

National Bee Unit

2014 Wales Regional Review



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

The Season

Overwintering

The winter of 2013/14 was mild and wet overall with very little frost and equally few dry spells. This followed an appreciable honey flow from the Himalayan Balsam in September and sustained mild temperatures which allowed colonies to work the abundant ivy flowers into October 2013. Pollen gathered from these crops enabled more prolific brood rearing and colonies were in a good state for winter compared with the previous year.

Winter Losses: *We surveyed 260 beekeepers during the course of our inspections this year and found that 15% of colonies were lost between 1st October 2013 and 1st April 2014. Further losses occurred after this date but with good management many of these hives will have been restocked during the summer.*

By March 2014, spring was well on its way with much dry, warm weather and temperatures rising near to 20 °C at the end of the month. One could catch a glimpse of bees foraging on hazel catkins, willow and late winter flowering shrubs on calm days and, on examination of the OMF inserts, a shallow layer of brown wax capping material under the cluster/brood area indicated the healthy activity above. At the end of March, it was typical for there to be 3 – 6 frames of brood in hives.

Spring into Summer

Favourable conditions continued into April, winter losses appeared low and colonies were coming on well in the warm weather. By May, brood rearing was in full swing and proving a very different start to the 2013 season. The weather stayed warm and the demands for pollen and nectar were easily met. In some areas, beekeepers were already achieving a honey surplus from the spring flow. The early mild season continued through May which meant plenty of forage coming in, steadily filling the first super and even the second one on strong stocks. Plentiful pollen resulted in brood nests building up well, and, inevitably, the good conditions interspersed with occasional wet spells, turned the attention of stronger colonies to building queen cells.

By the end of June, we were a couple of weeks ahead of normal and had experienced a good flow for much of the month. Brood frames shaken during the second fortnight in June scattered liquid nectar as the main flow got under way. There was weight building up in the supers and some beekeepers were already running out of boxes. July did not disappoint either. Only August bucked the trend, producing cooler, wetter conditions that ended what had been a consistently good honey season.

Honey yield: *The average honey crop per hive recorded by the seasonal bee inspectors in Wales from their own areas in 2014 was 20kg (45lb).*

Conditions in September reverted to warm and dry with good forage available to colonies building up for the coming winter. This latter part of the season also revealed some variable queen mating, requiring some uniting or requeening of stocks to be done by those vigilant beekeepers, keen for their charges to go into winter queen right.

The NBU in Wales

The Team

This year, we said goodbye to one of our established Seasonal Bee Inspectors (SBIs), Ceri Morgan, who left after being with the National Bee Unit (NBU) for 5 years. Ceri wanted to concentrate his energies on his own growing commercial beekeeping enterprise. We also welcomed Maggie Gill who has been covering South Pembrokeshire and West Carmarthenshire since June from her base near Carmarthen.

There are now nine SBIs in place, working from the beginning of April until the end of September. A full time Regional Bee Inspector (RBI) works throughout the year. The team covers the whole of Wales and individuals can be contacted on the numbers below (during the season for the SBIs whilst the RBI is contactable year-round):

Regional Bee Inspector	Area	Contact
Frank Gellatly	E Carmarthenshire	07775 119480
Seasonal Bee Inspectors	Area	Contact
Jonathan Garratt	N Gwynedd, Anglesey, Llyn	07775 119479
David Hards	Flintshire, Denbighshire, Wrexham	07775 119488
Paul Aslin	S Gwynedd, N Powys	07867 351605
David Coles	Mid & S Powys	07775 119485
Mike Davies	Ceredigion	07775 119481
Maggie Gill	Pembrokeshire, W Carmarthenshire	07979 119373
Ade Bowen	S Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot	07775 119489
Dinah Sweet	Cardiff, Bridgend & Vale of Glamorgan	07775 119450

Beekeeper Numbers

There are currently 2,928 beekeepers in Wales registered on the NBU's online database BeeBase. Between them, they have 15,784 colonies in 3,920 apiaries – an average of 5 colonies per beekeeper and 4 colonies per apiary. Over the past 7 years, the number of new beekeepers registering on BeeBase has risen overall: from 102 in 2007 to 406 in 2011. In 2012 and 2013, they fell to 242 and 208 respectively but 2014 saw a return to the upward trend with 332 new beekeeper registrations.

