

National Bee Unit

Northern Annual Review 2020



The 2020 Season

Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Wirral, Lancashire, Cumbria, Tyne and Wear, County Durham and Northumberland

Coronavirus restrictions have impacted every sphere of life this year and during the initial stages of lockdown in April bee inspectors were classified as *key workers*, our work within the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) being considered essential.

Nevertheless, I was the only inspector in the Northern Region working in the field until the middle of June, the Northern Region Seasonal Bee Inspectors (SBI) were working in isolation supporting the National Bee Unit in other essential work. Once SBI inspections commenced only three of the four inspectors returned to field work due to circumstances beyond our control.

When carrying out inspections we adhered to social distancing for the protection of both inspectors and beekeepers. We were unable to enter enclosed premises which included dwellings, even if it was the only way to access the apiary. Some beekeepers declined to visit secure apiaries to allow access to inspectors due to health vulnerabilities, and this was respected. The safety of inspectors when travelling was also a concern as many facilities normally taken for granted were closed.

Inspectors encouraged beekeepers to allow inspections to proceed without them being present, and if that was not possible observation from a distance was practiced. When making appointments the safety of inspectors and beekeepers were the top priority, even if that meant less inspections would be carried out.

Clearly the above restraints impacted on the inspection figures for the 2020 season as will be outlined later in this report.

There will be new rules with regard to imports and exports in 2021, a more comprehensive overview is detailed later in this report.

Another subject that will be raised later in this report is the Voluntary and Enhanced Apiary schemes. With five inspectors covering nine counties from South Cheshire to the Scottish borders these schemes provide an extra layer of vigilance for exotic pest incursions. We are very grateful to our current volunteers for their assistance and would encourage anyone who might consider take part to contact any of the Northern Team to discuss what's involved.

The NBU, BeeBase and the Northern Team

In November 2020 the Healthy Bees Plan Review and the Healthy Bees Plan 2030 was published, see <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/public/News/news.cfm#262>. Defra, Welsh Government and the National Bee Unit have worked with stakeholders to produce a review of progress made under the original Healthy Bees Plan, a ten-year blueprint

introduced in 2009 to improve honey bee health across England and Wales. The Healthy Bees Plan 2030 is a comprehensive document with future strategies to protect and advance the wellbeing of our honey bees, benefitting from the findings in the review and the work of the Healthy Bees Plan in the first 10 years.

Kate Wilson (Office Manager) and Lesley Debenham (Admin and Support) have taken temporary promotion working on other projects within APHA. Adam Parker has similarly taken up Kate's role also as a temporary promotion, and office support is additionally being provided by Diane Gillibrand and Yvonne Wroe based at Lutra House, Preston.

From April 1st 2021 you can use the post code search on the contacts page of BeeBase to check for your local SBI, who can be contacted on the numbers below from the beginning of April until the end of September. During the winter period of October to March please direct all enquiries to the RBI.

Regional Bee Inspector	Area	Contact
Mark McLoughlin	Merseyside, Wirral and West Cheshire	07500 891425
Seasonal Bee Inspectors	Area	Contact
Caroline Coughlin (April to September)	Greater Manchester, East Cheshire	07500 891423
Julia Hoggard (April to September)	Cumbria	07900 394303
Brian Murphy (April to September)	Tyne & Wear, Northumberland, County Durham	07747 765934
John Zamorski (April to September)	Lancashire	07775 119446

Beekeeper and Colony Numbers

The Northern Region currently has a total of 4,059 currently active beekeepers registered on Beebase, slightly up from last year's figure of 3,990. There are 17,641

registered colonies, again slightly higher than the 17,470 colonies in 2019. Additionally, there are 3,292 non-current beekeepers (compared to the 2019 figure of 3,063) who have indicated they do not keep bees and will not be resuming their beekeeping activity in the future. These figures do not take into account of unregistered beekeepers, apiaries or colonies (including feral).

The statistics are broken down below so you can see the numbers for your county. *When compared to other regions we still have the lowest number of registered apiaries and colonies, and the second lowest for registered beekeepers.*

Region	County	Current beekeepers	No of Current Apiaries	No of Colonies	Beekeepers unknown status	Apiaries unknown status	No of Colonies	Non Current beekeepers
Northern England	Cheshire	842	1157	3693	0	0	0	417
	County Durham	338	420	1551	0	0	0	269
	Cumbria	631	794	2693	0	0	0	737
	Greater Manchester	480	612	2203	0	0	0	347
	Lancashire	872	1069	3021	1	0	0	561
	Merseyside	373	503	1240	0	0	0	358
	Northumberland	322	419	2331	0	0	0	423
	Tyne & Wear	201	273	909	0	0	0	180
	NORTHERN ENGLAND TOTALS		4059	5247	17641	1	0	0

Over 9,000 beekeepers completed the Hive Count in 2019 and the 2020 Hive Count launched on 2nd November, so you can update your BeeBase records with the total number of overwintering colonies. It is very important that we do all we can to keep levels of foulbrood to a minimum, this information is vital for our planning and preparation for outbreaks of disease or exotic pests.

