

Healthy Bees Plan 2030

Rebekah Clarkson, Healthy Bees Plan project manager at the National Bee Unit, outlines renewed commitment to work together to

improve honey bee health

This November, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Welsh Government launched *Healthy Bees Plan 2030*.

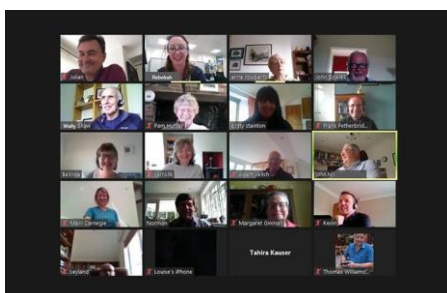
Publication of this plan follows a review of the first ten-year plan. Both the new plan and the review document are available in English and Welsh on BeeBase, the website of the National Bee Unit (NBU).

In 2009, 9,000 beekeepers were registered on BeeBase, but over the course of the first plan, with the support of associations, this increased to more than 40,000 registered beekeepers across England and Wales.

Both the review and the new plan have been written during a period of unprecedented uncertainty and change – as the United Kingdom (UK) leaves the European Union (EU), against the backdrop of six Asian hornet outbreaks in the past two years and, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic.

Experts in honey bee health – including researchers, beekeepers, bee farmers and policy makers – worked together on the review to understand the impact of the first plan's five outcomes. The review and the new plan called upon the expertise and guidance of the Bee Health Advisory Forum (BHAf), which normally

The 32nd Bee Health Advisory Forum Meeting, held online in June 2020



Healthy Bees Plan Review

November 2020



Healthy Bees Plan 2030

Working together to improve honey bee health and husbandry in England & Wales

November 2020



meets quarterly to share knowledge and to discuss and review bee health priorities. Defra's Bee Health Policy Team, the Welsh Government and the NBU are grateful for everyone's work on the review and development of the new plan, which would not have been possible without their support.

The five outcomes of the first plan were to:

- minimise levels of pests and diseases
- promote good standards of husbandry
- encourage effective biosecurity
- ensure sound science supports bee health policy and its implementation
- work together to protect bee health.

Disease Assurance Scheme for Honeybees (DASH)

As part of the review, Julian Parker, head of the NBU, considered how the Disease Assurance Scheme for Honeybees (DASH) had been received. Bee farmers who were also DASH participants were sent a questionnaire and the results are

published in the review. Respondents agreed (91 per cent) or mostly agreed (nine per cent) that when thinking about how they manage disease within their bee farming operation, they valued the benefits of DASH membership.

The new plan pledges to continue DASH, in which accredited bee farmers self-manage statutory notifiable diseases, including European foulbrood.

Education and Training

Good quality education and training, accessible to beekeepers of all levels of ability and experience, was recognised as a key element of the overall aim of improving the health of honey bees. Funding was made available through Defra and the Welsh Government to contribute towards a range of training opportunities. The organisations that previously won contracts to deliver training included: the British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA), the National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB) and the Bee Farmers' Association (BFA). Courses were



A National Bee Unit training session

provided to train beekeepers at both an intermediate and advanced level, and to support the needs of both experienced and prospective bee farmers.

The review document describes the benefits of collaborative working and its recommendations provide direction and focus for the future.

New Plan

Healthy Bees Plan 2030 was developed in consultation with bee health stakeholders to sustain the health of honey bees and beekeeping in England and Wales. This new plan sets out four key outcomes for beekeepers, bee farmers, associations and government to work towards, to help protect honey bees:

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

Ways of Working

In the document, the chapter 'Ways of working' outlines how we can deliver the four outcomes of the new plan together. Key to the delivery of the plan is regular communication between all those involved in bee health, including supporting actions relating to wider pollinator needs as coordinated by the Action Plan for Pollinators Taskforce (Wales) and the Pollinator Advisory Steering Group (England).

Continued collaboration on schemes such as DASH, sharing research opportunities and their findings, and maintenance of training and mentoring schemes will be crucial to delivery of the new plan.

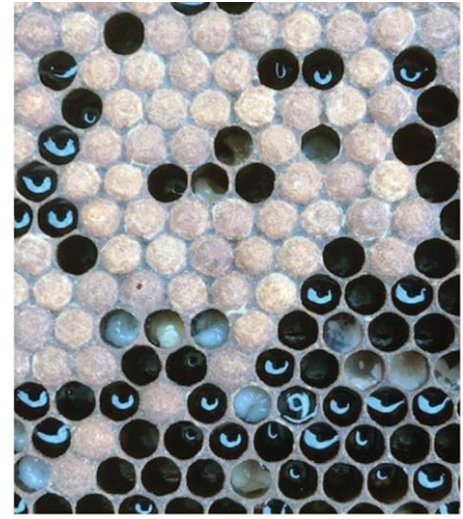
Julian Parker explains: '*Healthy Bees Plan 2030* builds on the experiences and successes of the previous plan. Its implementation plan will define how the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) works with stakeholders, Defra and the Welsh Government across the next decade to protect and improve honey bee health, recognising the importance of honey bees as pollinators and their impact on food production and the economy'.

How does this impact on bee farmers? Underpinning *Healthy Bees Plan 2030* is the renewed commitment to work together for the next ten years. Ensuring our bees are healthy is a serious business and it is important that we listen carefully to each other to understand current issues as well as the new challenges that will inevitably arise, so that bee farmers can continue to rear healthy, productive colonies both profitably and sustainably.

Next Step

The next step for *Healthy Bees Plan 2030* is for the BHAF to work together to develop a detailed implementation plan. This will include agreeing measures by which our progress towards achieving outcomes can be reviewed at regular intervals. Initial BHAF meetings have taken place to discuss the implementation plan and a first draft is planned in early 2021.

The inspectorate works with bee farmers to minimise disruption to commercial activities as a result of foulbrood occurrence



European foulbrood

If you have any feedback or thoughts about *Healthy Bees Plan 2030*, please do get in touch. Margaret Ginman is the BFA representative on the Defra-chaired Bee Health Advisory Forum. □

Further Information

BeeBase

www.nationalbeeunit.com

Defra press release

www.gov.uk/government/news/defra-launches-the-healthy-bees-plan-2030-to-help-protect-honey-bees

Healthy Bees Plan 2030

www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?sectionid=41

Bee Health Advisory Forum (BHAF) meeting minutes

www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=339