

Press Release

5 November 2013

Britain's honey bees warm to their work

BBKA 2013 honey survey shows a recovery in honey yields but still below the long term average

Survey highlights:

- Honey production rose to 24.7 lbs per hive, three times as much as last year but still well below the long-term average
- The late spring and warm early summer produced an intense nectar flow which the bees were able to gather and which helped the recovery of many apiaries
- The cold winter of 2012 may have had one positive outcome causing a reduction in the impact of the varroa mite which nevertheless continued to damage honey bees
- Significant regional variations in honey production - highest yields in England were in the East region, lowest in London
- One in ten beekeepers reported taking no honey crop in 2013, being extra cautious in leaving more stores than usual with their bees ahead of what could turn out to be another long, wet winter

The results of the British Beekeepers Association's (BBKA) annual honey survey released today (5 November 2013) show a big improvement in the amount of honey produced this year, with each hive yielding an average of 24.7 lbs, compared to just 8.1 lbs last year. Last year's running average was 30 lbs. These figures are relatively small per hive compared with 20 years ago when data indicated that a beekeeper would expect a hive to produce at least 40 lbs in an average year. It is nevertheless an encouraging recovery after the disastrous summer of 2012 which, according to the BBKA's records, saw the lowest honey production.

There were large variations by region in honey production, which may reflect differences in weather as well as differences in the amount and variety of forage available for honey bees to feed on. London beekeepers, 10 per cent of whom keep their hives on rooftops, saw just 18.7 lbs of honey per hive this year, whereas beehives in the Midlands produced 26.4 lbs each, the South East 27.1 lbs and Scotland (included for the first time in the survey results) produced 34.8 lbs each.

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The cold spring may have helped to reduce the impact of the varroa mite which wreaks havoc among honey bees. The varroa mite lays its eggs in bee larvae cells, feeding off the larvae as they grow. The cold, late spring in 2013 meant that queen bees delayed laying eggs, so varroa died off with no new brood to feed on. Many beekeepers reported that brood raising by colonies began much later than normal and when laying did start, it was in unusually high quantities supported by ample quantities of nectar and pollen as flowers blossomed strongly in the warm summer weather.

Next year will show more clearly any long term effect from the cold winter of 2012, the effects of the warm summer this year and the longer term recovery of colonies. The BBKA reminds beekeepers to check their bees with a view to providing extra feed if necessary during the winter, and is calling on the public to lend their support by planting the right type of nectar and pollen yielding flowers and plants.

Commenting on the survey's findings, David Aston, BBKA Chairman, said: "It is clear that our bees have appreciated the warm summer and made honey whilst the sun shone! We hope that all the work put in by beekeepers to support their colonies this year will result in lower over-winter losses and that our bees will emerge next spring ready to carry out their vital role as pollinators."

Unlike many other charities dedicated to the welfare of the natural world the BBKA is run almost entirely by volunteers with just five paid employees to manage the day to day admin for the nation's beekeepers. The charity campaigns for support nationally and through a network of local associations for funding for education and research. One of the key BBKA fund-raising schemes is Adopt a Beehive, www.adoptabeehive.com, which enables non-beekeepers to be an armchair beekeeper; to learn about beekeeping as well as how they can help the honey bee, all whilst raising funds for applied research projects to help protect the honey bee.

In addition to honey yield, the survey explores the general status of beekeeping across the country and revealed this year that beekeeping is a surprisingly social activity, with 59 percent of members taking part in a social activity related to beekeeping in the past year, and 56 per cent taking part in some form of training too. The BBKA places great emphasis on training to help combat modern threats including the varroa mite, and even among those beekeepers with fifteen or more years experience, 54 per cent have attended training in the past year. The BBKA and its members are doing their utmost to support the honey bee but the public can make a huge difference too. BBKA 'Adopt a Beehive' beekeeper for the North East, Professor John Hobrough, observes: "I have been a beekeeper for nearly sixty years and in that time have seen a tremendous change in the beekeeping world, as well as a reaffirmation of how important the simple things are that we can all do to help honey bees, like planting bee friendly flowers or leaving an area of your garden to grow wild."

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Each region in Britain has its own beekeeper who can be 'adopted'. BBKA Adopt a Beehive beekeepers in Wales, Susannah and Calwyn commented: "Now is the time to be planting bulbs for spring pollen to help the bees. Snowdrops are great sources of nectar for honey bees, as are crocuses. It sounds a bit unpatriotic but daffodils don't produce nectar for bees, so planting some bee friendly plants among daffs will really help next year."

- Ends -

Notes to editors:

Survey methodology

The survey was based on responses from a total of 2,581 beekeepers in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Of the total numbers of beekeepers surveyed 90% were members of the BBKA. Respondents were asked to state how many pounds of honey they had taken from their hives by 30 September 2013 including any still on frames but out of the hive waiting to be extracted.

Survey results by region 2011 - 2013

Region ¹	2011 lbs per hive	2012 lbs per hive	2013 lbs per hive
Total	29.4	8.1	24.7
East	34.7	10.3	28.7
London	25.8	5.6	18.7
Midlands	30.6	9.0	26.4
North East	26.5	8.6	23.6
North West	24.9	6.9	20.1
South East	29.3	7.3	27.1
South West	29.5	7.1	22.3
Wales	31.6	9.8	21.8
N Ireland	34.7	16.4	19.1
Scotland²	n/a	n/a	34.8

¹The geographic regions correspond with the FERA bee inspector regions.

² Small sample size.

About the BBKA: The **BBKA** is a registered charity no 212025 www.bbka.org.uk. It has more than 24,000 members who are amateur beekeepers.

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.

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