Wales' beekeeper, apiary and colony numbers on BeeBase (December 2014)

County*	No. Beekeepers – and as a % of the total		No. Apiaries – and as a % of the total		No. Colonies and as a % of the total	
Gwynedd	417	14 %	581	15 %	2,043	13 %
Clwyd	371	13 %	503	13 %	1,709	11 %
Powys	409	14 %	527	13 %	2,293	15 %
Dyfed	890	30 %	1222	31 %	5,718	36 %
Mid Glamorgan	206	7 %	277	7 %	1,086	7 %
West Glamorgan	189	6 %	244	6 %	907	6 %
South Glamorgan	151	5 %	203	5 %	684	4 %
Gwent	295	10 %	363	9 %	1,344	9 %
WALES totals	2,928		3,920		15,784	

* Funding restraints mean that BeeBase is still configured in the preserved counties of Wales.

Inspections

This year, Welsh Inspectorate visits totalled 937 beekeepers, 1339 apiaries and 5553 colonies. This represents 65 less beekeepers and 57 more apiaries, but 63 fewer colonies than the previous year. We also carried out 7 import inspections following up the importation of queens from other EU countries.



Apiary inspection at the National Botanical Garden of Wales – Photo by Ade Bowen

Pests and diseases

Varroa

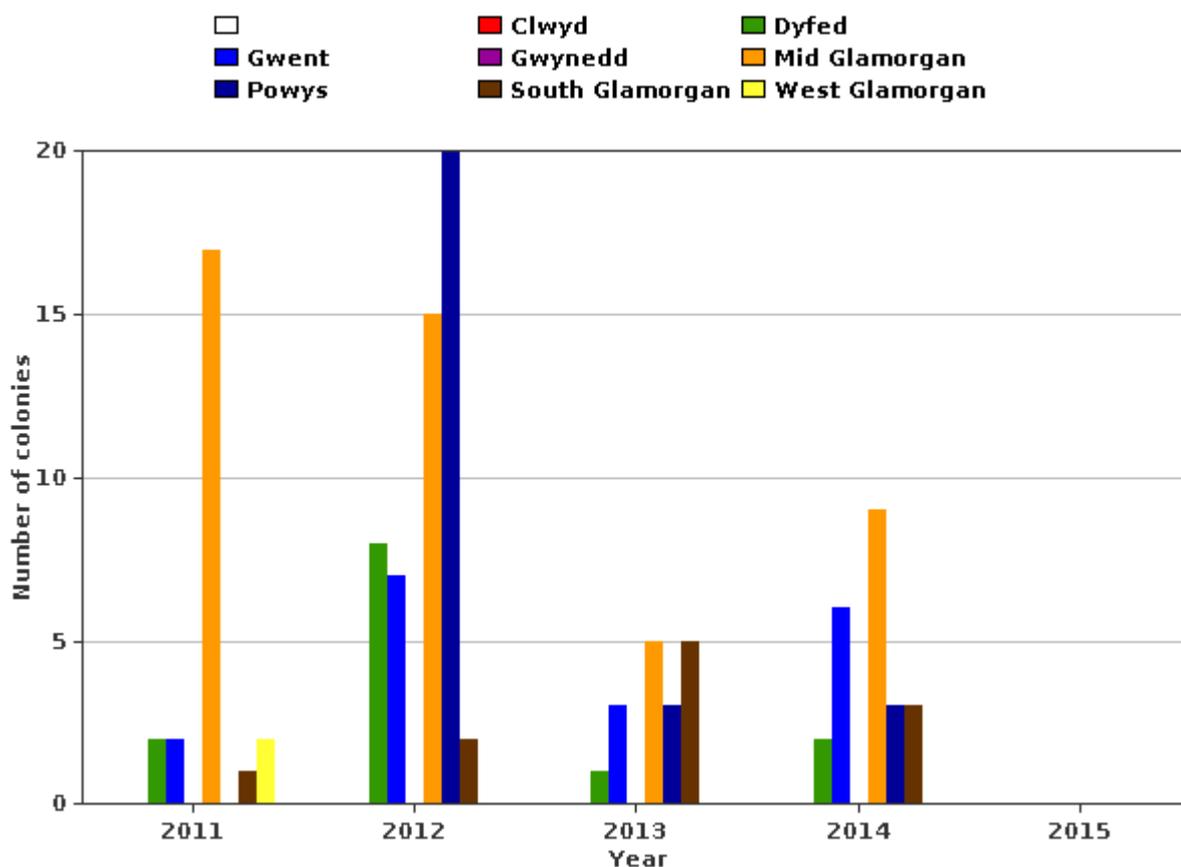
Many beekeepers in England and Wales have recorded higher Varroa mite levels this year compared to the low levels of last year. This may be attributable to the milder 2013/14 winter and longer presence of brood within colonies during 2014, enabling more prolific mite reproduction. The range of treatment products available for varroa control continues to rise, with some beekeepers making effective use of MAQS formic acid strips.

Notifiable Diseases: European Foulbrood (EFB) and American Foulbrood (AFB)

This season, we found foulbrood in 17 apiaries, affecting 28 colonies. This is a decrease on 2013 levels when 23 apiaries were found with 37 diseased colonies. It represents a 26% drop in infected apiaries and a 24% drop in infected colonies.