BeeBase Registration

I hope that all of you reading this are registered on BeeBase. If you have received a visit from your local Seasonal Bee inspector you will be, but if not, please can I encourage you to register? It is free and all your details are kept confidential. The benefits to you are email alerts if foulbrood or exotic pests (including Asian Hornet) are found in the area of your apiaries. The benefit to the wider beekeeping community is that inspectors know where to look for disease or pests so that outbreaks can be quickly brought under control. Just because you are a member of a beekeeping association does not mean that you are automatically registered on BeeBase. If you are registered then thank you, but please do keep your apiary locations updated. If you have lost your BeeBase password then contact the NBU office for a reset. You can register online (www.nationalbeeunit.com) or by contacting the NBU office on 0300 3030094 or through your Regional Bee Inspector.

Inspections

During the 2020 inspection season 1198 colonies were inspected across the region, two colonies in Northumberland were found to have American Foulbrood and destroyed. Attached are the figures (publically available on Beebase) for both foulbrood and exotic pest apiary inspections broken down by county.

Apiary Inspections and Foulbrood Disease in England, Scotland and Wales for 2020						Report for year 2020
Region	County	Apiaries Inspected	No. of apiaries diagnosed positive for AFB	No. of apiaries diagnosed positive for EFB	Percent of inspected apiaries diagnosed positive for AFB	Percent of inspected apiaries diagnosed positive for EFB
Northern-England	Cheshire	59	0	0	0.00	0.00
	County Durham	12	0	0	0.00	0.00
	Cumbria	44	0	0	0.00	0.00
	Greater Manchester	31	0	0	0.00	0.00
	Lancashire	38	0	0	0.00	0.00
	Merseyside	10	0	0	0.00	0.00
	Northumberland	40	2	0	5.00	0.00
	Tyne & Wear	20	0	0	0.00	0.00

Apiary Inspections for Exotic Pests in England and Wales for 2020					Year 2020	
Region	County	No. of Apiaries Inspected	No. of Colonies Inspected		No. of Colonies with Small hive beetle	No. of Colonies with <i>Tropilaelaps</i>
			Total	Dead		
Northern-England	Cheshire	20	77	7	0	0
	County Durham	3	18	0	0	0
	Cumbria	49	184	15	0	0
	Greater Manchester	28	177	20	0	0
	Lancashire	37	91	10	0	0
	Merseyside	22	58	2	0	0
	Northumberland	4	13	0	0	0
	Tyne & Wear	18	50	12	0	0

Beekeepers can contact their RBI or SBI if they have concerns about bee disease or pests. If you see anything suspicious take a photograph if you can, and in relation to insects try to take a sample. The photograph can then be sent via picture message or email to your SBI or RBI, or you can contact us by phone to describe the problem/specimen. If we can't rule out it being a statutory disease or pest, we will arrange to visit free of charge. Please note that it's a legal requirement to inform the NBU if you know or suspect a statutory, notifiable disease or pest is present.



Classic AFB ropiness test.
Photo Frank Gellatly



Contorted larvae with EFB
Photo Ben Bowen

Commencing at the start of 2020 the risk-based priority inspection rules for the SBI inspection lists have been revised following work by Professor Giles Budge at Newcastle University. For European Foulbrood the follow-up inspections remain largely unchanged, however after reviewing scientific evidence wider surveillance inspections following AFB outbreaks have been modified to better match evidenced disease behaviour.

In addition, there has been a revision of the inspection criteria for exotic pest detection to provide a more efficient approach.

Varroa

Varroa levels as noted by inspectors showed variance between apiaries, some had colonies with no significant evidence of mites, whilst others situated nearby were struggling with high loads and virus damage. Generally, whether this is due to beekeeper interventions or other factors it's difficult to say. Regardless, it is strongly advised that beekeepers regularly monitor mite levels as part of the management of the colonies, and to take action if they reach damaging levels.

Control can be achieved by using biotechnical methods and authorised products as directed by the manufacturer. Varroa treatments should be targeted before colonies start to produce their 'winter' bees but monitoring of varroa levels throughout the season will help determine whether an earlier treatment is required.

