

# Healthy Bees Plan 2030



By Rebekah Clarkson, Healthy Bees Plan Project Manager, National Bee Unit, Animal and Plant Health Agency

It is two years since Defra and the Welsh Government, together with stakeholders including the BBKA, launched the Healthy Bees Plan 2030 (HBP 2030); a joint commitment to honey bee health. This article covers the aims of the plan, who is involved, highlights some successes, talks about our plans for 2023 and explains how you can get involved. HBP 2030 follows on from the previous ten-year plan. In 2021 we developed and published the implementation plan for the HBP 2030 with 55 actions for everyone to work together to improve honey bee health and husbandry in England and Wales. These documents, including a review of the previous plan, are available in English and Welsh on BeeBase, the website of the Animal and Plant Health Agency's (APHA) National Bee Unit (NBU).

The HBP 2030 sets out four key outcomes for beekeepers, associations, bee farmers and government to work towards to help protect honey bees. These are:

- Effective biosecurity and good standards of husbandry, to minimise pest and disease risks and so improve the sustainability of honey bee populations.
- Enhanced skills and production capability/capacity of beekeepers and bee farmers.
- Sound science and evidence underpinning the actions taken to support bee health.
- Increased opportunities for knowledge exchange and partnership working on bee health and wider pollinator needs.

The HBP 2030 was developed in consultation with bee health stakeholders who all want to act to sustain the health of honey bees and beekeeping in England and Wales. Representatives from Defra Bee Health Policy, Welsh Government, the NBU, Defra Pollinator Policy, Fera Science Ltd, the BBKA, Welsh Beekeepers Association, Bee Farmers Association (BFA), National Farmers Union, National

Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB) and Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd all collaborate to deliver actions in the implementation plan. These representatives are also members of the Bee Health Advisory Forum (BHAf).

Crucial to the delivery of the plan is collaboration of the group, which meets quarterly. Minutes of meetings can be found on BeeBase. Key to the way we work is communication with everyone involved in bee health, including wider pollinator groups across England and Wales; the Action Plan for Pollinators Taskforce (Wales) and the Pollinator Advisory Steering Group (England). The plan states how we intend to deliver the outcomes of HBP 2030 together.

## Supporting more beekeepers

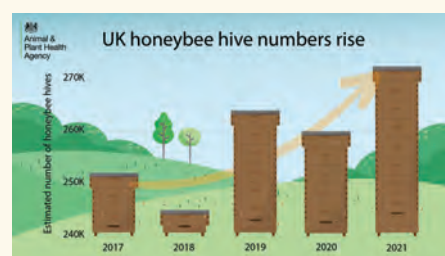
At the start of the first ten-year plan in 2009, 9,000 beekeepers were registered on BeeBase but with the support of stakeholders, including beekeeping associations, this has increased to more than 42,000 registered beekeepers across England and Wales. Over the last five years only 25,142 of those have been active in their accounts. Although it is not mandatory to register the location of hives, the NBU and the BBKA encourage all beekeepers to sign-up. Registered beekeepers benefit from local disease updates and alerts. Beekeepers also benefit from checks on their colonies by inspectors should there be a nearby outbreak of statutory disease.

During 2022 the NBU developed new social media channels; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, as research showed that people were seeking beekeeping advice using social media.

## Bee Health Advisory Forum

Since the start of the plan the BHAf has renewed its terms of reference for the meeting and appointed three independent Science Advisors: Norman Carreck, Kirsty Stainton and Professor Giles Budge. In

## Social media successes



Posted on the UN's World Bee Day, this graphic highlighted that honey bee numbers in the UK are not in decline but are in fact rising. The post reached 9,876 people on Facebook and 1,830 people via Twitter. All photos in this panel are courtesy Animal and Plant Health Agency, Crown copyright.



The interception of honey bee queens at Dover was the most viewed post in 2022, reaching 18,084 via Facebook, 814 via Twitter and 261 via Instagram. It linked to guidance on how to import queens legally and highlighted the consequences when the correct procedure is not followed.



The second post with the widest reach was an animation explaining what the National Bee Unit does, which reached 17,953 via Facebook, 1,969 via Twitter and 270 via Instagram.



**Left: Brood comb with dead cannibalised pupa, showing signs of starvation. Right: Monitoring board with white insert showing extensive *Varroa* mite drop among debris from a hive. Both photos courtesy Animal and Plant Health Agency, Crown copyright.**

February 2021, the BHAF had its first annual science meeting to discuss research priorities and hear from scientists about recent projects.