As well as the vigilance and ongoing effort of the inspectorate, the reduction in cases of notifiable disease is also attributable to EFB being suppressed in the good season of 2014 and to the effectiveness of the statutory destruction policy in cases of AFB. Beekeepers should not drop their guard, but can take some comfort from the fact that the likelihood of their bees being affected by foulbrood remains low: 0.2% (2 in number) of beekeepers inspected were found to have AFB and 1.5% (14 in number) EFB.

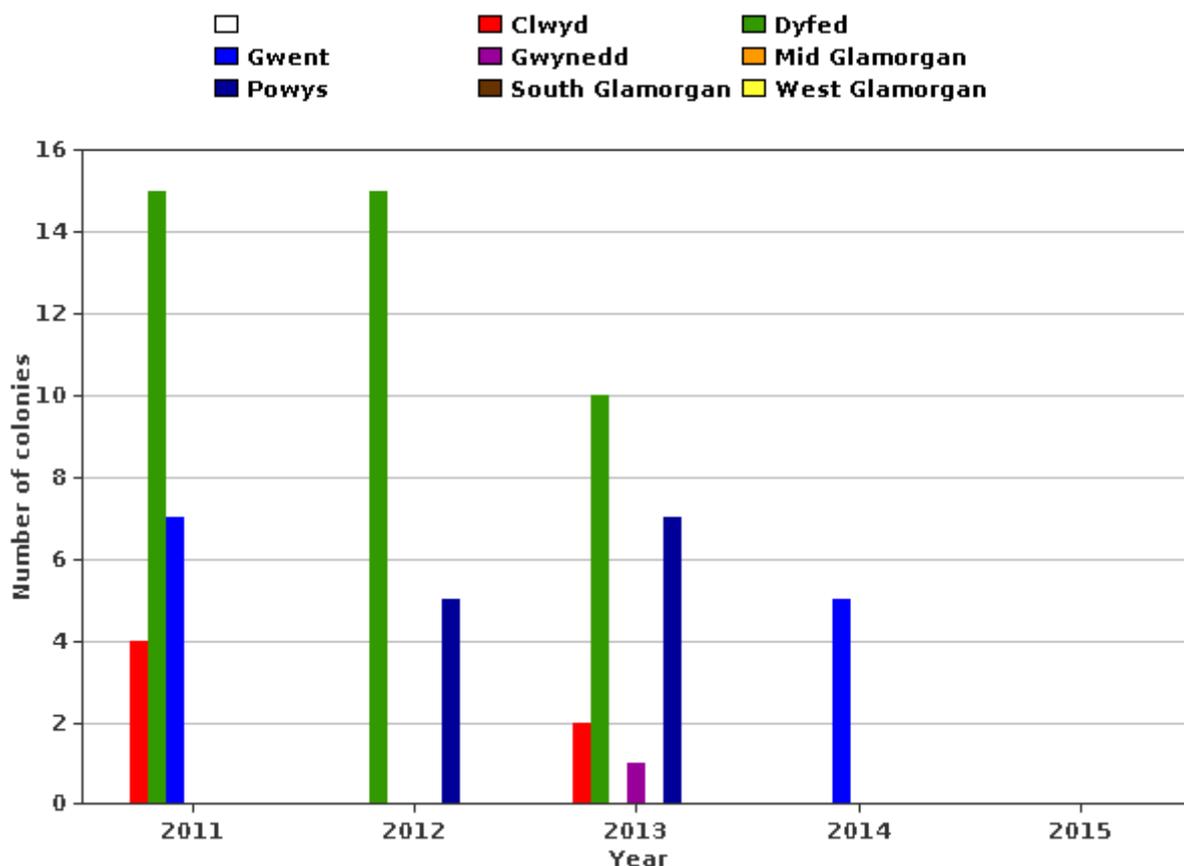
INCIDENCE OF EUROPEAN FOULBROOD 2011 – 2014 (per preserved county)



Location and incidence of EFB affected hives per unitary authority (colour referenced to preserved counties data above)

Unitary Authority	Grid square	Area	Colonies infected	Month found
Bridgend	SS88	Pyle	4	May, June, August
Bridgend	SS97	Bridgend	1	June
Bridgend	SS98	Pencoed	6	April, May, June, July
Caerphilly	ST19	Blackwood	1	April
Monmouthshire	ST59	Chepstow	5	May, June, August
Monmouthshire	SO50	Whitebrook	1	May
Carmarthenshire	SN40	Burry Port	1	May
Ceredigion	SN56	Nebo	1	April
Powys	SO12	Llangorse	2	June
Powys	SO13	Three Cocks	1	June

INCIDENCE OF AMERICAN FOULBROOD 2011 – 2014 (per preserved county)



Location and incidence of AFB affected hives per unitary authority (colour referenced to preserved counties data above)

Unitary Authority	Grid square	Area	Colonies infected	Month found
Monmouthshire	SO31	Abergavenny	5	August, September

Exotic Pest Surveillance

We carried out 256 inspections specific to exotic pests this year, targeting a combination of identified risk points and random sites. The identified risk points are ports, airports, crude hive product importers, fruit and vegetable wholesale markets and landfill sites associated with imported products.

