with fondant is required, particularly when the queens come back into lay in the New Year.

Most reports indicate that *Varroa* has not been a serious problem this year with a lower than usual drop from late summer treatments. Colonies with a high count and weakened by viruses associated with *Varroa* would not have survived last winter. However, a prolonged broodless period and slow build up of colonies would also have limited *Varroa* population growth during the season. We should not be complacent though and continue to monitor to see if further treatment may be required during the winter period. For further advice on *Varroa* control, please see

the free NBU booklet 'Managing *Varroa*' or BeeBase, <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase>

Colony Losses 2012-13

The figures presented are derived from information gathered during inspection visits and personal contact with approximately 300 beekeepers during the season and give an indication of the 'winter' colony losses – those colonies that died out during the period 30th September 2012 to 1st April 2013 - experienced by beekeepers in the last 6 years. The combined average for 2012/13 from across the region was 37.4%. However, due to the prolonged harsh conditions, some colonies succumbed after the April cut-off point and overall losses may have been even higher.

Region	Colony Losses (%)					
	2007-8	2008-9	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Derbyshire	31.2	34.4	21.1	14.8	14.3	35.6
East Yorks	50	19.8	14.6	15.2	13.6	34.0
North Yorks	34	11.7	29.9	11.3	14.1	22.9
Nottinghamshire	48.3	15.7	12.6	16.3	10.7	53.6
South Yorks	56.5	30.7	36.8	12.7	12.2	37.0
West Yorks	35.7	21.6	19.1	20.3	11.5	34.1
County average	42.6	22.3	22.4	15.1	12.7	36.2

Colony losses were fairly uniform through the region, apart from the returns from North Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire – the latter may have been distorted somewhat due to a relatively small sample size (18 beekeepers) but why the losses were significantly lower in North Yorkshire is not clear (144 beekeepers surveyed). It is disappointing, though not totally unexpected, to see average losses for the region approaching those of 2007-8. Some colonies were lost early in winter, generally those with failing queens, but most losses occurred in late winter/early spring when the weather deteriorated again. However, after a remarkable turn-around when summer eventually arrived, most colonies are going into winter in much better condition, with plenty of bees, well-mated queens and a good supply of late pollen. I hope I am not tempting fate in saying, providing we do not get a repeat of last winter, I anticipate that losses will be much lower this winter and colonies stronger in spring and so better able to take advantage of the spring nectar flow.

The National Bee Unit also conducts a randomised husbandry survey of beekeepers each year as part of the healthy bees plan to monitor trends. The survey provides valuable information on beekeeping practices and the health of colonies in the UK and I would encourage all beekeepers selected for the survey to take part.

September saw completion of the 2012/13 EU Pilot Surveillance Programme in which colonies in 200 apiaries throughout England and Wales were monitored for colony health, over-wintering and in-season losses. Samples taken from these colonies were also analysed for a range of pathogens. Apiaries were selected at random and the results of the survey, when published (spring 2014) should give a comparative representative average for winter and in-season losses in the UK and other European countries.

Foulbrood Diseases and Inspection Statistics 2013

The season officially got under way the first week of April – but no-one told the weather and inspection work was severely hampered by the cold and wet conditions. We were also a Seasonal Bee Inspector short in the region until able to recruit Adrian Wilford to the post. Ian Wallace from Northern Region kindly assisted with inspections in the far north of Yorkshire and later in the season again helped complete a survey in the South Yorks/North Lincs borders. Dhonn Atkinson and John Drakes carried out a thorough inspection of apiaries within 5km of EFB found last year in the Harrogate district. Recurrence was observed in just one apiary and two new apiaries were affected – though one of these was a feral colony that had been retrieved from a fallen tree in the Wetherby area. This colony was destroyed and the nest site in the tree burnt to prevent other bees accessing any diseased material that might have remained. The low disease incidence was a testament to the diligence of the inspectors dealing with last year’s outbreak and the commitment shown by Harrogate & Ripon BKA and members to eradicate the disease.