Many experienced beekeepers will complete two treatments at specific times in the year, the most popular being a thymol-based treatment starting in August, after taking the honey off and checking for stores, and a winter treatment with an oxalic acid based product in December. Both of these have active ingredients that are not thought to risk promoting resistance in mites through regular use.

The manufacturers of the authorised treatments spend a great deal of time formulating how they should be used to ensure the maximum efficiency. Please ensure that when using treatments that the manufacturer's instructions are strictly adhered to achieve the greatest benefit from the product.

It is also worth noting that some treatments, such as those that are thymol or formic acid based are affected by temperature. Strips such as those containing Amitraz need to be placed correctly in the brood chamber in line with instructions. They also need to be monitored regularly; I often see colonies that move away from inserted strips once the brood has emerged resulting in reduced exposure to the active ingredients.

Varroa acts as a vector for viruses which will reduce the longevity of the bees and so impact on the foraging capability of colonies during the summer. Colonies treated too late in the season may result in winter bees being affected by viruses, or they may be weakened by the varroa mites feeding on them. This could lead to colony mortality in the winter or early spring.

This year the list of approved veterinary medicines remains unchanged. The list of those registered for use by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) is available on their website, <https://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/ProductInformationDatabase/Default.aspx> the 'Summary of Product Characteristics' giving full details of use. For the full list, select 'Bees' from the drop-down list of species in the product search link.

There's a legal requirement that the use of any treatments is recorded, and these records must be kept for a minimum of 5 years. Full details can be found on Beebase along with numerous free fact sheets including the 'Managing Varroa' booklet.

The Beebase website has pdf links to numerous free fact sheets including the 'Managing Varroa' booklet.

<http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=167>

Voluntary and Enhanced Apiary Schemes

We have 15 Voluntary Sentinel Apiaries (VSA) and 13 Enhanced Sentinel Apiaries (ESA) in the Northern Region

The main difference between the sentinel apiary schemes is that the SBI visits the ESA apiaries to take the samples, but it's the beekeeper who does so at a VSA. Beekeepers who participate in the VSA scheme are issued with all they need to enable them to participate at no cost to themselves. Likewise, there is no cost to the beekeeper who participates in the ESA scheme.

I would like to thank all the beekeepers who currently take part, your involvement is highly valued and appreciated.

If you would like to join either scheme in 2021, or would just like to chat through what's involved please contact me by

email (mark.mcloughlin@apha.gov.uk) or mobile phone (07500 891425).



Tropilaelaps Mite
Photo: NBU



Small Hive Beetle oil trap in a hive
Photo: Mark McLoughlin

Yellow-legged Asian Hornet

This year has seen a reduction in confirmed Asian Hornet sightings in the UK with just one Asian Hornet nest found and destroyed by NBU inspectors in an apple tree in Gosport, Hampshire on Friday 11th September. This followed reports from two householders in the area, one of which was a beekeeper who had identified Asian Hornets feeding on his grapes. The nest was small, approximately 20cm in diameter, local beekeepers were made aware through the Asian Hornet Teams (AHTs) and



Gosport nest in apple tree
Photo: Peter Davies

monitoring has continued in the area.

The NBU has close ties with the Jersey Government's Asian Hornet Co-ordinator and team of volunteers, given their location between us and France. NBU inspectors have had field visits there in previous years so that we could learn from their experience. There haven't been as many Asian Hornet nests reported on Jersey this year either, with the tally of those destroyed on the island being 38 by October 15th, which contrasts with 83 found by the end of 2019. The reduction will be partly due to the ongoing eradication of nests and founding queens in previous years. The other most likely reasons given are the damp and variable temperatures between January and March this year making the over wintering queens more susceptible to fungal attack. Also, the reduction in traffic from France due to

Coronavirus restrictions may well have reduced the number of founding queens hitching a ride over from the French mainland in spring.