We have also established 15 Sentinel Apiaries in order to improve our capacity to combat the arrival of pests from abroad. Sentinel apiaries are set up in areas considered ‘at risk’ where a volunteer beekeeper agrees to designate and monitor one of their colonies specifically for exotic pests. As well as visual inspection, floor debris from the designated hives is sampled twice a year and tested for Small Hive Beetle and Tropilaelaps. All equipment and paperwork is supplied to the beekeeper who collects samples as directed and sends them to the NBU laboratory for screening. SHB traps are provided and checked at normal colony inspections and noted on a log sheet.

Given the incursion of Small Hive Beetle into Italy in September and the proximity of the Asian Hornet across the channel in Northern France, the importance of exotic pest surveillance work cannot be overstated.



Chalk Brood – Photo by Frank Gellatly

Strategic Work

Pollinator Action Plan

I continue to represent the NBU on Welsh Government's Pollinator Action Plan Taskforce, and, alongside representatives from the Welsh Beekeeper's Association (WBKA), work to ensure that honeybee health remains an important part of the agenda. The Taskforce aims to raise awareness and bring a new emphasis to the work of government departments, other public sector bodies and voluntary groups in order to improve habitats and opportunities for all pollinators.

Education and Events

The Inspectors in Wales are involved in local association beginners and improvers classes, as well as giving talks and demonstrations on topics ranging from good husbandry, swarm management and making increase to varroa control, nosema and winter preparation. In total, the team has participated in 65 events.



Conwy BKA Comb Workshop – Photos by Barry Griffiths

Following the success of last year's programme, we ran another seven Disease Recognition and Comb Workshops in May, June and July. They were hosted and publicised by local beekeeper associations, open to members and non-members alike, and were attended by a wide range of beekeepers. A special licence from the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) allowed us to show real examples of diseased combs collected during our inspections. The practical and visual elements of the events, especially the chance to see and handle diseased comb 'in the flesh', was an opportunity much appreciated by participants. As well as beekeepers going away with a better understanding of biosecurity, hygiene, good husbandry and the importance of

inspecting for disease, we enjoyed being able to demonstrate the work that we do to a wider audience in an informative and accessible way. More will be on offer next year.

APHA

During the second half of the year, we have been promoting the NBU's new home: we have now left FERA to join the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) with effect from 1 October. This new body brings all animal and plant health inspectors - the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency, the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate, the Bee Inspectorate, and the Genetic Modification Inspectorate – into a single agency. An APHA conference in Llandrindod Wells in November brought together its Wales element and gave me a chance to introduce the work of the NBU to new inspectorate colleagues.

The Welsh Bee Inspectorate still operates from within the National Bee Unit whose head office remains at its former site in York, now re-named National Agri-Food Innovation Campus in York. The telephone number for the NBU Office has changed to 0300 303 0094 (local rate) and the email address is nbu@apha.gsi.gov.uk.

BeeBase

The graphs and figures in this report are available on the public pages of Beebase, on the NBU website (www.nationalbeeunit.com) in 'Bee Pests, Diseases and Maps'. The site also offers several pages of tips, advice and downloadable leaflets on disease control and bee husbandry.

If you have been inspected, you will be registered on Beebase (it is not an automatic consequence of joining a local beekeeping association). There are substantial benefits in registering, including: automatic alerts in the event of foulbrood or exotic pests being found in the vicinity of your apiary; emails with timely advice on the basis of the inspectorate's findings during the season; and a facility to maintain your own beekeeping and apiary records. In addition, we can come and check your bees and give advice in person if foulbrood or exotic pests are found nearby.

I urge everyone to check that they are on BeeBase and, if registered, to update any changes to their personal details and apiary information. If not, registration is free, quick and confidential, using a link on the home page. You can also request a reminder of your username and password from there (or phone the NBU office).

A Final Note

I would like to thank the team of Seasonal Bee Inspectors for all their hard work, and the local association secretaries who helped us to manage the programme of workshops across Wales. I anticipate recruiting another SBI in 2015 and would be happy to receive any expressions of interest or answer any questions from anyone suitably experienced.

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