Whilst Dhonn was busy in North Yorkshire we received an unexpected call from a beekeeper near Doncaster who suspected EFB. Tim Roper came up from Derbyshire to deal with this case and then found several more apiaries affected, stretching over the border into North Lincs. Tim was kept particularly busy this season with further EFB outbreaks in both North and South Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Some colonies affected were believed to have been purchased at auction – I would remind anyone thinking of buying colonies or second hand equipment of the Best Practice Guidelines and Fact Sheet about obtaining bees on the advisory pages of BeeBase (www.nationalbeeunit.com).

707 Apiaries were visited and 3356 colonies inspected in the North East Region this year. In total 53 colonies with EFB were dealt with. This is a lower incidence than in 2012 but spread over a higher number of apiaries (27 compared with 22 in 2012). This was due largely to the new outbreak in South Yorkshire. AFB was limited to two cases, one again in the Scarborough district though with no obvious link to previous cases. The other was in the southern borders of Notts and dealt with by colleagues from Eastern Region.

The locations of foulbrood disease by 10km squares are listed in the following table.

County	10km Square	Colonies with EFB	Colonies with AFB
Derbyshire	SK34	10	
	SK47	4	
North Yorks	SE15	2	
	SE35	2	
	SE44	4	
	SE45	1	
	SE53	1	
	SE56	1	
	SE63	1	
	SE79	1	
	TA08		1
	TA09	3	
East Yorks			

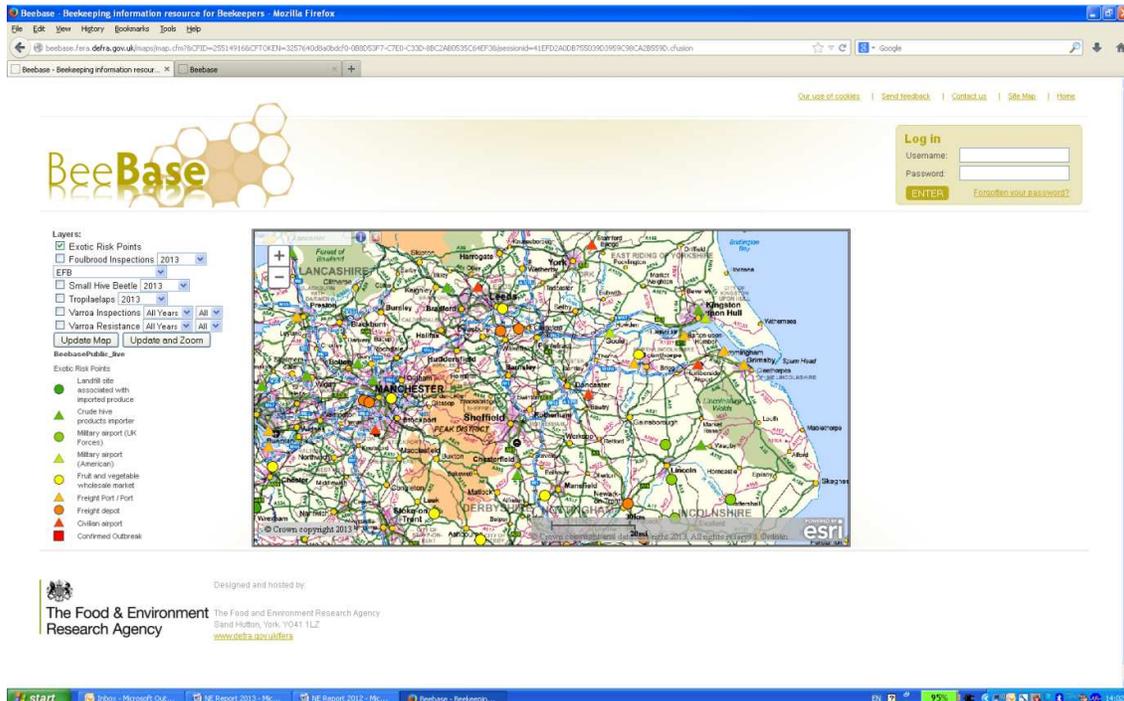
Notts	SK42		1
	SK52	3	
	SK64	3	
South Yorks	SE50	2	
	SE70	11	
	SK37	4	
West Yorks			

Further details can be found on the disease incidence pages of BeeBase, www.nationalbeeunit.com. The live data maps have been updated recently with clearer mapping and faster loading. It is recommended that these are checked regularly to see if there is any foulbrood disease close by.