Following beekeeper feedback, BeeBase was improved in 2021 to make recording the location of apiaries much easier. The layout and maps were changed. We have received lots of positive feedback. If you have any other suggestions on how to improve BeeBase please get in touch.

### Our plans for 2023

This year we plan to make more people aware about what beekeeping involves before they begin, as there are a range of misconceptions. For example, a Defra-funded social science project delivered by ICF Consulting Services Ltd provided evidence that many beekeepers have unrealistic expectations about beekeeping and find it hard to deal with pests and diseases. The same study also found that beekeepers (over 56% of 912 respondents) initially took up beekeeping because they believed it would 'help the environment'. The BBKA has excellent leaflets to assist beginner beekeepers including *Getting Started in Beekeeping* and *Bees, Neighbours and Siting an Apiary*, and we are working on new communications to help beginners make informed decisions before they get bees.

### Common beekeeping issues addressed

**Starvation:** Each year NBU Inspectors are distressed to report finding numerous colonies with starved bees, which can be due to a lack of forage. When it is hot and dry and nectar has stopped flowing, bees can find nothing to eat, so starve. When this happens, the NBU sends out starvation alerts to registered beekeepers to remind them to feed their bees. Some new beekeepers seem unaware that honey bees are livestock and need water, food, clean housing and potentially medicine when they are ill or suffering from parasites, just as other livestock or pets do.

**Varroa infestation:** As I write, in mid-winter, we are already receiving a number of calls from beekeepers who have realised that their bees have died. One of the first questions our inspectors ask is: 'How have you managed *Varroa* in your hive?'. *Varroa* mites are a reportable pest, they damage brood and are a vector of viruses. With the weather being so warm, in many areas of the country many colonies have continued to produce brood, which allows *Varroa* populations to continue growing even during the winter.

Beekeepers need to check their *Varroa* mite count and when necessary, decide how to manage or treat for *Varroa*. There are a range of ways to manage *Varroa* populations, some biotechnical and some chemical methods, but doing nothing with a high *Varroa* population risks colony death. Good quality education and training, accessible to beekeepers of all levels of ability and experience was recognised as a key element of our overall aim of improving the health of honey bees including *Varroa* management.

### Training initiatives

Funding has been made available through Defra and Welsh Government to contribute towards a range of training opportunities over the years. The organisations that previously had contracts to deliver training included the BBKA, the NDB and the BFA. During 2023 new online courses are being developed by 'Menter a Busnes', which will become available and will cover these four areas of beekeeping:

- (i) Managing *Varroa*.
- (ii) Honey bee brood disorders.
- (iii) Self-sufficiency.
- (iv) Buying and sourcing bees.

The courses are being designed to supplement learning for intermediate beekeepers, i.e., people who have been keeping bees for a minimum of one to two years. Online courses are more accessible and have the potential to reach many more beekeepers than locally delivered hive-side courses. Once available, the courses will

deliver a consistent message and can be accessed by beekeepers at any time, allowing time-pressured beekeepers to further their learning at their own pace.

### Get involved and find out more

The BBKA is a key contributor to the HBP 2030 and as a *BBKA News* reader you already contribute to outcomes set out in the HBP 2030, for example by reading articles in the magazine you may improve how you recognise pests and diseases. You may be working towards your Basic Assessment, attending NBU or association events, read a NBU social media post to improve your husbandry knowledge or be part of a mentoring scheme in your area. All of these are activities that the BHAF identified could be done to deliver the HBP 2030.

If you want to know more about Bee Health Advisory Forum meetings, the Healthy Bees Plan 2030 and the implementation plan, please take a look at BeeBase. If you have any feedback or thoughts about the Healthy Bees Plan 2030, please do get in touch.

### Further information

<https://www.facebook.com/APHANationalBeeUnit>, [https://twitter.com/nbu\\_apha](https://twitter.com/nbu_apha), [https://www.instagram.com/nationalbeeunit\\_apha/](https://www.instagram.com/nationalbeeunit_apha/) and <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC87YR2LaYCYLqyW7RldjEA>  
DEFRA press release: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defra-launches-the-healthy-bees-plan-2030-to-help-protect-honey-bees>.  
BeeBase Healthy Bees Plan 2030 <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?sectionid=41>  
Bee Health Advisory Forum minutes are available here: <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=339>  
*Getting Started in Beekeeping*. <https://www.bbka.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=0aed005e-f46a-43ef-a09d-46562d23ff7f>  
*Bees, Neighbours and Siting an Apiary*. <https://www.bbka.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=8effceac-8e8f-4c81-9784-2a98bfbd7b4>