Annual Bee Report – North East Region
December 2009

The 2009 Season – An Overview

If 2008 was a poor year for nearly everyone, 2009 will be remembered for the difference being in the right place at the right time can make – and swarms! Most colonies that had been fed during summer 2008 or were able to take advantage of the late autumn honey flow appeared to go into winter in good shape. However, in many areas beekeepers were soon finding that the two or more gallons of sugar syrup had been consumed and the bees required a Christmas present of fondant or candy. Feeding continued during the remainder of the cold winter months and it wasn't really until April that an assessment of how the colonies had faired could be made.

A common complaint was of small colonies, some queenless or with poorly laying queens, drone layers and even queens that had given up laying altogether! Nosema was evident in some colonies, possibly exacerbated by confinement due to the extended winter weather. Colony build up was slow and where winter sowing of oil seed rape had been possible (mainly in areas where natural contours allowed better land drainage) the continuing cool conditions did not allow the bees to take full advantage. Poor flying conditions during May hindered queen mating with failure commonplace.

Summer came suddenly and early and where this coincided with the flowering of late sown rape, field beans and clover, there was a flow that seemed to herald a return 'to the good old days'. We should have anticipated that a long cool spell with a sudden change to good conditions and a strong honey flow would promote swarming but many beekeepers were surprised by the speed of colony development and swarms were plentiful! Colonies – especially overcrowded nucs - where virgin queens had been confined for far too long absconded either on mating flights or soon after coming into lay.

How quickly things can change! July saw the return of indifferent weather conditions and most colonies taking from, rather than adding to, honey stores. Only a very few beekeepers were able to move bees to borage and I understand that it is unlikely that this crop will be grown in any quantity in the next 3-4 years. In areas such as the cooler East coast and in particular the far West and North West of the region, where bees are reliant on trees and wild flowers for forage in spring and early summer, another poor year has been reported. In some cases feeding was required throughout July to prevent starvation.

The summer rains were favourable to growth of the ling heather, which produced one of the best shows I can remember on all the moors – except areas in the North East affected by the heather beetle. Colonies that were strong did better than last year, particularly where the heather flowered a little

later. Unusually, a second flow was observed on some moors with the better weather coming in early September.
Continuing warm, dry conditions saw the bees collecting pollen and nectar from ivy right through to November though the balsam finished early, except in the upper reaches of the river valleys where some good crops were obtained.

Rather worryingly a build up of Varroa after late summer treatment was observed in some colonies with a corresponding increase in the number affected by Deformed Wing Virus. Infestations were not uniform across the apiaries suggesting that reinvasion from, or robbing of, collapsing colonies was occurring. It is known that DWV is the most common pathogen associated with colony loss and can remain in colonies even after treatment for Varroa. Recent research has suggested that DWV can potentially act independently of Varroa and may be a major factor in over-wintering colony losses.

Such a disparity in weather conditions and available forage in different districts has made it difficult to assess the honey yields for 2009. However an average for production colonies from sources throughout the region gave a spring/summer yield of 26kg and heather honey 9kg – not a good year but overall somewhat better than 2008.

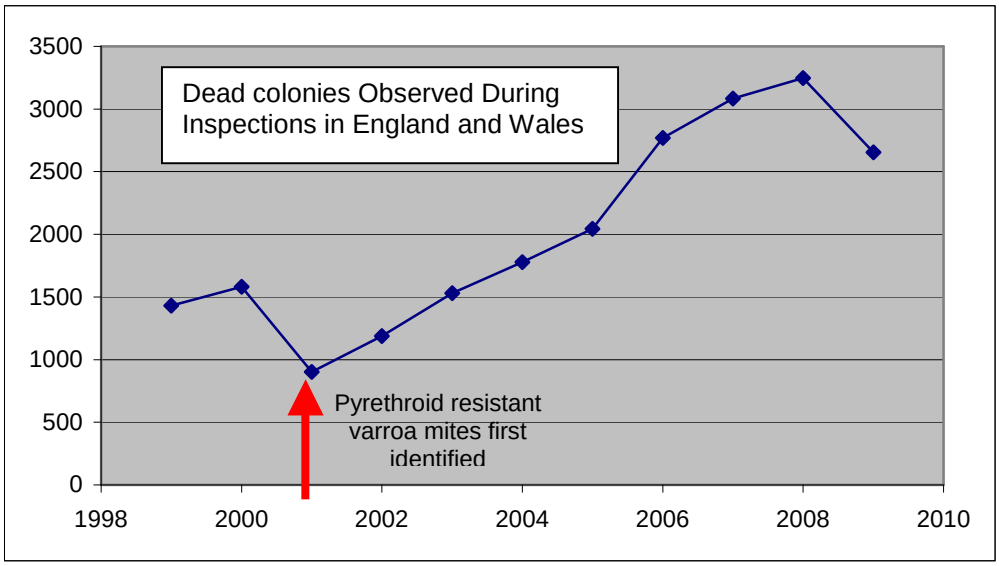
Colony Losses 2008-9

As may be expected after such a poor summer as 2008, some colonies had insufficient food to survive the winter but most that were well fed and had been treated effectively for varroa survived through to spring. Poor varroa control will have contributed to the demise of some colonies but varroa related losses appeared fewer than in 2007-8. Nosema may have contributed to the death of colonies already weakened by the protracted winter conditions but the majority of losses occurred in late winter and were associated with queen failure rather than disease.