All beekeepers should ensure that they are registered on BeeBase. This can be done through the NBU office (tel. 01904 462510), through your Bee Inspector, or by self-registration. I am grateful to the majority of Beekeeping Associations who have sought permission to forward member's contact details to the NBU so beekeepers can be advised if there is a notifiable disease nearby, either through the automatic e-mail alert if the disease is within 3km of the apiary or by telephone. However, self-registration or by contacting the NBU is still recommended, especially for beekeepers whose apiaries are not at their home address. Self-registration also gives beekeepers secure password protected access to their own details and inspection records.

Exotic pest surveillance programme

89 Apiary visits were made this year as part of the NBU exotic pest surveillance programme, mostly around the designated risk points, which can be viewed on the new BeeBase maps.



I am grateful for the additional help of those beekeepers taking part in the Sentinel Apiary Programme who carry out checks at their own apiaries for exotic pests and send in samples for monitoring in the laboratory. Early detection is absolutely essential if we are to have any hope of eradicating an incursion and protect our bees from a new threat. I would be pleased to hear from anyone else who has an apiary near a risk point and would like to be involved.

There have been several reports this year from members of the public and beekeepers throughout the country of suspect sightings of the Asian hornet, *Vespa velutina*. We are extremely grateful for these, and pleased to report that on investigation, none have been confirmed and, where captured, usually identified as the European hornet, *Vespa crabro* (see BeeCraft article *Cases of Mistaken Identity* available on the publications page of BeeBase). This hornet is becoming increasingly more common in the north of the Region with several sightings around York this year. There is a very useful Identification Sheet produced by the Non-Native Species Secretariat available on the Asian hornet pages of BeeBase.

Education and Advisory Services

The North East team were pleased to be able to assist local and county Associations again in education events aimed at improving disease awareness and good husbandry by providing talks, comb workshops and the popular Bee Husbandry Days. We were fortunate that the Bee Husbandry Days at Harrogate and Murton went ahead without too much interference from the weather, heavy showers on one day failing to dampen the enthusiasm of those attending.

The second NBU Husbandry and Research Day for BFA members and semi-commercial beekeepers in northern England was held at Fera in September and attracted about 50 of the areas larger scale beekeepers. The first of the more intensive DASH (Disease Accreditation Scheme for Honeybees) training days for the BFA was also held at Fera in October.

Going forward, the NBU education and training programme is to be refocused mainly on larger, county based events that meet the NBU's remit – e.g. *Varroa*, disease management and control, good husbandry, bio-security, barrier management, exotic pest risks and adult bee diseases. To this end there are plans to hold Bee Husbandry Days hosted by larger Beekeeping Associations in West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and Derbyshire in 2014.

However, the Seasonal Bee Inspectors will still be available to assist with apiary safaris, comb workshops and disease awareness related demonstrations at a local level. Associations Secretaries should discuss their requirements with me at the earliest opportunity.

North East Bee Inspectors

We were pleased to welcome Adrian Wilford to the team in July, just as the weather started to improve. After a period of training Adrian commenced inspection work, mainly in East Yorkshire and up into the North Yorkshire moors.

After a year working in the North West, Sandra Kinchin is returning to the North East Region for 2014. John Drakes is also moving across to the West of the Region.

These changes have made necessary some considerable reallocation of the 10km squares that are allocated to each SBI as their normal inspection areas and mean that some beekeepers may see a new face (or the return of a familiar one) as their local inspector next year. The season starts on Tuesday 1st April and the post-code search facility on the contacts page of BeeBase will give the SBI allocated to each district, though there may be some overlap in certain areas. Prior to April 1st please direct all enquiries to me.

Areas covered by myself and the NE team should be approximately as follows:

Ivor Flatman – West and South (West) Yorks
Dhonn Atkinson – Lower North and West Yorks, South (East) Yorks
Tim Roper – Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire
Sandra Kinchin Upper North, North East Yorks and Teeside
John Drakes – North West and mid North Yorks
Adrian Wilford East and North East Yorks

Finally I would like to wish all in the Region good health and happiness for Christmas and the New Year.

Ivor

Ivor Flatman
Regional Bee Inspector – North East Region
Tel. 01924 252795 or mob. 07775 119436.
e-mail ivor.flatman@fera.gsi.gov.uk