

Making Sense of the Count

By Jason Learner, National Bee Unit

The Bee Health and Pollinator Strategies across the UK, listed below, outline plans for improving the state of pollinators and for building a better understanding of current pollinator populations and the threats they face.

- The National Pollinator Strategy.
- The Action Plan for Pollinators.
- Honey Bee Health Strategy for Scotland.
- Strategy for the Sustainability of the Honey Bee.

As part of this work we need to better understand the current condition of our national honey bee population. For example; How many honey bees do we have? Are they healthy? Do we have enough of them so that, together with all the other pollinators, they are able to meet our needs and those of the wider environment?

Having a greater understanding of the number and location of beehives in the UK will also help us to prepare for and react to outbreaks of bee pests and diseases. Similarly, through its triennial Apiculture Programme, the European Commission is seeking to improve its knowledge of EU honey bee populations and the vitality of this sector.

Future EU apiculture funding will be based on estimates of national colony numbers

Together with other Member States, the UK receives financial support for its beekeeping sectors from the EU Apiculture Programme. From 2020 onwards, Member States are required to submit estimates of the numbers of beehives in order to continue to receive a share of this funding.

One of the first things we need to do is to work out the best way of estimating the number of bee hives (colonies) in the UK. To this end, we are undertaking a pilot beehive count during the winter of 2015/16. This involves looking at records from BeeBase and other data sources to make an estimate of a national count.

You should have received an email or text message early in January asking you to either update your records with the number of beehives you had going into winter, as of 1 November 2015, or to mark yourself as 'a non-current beekeeper' if you no longer intend to keep bees.

We have published information on BeeBase <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=362>, which includes a Frequently Asked Questions document. Any beekeeper without an email address should have been contacted by SMS (text messaging) requesting the same details.

The method proposed by the UK for assessing numbers of beehives will be submitted to the EU and, once they are satisfied that all Member States are using appropriate and consistent counting methods, a National Hive Count will begin from the autumn/winter of 2016 onwards.

We will ask you to review and update your records each year. This will need to be completed between 1 September and 31 December so that we can provide an estimate of the numbers of overwintering beehives. The number of overwintering beehives will be collated to generate the national total. The data collected each year between 2016 and 2019 will be averaged and used to apportion Apiculture Programme funding to Member States from 2020 onwards.

This information will also form a useful baseline for establishing the contribution of honey bees to the wider pollinator population in the UK, and deciding how we can best support the valuable role honey bees play in terms of food production and the wider environment.

From the above you will realise the importance of being registered on BeeBase so if you have not done it yet please consider it now. Registration is a simple process and takes only a few minutes. Log on to <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm> and follow the links for registration.

	<p>Cymdeithas Gwenynwyr Cymru Welsh Beekeepers' Association Convention 2016 Saturday 2nd April at 0830</p>
<p>Tea and Coffee available from 0800 Old Food Hall, Royal Welsh Agricultural Showground Builth Wells, Powys, LD2 3SY Mynediad/Admission: Oedolion/Adults - £9.00, Advance Payment - £7.00 (see below) Leuencid/Juniors (under 17) - am ddim / free admission</p>	
<p>Guest Speakers: Margaret Ginman opening <i>Bee Farmers Association</i></p> <p>Natasha de Vere Plants for Healthy Honeybees</p> <p>Clive de Bruyn Making a start in Spring</p>	
<p>Mike Brown, BDI sponsored lecture What a beekeeper should know about the Asian Hornet. "Beekeepers' Question Time" - your chance to ask the experts.... Trade stands and exhibitions. Bargain beekeeping supplies. All day refreshments. Free Parking. Earlybird payments (£7.00): Forms available on WBKA website (www.WBKA.com) and from Association Secretaries. Return completed forms plus payment to Convention Secretary by March 19th Address and payment details on form.</p>	