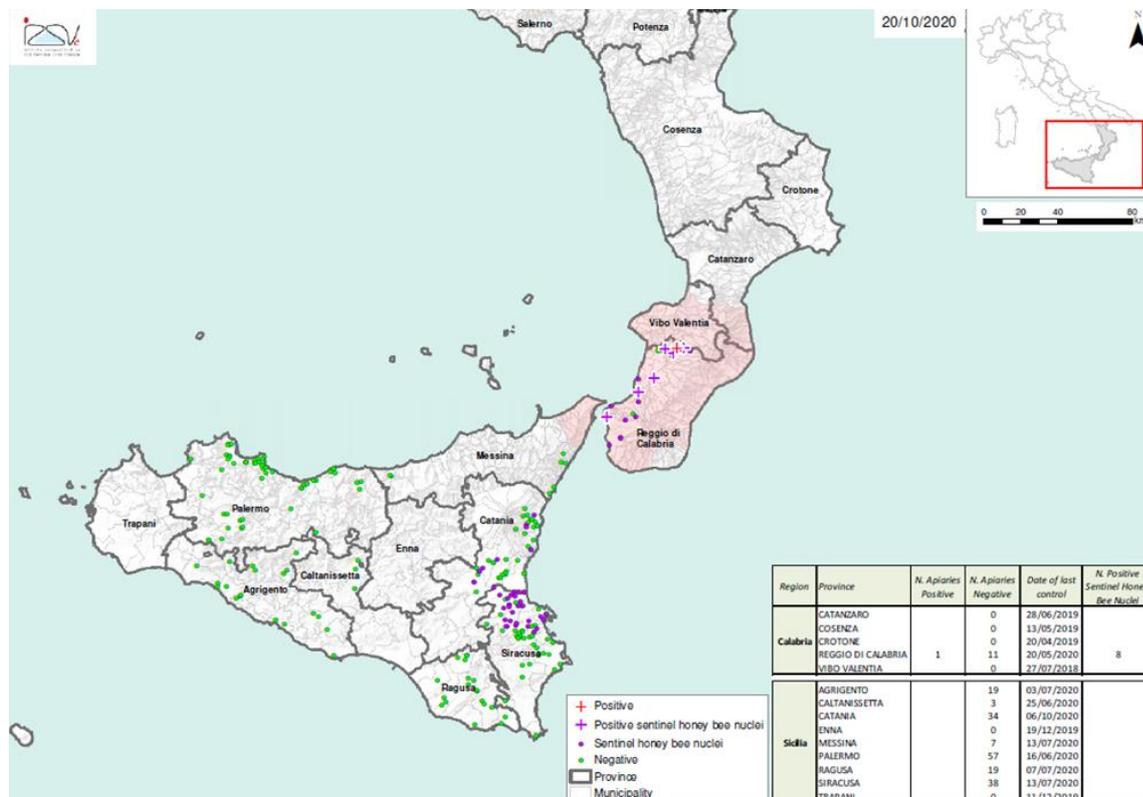
We are encouraging everyone to:

- download the free Asian Hornet Watch iPhone or Android app
- familiarise yourself with what the hornets and similar insects look like
- keep a look out on late summer flowering plants such as ivy where the hornets (and other insects) forage on the flowers.
- report suspect sightings using the ‘Asian Hornet Watch’ app, or by filling out an online report form, or by emailing alernnonnative@ceh.ac.uk .

The Northern Region is currently at the northern edge of the Asian hornet’s European range, and by working together hope to keep this invasive species at bay and protect our nation’s important pollinators.

Surveillance of Small Hive Beetle (SHB) in Italy in 2020

Information from the National Reference Laboratory for Apiculture in Italy below, updated in October 2020, shows extensive surveillance for Small Hive Beetle in Sicily with no positives found. Meanwhile in the Calabria region on the mainland one positive apiary and eight positive sentinel Nuclei have been found containing both larvae and adult beetles.



Importing or Exporting Honey Bees after 31st December 2020

The UK has left the EU, new rules apply from January 2021

The transition period comes to an end this year on 31st December 2020. To find out how this affects Imports and Exports of honey bees as of the 1st January and what you can do to prepare please refer to guidance on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) and the [Border Operating Model](#), which provide information on the new processes.

For movements both ways between Northern Ireland and GB guidance may be found in the [Northern Ireland Protocol](#).

If you are planning to import or export bees it is your responsibility to follow these new rules and protect GB biosecurity.

Guidance on changes for businesses and citizens may be found at <https://www.gov.uk/transition> where you may use the Brexit checker to obtain a personalised list of actions.

If you import Bees:

- [Check what you need to do to import from the EU from 1 January 2021](#)

You risk not being able to bring or receive goods from EU countries from 1 January 2021 if you are not prepared for the end of Transition

- [Check what you need to do to import animals, animal products, high risk food and feed into Great Britain from 1 January 2021](#)

There will be new processes that importers must follow. These processes to import from an EU country will be introduced in 3 stages:

- [1 January 2021](#)
 - [1 April 2021](#) (included for completeness but only relevant to animal products and high-risk food and feed)
 - [1 July 2021](#)
- **You will need to register for the UK's new Import of Products, Animals, Food and Feed System ([IPAFFS](#))**

You will no longer be able to import using the TRACES system from 1 January 2021.