Information on colony losses obtained by Bee Inspectors from beekeepers in the region is presented below. Not too much reliance should be placed on individual figures as some are derived from fairly small sample sets. However the results generally show a significant improvement from the previous year and for the whole region close to the national average of about 20%.

Region	Colony Losses (%)	
	2008	2009
Derbyshire	31.2	34.4
East Yorks	50	19.8
North Yorks	34	11.7
Nottinghamshire	48.3	15.7
South Yorks	56.5	30.7
West Yorks	35.7	21.6

The number of dead colonies observed nationally during apiary inspections has been monitored for several years and supports a general reduction in colony losses last winter. Whilst still too high, this is a reversal of the trend observed since the advent of pyrethroid resistance and may indicate that beekeepers generally have a better understanding of varroa control.



Resistance of Varroa to the pyrethroids (Apistan and Bayvarol) is now widespread in the region and has been observed even in some more remote parts of North Yorkshire. Beekeepers are generally turning to thymol treatments, possibly following up with an oxalic acid treatment in winter. A few beekeepers are using treatments based on Amitraz, the active ingredient in Apivar (obtainable under the Cascade process through veterinary agencies) but there is some anecdotal evidence of emerging resistance to this treatment also.

It remains essential that beekeepers monitor varroa levels throughout the year and learn to use a combination of alternative methods of control in an Integrated Pest Management approach. For further advice on varroa control please see the free NBU booklet 'Managing Varroa' and information on the NBU web site,

https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase

Foulbrood Diseases and Inspection Statistics

Additional funding through the Healthy Bees Plan has enabled a much needed expansion of the Bee Health Inspectorate. We were pleased to welcome Dhonn Atkinson, Sandra Kinchin and Tim Roper as Seasonal Bee Inspectors onto the North East team. Dhonn has been covering the Yorkshire districts from Rotherham to Ripon and Wakefield to York and Sandra from the far North down to Thirsk and East to Whitby. Tim's area is the Northern parts of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire from Matlock and Mansfield to Sheffield in South Yorkshire.

A total of 4299 colonies in 1001 apiaries were inspected in the North East Region. 60 colonies were found to have European Foulbrood (EFB) in 27 apiaries, somewhat less than last year but the occurrence was more widespread, affecting 25 beekeepers in all. The major outbreak last year in the Northallerton area has been brought under control but there were new areas affected in the York and Selby district and other cases in West Yorkshire and Derbyshire.

The incidence of American Foul Brood (AFB) in the North East Region was the highest on recent record with 18 colonies in 8 apiaries affected, mostly in the Scarborough district.

The location of foulbrood disease by 10km squares are in the table below.

County	10km Square	Colonies with EFB	Colonies with AFB
Notts	SK54	4	
Derbyshire	SK33	1	
	SK35	1	1
	SK37	2	
East Yorks			
North Yorks	SE28	1	
	SE37	1	
	SE45	6	
	SE49	5	
	SE52	3	
	SE53	2	
	SE54	10	
	SE55	2	
	SE56	3	
	SE63	5	
	SE65	3	
	SE98	3	
	TA09		8
	SE99		7
South Yorks			
West Yorks	SD92	2	
	SE02	3	
	SE13	3	
	SE04		1
	SE14		1

Details of disease incidence including maps and disease trends are regularly updated on BeeBase, the NBU web site:
https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase

All beekeepers are welcome to register on this site and will be able to access personal inspection records, information on the Healthy Bees Plan, research projects, bee health, legislation, news and a wide range of advice and general information. Watch out for new developments to BeeBase early next year.

Education and Advisory Services

As part of the ongoing commitment to education the Disease Liaison Contact Scheme has been revitalised in the North East Region. DLC's are people who have a responsibility in their local Association for education or training of new beekeepers or whom other beekeepers turn to for advice for their 'enhanced' bee husbandry knowledge. My aim is to encourage each district to be involved and to offer training and advice to give DLC's a better understanding of bee-health issues, enabling them to pass on their knowledge through their local associations and contacts – to 'Train the Trainers'. July saw the first two-day training course. Due to the practical element, numbers had to be limited to 15 but a second course is planned for 2010.

Other region-wide events planned for next year are a Bee Health Forum to which representatives from all beekeeping organisations will be invited and two or three Bee Husbandry Days.

At a local level my team and I will continue to be available to assist with talks, demonstrations and many of the events organised by the various beekeeping associations – please contact me with any ideas or requirements.

With best wishes for 2010

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