

Press Release

30 October 2012

BRITISH HONEY HARVEST DEVASTATED BY POOR WEATHER

The British Beekeepers Association 2012 Honey Survey highlights dramatic fall in honey yield - many experienced beekeepers describe it as their “most difficult beekeeping year ever”

Key points:

- Average annual honey crop per hive down by 72 per cent compared to 2011
- Just eight pounds of honey produced per hive, compared to annual average of 30 pounds
- Unprecedented mid-summer starvation warning issued by the BBKA to keep honey bees alive
- Rain and cold weather cited by 88 per cent of beekeepers as main factors affecting poor honey supplies
- Poor summer may have longer term detrimental impact with new queens unable to produce sufficient brood to see colonies through to next year

Britain's beekeepers have endured a desperately difficult summer with average honey yields down to just eight pounds per hive, compared to a yearly average of 30 pounds, according to the results of the British Beekeepers Association's latest annual Honey Survey announced today, 30 October.

Honey bees produce honey as a food store. In a normal year this store should be sufficient to see them through the winter months. The nation's honey bees now face an even more trying winter than usual with vastly depleted stores and even greater reliance than usual on the feeding skills of beekeepers to prevent mass starvation occurring through the dark winter months when honey bees would normally feed on honey produced over the previous summer.

Nearly nine in ten (88 per cent) of the 2,700 beekeepers who took part in the survey cited rain and cold weather as the main cause of depleted honey supplies this year, conditions which caused the BBKA to issue an unprecedented mid-summer warning to beekeepers to check the stores in their honey bee colonies and to feed them if they were inadequate to avoid starvation.

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The poor summer weather may have a longer-term impact on the health of the nation's honey bees as the weather is likely to have hampered the normal process of queen production. Virgin queens mate on the wing on fine, still summer days. If the weather prevents them flying within the timescale required then queens may be poorly mated and be unable to produce sufficient new brood to see colonies through the winter. As well as its annual honey survey, the BBKA surveys its members to monitor winter colony survival levels and will report on this in June next year. Only then will the full impact of this year's unusual weather patterns become apparent.

The BBKA runs a scheme, www.adoptabeehive.com, which enables people to become 'armchair beekeepers' and follow the operations of a local beekeeper to raise funds for applied research projects to help protect the honey bee. Peter Hutton, a BBKA Adopt a Beehive beekeeper in Tunbridge Wells (South East region) reports: "It has been the most difficult year I have known in my 53 years of beekeeping. Bad weather in spring prevented honey bees in many areas from collecting nectar from early flowering crops such as oil seed rape. The rain then continued in many places throughout June and July preventing honey bees from foraging on later crops."

In terms of regional variations, London beekeepers fared the worst producing just 5.6 pounds of honey per colony compared with 25.8 pounds per colony last year whilst Northern Ireland performed the best but still saw their honey yields down by more than 50 per cent over 2011.

Angela Woods, Secretary of the London Beekeepers Association commented "The results for the London area suggest that it was not just bad weather that was the problem. They may also highlight the lack of forage in the city for many bees. Rather than putting beehives on office roofs, we encourage companies in London who want to help to look at different ways of supporting bees and beekeepers. We need more forage for the bees and better-educated beekeepers. Individuals can help too by becoming an armchair beekeeper and taking up the BBKA's offer to Adopt a Beehive."

In addition to honey yield, the survey explores the general status of beekeeping across the country and revealed this year that the average beekeeper has been beekeeping for eight years, manages six hives apiece and that just over half, 56 per cent, of beekeepers have attended some form of training in the past year.

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“This is music to our ears,” says Tim Lovett, Public Affairs Director and past President of the BBKA. “The BBKA has put great emphasis on training and developing better beekeeping skills in recent years and whilst trends in this area are encouraging, we need more resources to put into training, education and bee health research, to continue to support our honey bees and other pollinators. Well trained beekeepers are better equipped to deal with the adverse conditions we have seen this year, for example by knowing to check that their bees always have sufficient stores and supplementing those stores by feeding when necessary. Without training, this year’s situation might have been a lot worse.”

- Ends -

Notes to Editors:

Survey results: Survey based on a total of 2,712 beekeepers in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Of the total number of beekeepers surveyed 91% were members of the BBKA. Respondents were asked to state how many pounds of honey they had taken from their hives by 30 September 2012 including any still on frames but out of the hive waiting to be extracted.

Table 1: Average honey yield per hive 2010 - 2012

Region	2010 lbs per hive	2011 lbs per hive	2012 lbs per hive	% Variance 2011 to 2012
Total	31.2	29.4	8.1	-72
East	34.1	34.7	10.3	-70
London	24.8	25.8	5.6	-78
Midlands	33.2	30.6	9.0	-71
North East	25.9	26.5	8.6	-68
North West	20.7	24.9	6.9	-72
South East	34.2	29.3	7.3	-75
South West	30.8	29.5	7.1	-76
Wales	25.2	31.6	9.8	-69
N Ireland	22.8	34.7	16.4	-53

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Table 2: Percentage variance to average 2012

Region	Average lbs of honey per hive 2012	Honey Index	% Variance to average
Total	8.1	100	0
East	10.3	127	27
London	5.6	69	-31
Midlands	9.0	111	11
North East	8.6	106	6
North West	6.9	85	-15
South East	7.3	90	-10
South West	7.1	88	-12
Wales	9.8	121	21
N Ireland	16.4	202	102

About the BBKA:

The **BBKA** is a registered charity no 212025 www.bbka.org.uk. It has more than 23,500 members who are amateur beekeepers each keeping an average of six hives in 2012.

About Adopt a Beehive:

Adopt a Beehive www.adoptabeehive.co.uk is the only scheme in the UK which raises funds for applied research and education projects to help save the honey bee.

For further information please contact:

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