More information:

[Importing animals, animal products and high-risk food and feed not of animal origin from 1 January 2021](#)

EU law prohibits or restricts the import of specific goods from third countries that are deemed to present an unacceptable level of animal, plant or public health risk. These prohibitions and restrictions will be transposed into UK law at the end of the Transition Period.

As GB and the EU are expected to be treating each other as third countries from a bee health point of view, these restrictions and prohibitions will currently prevent or restrict mutual trade in bees.

As a result, importers will only be able to import queens from the EU. Any associated packaging (including queen cages and attendant workers) will have to be sent to a designated laboratory for examination and for honey bees this is Fera Science. Importing packages or colonies will no longer be possible after the 31st December 2020. From 1st July 2021 imported queens will have to pass through a Border Control Point (BCP). Currently, only BCPs at Heathrow and Manchester airports will accept imports of invertebrates, which includes bees. The National Bee Unit will continue to carry out physical checks on consignments of queens according to risk.

If you export Bees:

- [Check what you need to do to export to the EU from 1 January 2021](#)

You risk not being able to send or take goods to EU countries from 1 January 2021 if you are not prepared for the end of Transition.

The position regarding exports is similar to imports. The EU would also consider the UK to be a Third Country. This will mean that the EU would only accept exports of queens from the UK – providing we are listed as a third country approved to export to the EU. The export of packages and colonies will no longer be possible.

Further Advice:

Please review the Gov.uk pages linked above for more detailed and the most up to date guidance. [BeeBase pages](#) containing Import and Export guidance will be updated on a regular basis for easy reference.

2020 Imports

Excluding Northern Ireland, 21,405 queens, 1,882 packages, 210 nucleus and 363 colonies were imported from the EU into the UK mainland during 2020. As seen below

compared to 2019 the number of imported queens has risen from 20,081 and packages reduced from 2,623. There were no reported imports from outside the EU during 2020.

Queen Bees or nucleus colonies imported from the EU into England, Scotland and Wales in 2020						Report for year 2020
Country of origin	Number of consignments imported	Batched number of queens	Batched number of nucleus	Batched number of packages	Batched number of Colonies	Number of consignments inspected
Austria	1	5	0	0	0	1
Belgium	2	4	0	0	0	0
Croatia	1	3	0	32	0	1
Cyprus	1	20	0	0	0	1
Czech Republic	6	91	0	250	0	1
Denmark	44	2405	0	0	0	23
France	4	420	0	0	0	4
Germany	10	64	0	0	0	5
Greece	51	2872	0	0	0	13
Hungary	15	713	0	0	0	12
Italy	104	9701	60	1595	363	75
Lithuania	1	0	0	5	0	1
Malta	18	2062	0	0	0	4
Netherlands	2	9	0	0	0	1
Poland	4	110	150	0	0	0
Portugal	1	66	0	0	0	1
Romania	21	1576	0	0	0	9
Slovenia	32	1284	0	0	0	7
TOTALS:	318	21405	210	1882	363	159

Queen Bees or nucleus colonies imported from the EU into England, Scotland and Wales in 2019						Report for year 2019
Country of origin	Number of consignments imported	Batched number of queens	Batched number of nucleus	Batched number of packages	Batched number of Colonies	Number of consignments inspected
Bulgaria	1	3	0	0	0	1
Cyprus	18	318	0	0	0	10
Czech Republic	7	159	0	175	0	1
Denmark	43	2574	0	0	0	22
France	1	0	0	0	15	1
Germany	25	203	0	20	1	11
Greece	88	4928	0	0	0	18
Italy	85	3304	0	2428	0	57
Malta	36	3529	0	0	0	26
Netherlands	4	12	0	0	0	3
Poland	3	40	30	0	20	1
Romania	37	2806	0	0	0	11
Slovenia	65	2205	0	0	0	25
Spain	1	0	0	0	100	1
TOTALS:	414	20081	30	2623	136	188

Beekeeper training

The Northern Region had arranged two Bee Health Days for 2020 which were cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. We currently have a Bee Health Day event planned for the summer of 2021, details of which will be circulated nearer the time if restrictions are lifted.

Finally

I would like to thank the Northern Region SBIs for their hard work during a challenging 2020 season. Also, thanks to all the beekeepers we visited, and who facilitated sample taking during 2020 for their time and cooperation.

I wish everyone an enjoyable and productive 2021 beekeeping season.

Mark McLoughlin

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