

Healthy Bees Plan
Quarterly Newsletter for all those interested in
honey bee health
Issue 1 October 2009

Quarterly newsletter on progress with implementing the Healthy Bees Plan (www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/growing/bees/news/plan.pdf) which the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) is implementing on behalf of Defra and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).

Highlights:

- Good progress made over recent months by the Healthy Bees Project Management Board leading to agreed terms of reference, governance and priorities for implementing the Plan.
- Education and training work programme on improving beekeepers' husbandry skills has been agreed by the Board. The NBU's Education and Extension Officers are now implementing the work programme.
- 2500 additional beekeepers have registered on BeeBase during 2009; of this total some 30% have self-registered (either by logging onto www.nationalbeeunit.com or by telephoning the National Bee Unit on 01904 462510).
- Defra is commissioning a study of beekeeping practices and the support available to both new and experienced beekeepers particularly on husbandry and on pests and diseases. The study will help to throw light on the best ways to provide advice and deliver training to beekeepers. Beekeepers' opinions and experiences are a very important part of the study. Defra's researchers will be aiming to gather the views of beekeepers from across England and Wales with a focus on those who have been keeping bees for at least two years. *If any beekeepers reading this would be available for a short telephone interview as part of this study, please contact us at beehealthinfo@fera.qsi.gov.uk.*



Further details on the Healthy Bees Project Management Board:

- The Board is responsible to Defra and WAG for successful implementation of the Healthy Bees Plan by identifying priorities and by steering and guiding the detailed work required to deliver the Plan. It is chaired by Dr Helen Crews (Fera) and includes representatives from WAG. Commercial and amateur beekeepers' perspectives are provided by BFA, WBKA, NFU and individual beekeepers. The Scottish Government is an observer.
- The Board is supported by three working groups (Husbandry and Education, Communications, and Science and Evidence) whose members include beekeepers and other experts to provide input and challenge to the detailed work of implementing the Plan. Further details of the Board's terms of reference and the governance arrangements for implementing the Plan are described in the Implementation Brief (posted on the news pages of www.nationalbeeunit.com along with the minutes of the Board's meetings).

- The Board was saddened by the BBKA's decision to withdraw from participating in the Board and in the three working groups. The Board continues to support implementation of the Plan and has reiterated their agreement to the common goals and priorities, particularly on raising husbandry standards through education and training of beekeepers. Fera is continuing to engage with the BBKA and hopes that they will be able to rejoin the Board at some point in the future.
- The 4th meeting of the Board will be in December and will review progress with implementing the education and training work programme and the draft communications plan developed by the Healthy Bees Communications Working Group.

Key priority – improving husbandry through education and training:

- The Project Management Board has agreed that improving husbandry is a key priority and to help achieve this, we need to improve how we educate and train beekeepers. Good husbandry is vital for successful beekeeping and healthy colonies and also to prevent colonies from acting as a reservoir of pests and disease that may spread to neighbouring apiaries.
- The first phase of the husbandry and education work programme was agreed by the Board at its 3rd meeting and covers the next 6 months, as follows:
 - ❖ Completion and publication of the leaflets in the new series of 'Healthy Bees' advisory leaflets and other training products – covering 'principles of beekeeping' and 'starting right with bees'. Further leaflets and products in this series will be developed during 2010/11.
 - ❖ 4 pilot 'Healthy Bees' road-shows organised and run by local bee inspectors to promote good beekeeping practice with a particular focus on Varroa management and on attracting beekeepers who are new to the craft and/or not members of local associations. To be run in winter 2009/10.
 - ❖ (As a first step towards raising standards) making available and funding formally recognised 'train the trainer' courses to interested beekeepers who regularly deliver training to other beekeepers. To cover effective skills for delivering practical as well as theoretical training. Similar courses will also be available to bee inspectors.
 - ❖ Development of proposals on audiovisual aids for consideration by the Board and their decision on whether/how to proceed with these as part of the education and training work programme.
 - ❖ Reviewing the practicality and cost implications of establishing regional training apiaries and producing advice to the Board to consider whether to proceed with these as part of the education and training work programme.
- Proposals on the next phase of the husbandry and education work programme (April 2010 to March 2011) will be considered by the Board in early 2010.

BeeBase

- Good news that more beekeepers are registering on BeeBase - 2500 additional beekeepers during 2009. The total number of beekeepers registered is nearly 18,700.
- Most beekeepers recognise and appreciate BeeBase as an essential beekeeping resource to which they have free access to help them keep healthy bees. But it is much more than that – information it contains on the location of apiaries is vital for the NBU's Bee Inspectors in their work to control disease and to sustain the health of our honey bee colonies. By knowing where the bees are we stand a much better chance of controlling disease and containing any incursion of new pests – hence the importance that the NBU attaches to registration of beekeepers.
- If anyone reading this Newsletter would like to help encourage beekeepers to register on BeeBase, such as including the BeeBase address (www.nationalbeeunit.com) on your own websites or publicity material, the Healthy Bees Project Manager would be delighted to hear from you. Contact details below.

Study of beekeeping practices

- Defra is commissioning a study due to start in November to better understand beekeepers' husbandry practices and approaches to managing pests and diseases, and how these practices are influenced by external information and advice. Beekeepers' opinions and experiences are a very important part of the study. A particular focus of the study is to help to throw light on the best ways to provide advice and deliver training to beekeepers. Results are due to be available at the end of March 2010.
- Defra's researchers would like to gather views from beekeepers across England and Wales with a focus on those who have been keeping bees for at least two years. If any beekeepers reading this would be available for a short telephone interview as part of this study, please contact beehealthinfo@fera.gsi.gov.uk. Interviews will take place in January and February. Depending on the scale of response from the beekeeping community, you may not be contacted but we would very much like people to be involved, so please do get in touch.

Random Apiary Survey

- The NBU's Random Apiary Survey is making good progress. The aim is for the Bee Inspectors to survey a total of 5000 apiaries across England and Wales during 2009 and 2010. Some 1500 apiaries have been surveyed to date. We are very grateful to all those beekeepers who have already taken part. During 2010, 1000 of the apiaries to be included in the survey will belong to newly registered beekeepers.
- The purpose of the Survey is to investigate the national incidence of the full range of bee diseases, and to investigate factors which potentially affect disease incidence. Samples will be stored for future use, in the event that we need to investigate emerging or new diseases. By aiming for 5000 apiaries, we stand a good chance of achieving a satisfactory sample size and an accurate picture of disease incidence. The results will provide the basis for refining statutory inspections and surveillance programmes from 2011 onwards, and for targeting advice and training at a local level.

Strengthened surveillance - 39,000 colonies inspected this season

- The number of Bee Inspectors has increased from 45 to 63 during 2009 and, as a result, over 39,000 colonies have been inspected this year which is the highest since 1988.
- The main focus of this strengthened surveillance activity is on controlling statutory notifiable bee diseases, and for this year (and next), an additional element has been the Random Apiary Survey (accounting for 1500 of the 39,000 colonies inspected). This increased coverage of apiaries is providing the NBU with an excellent basis for identifying local/regional issues and for directing further effort (eg, on education and training).
- Inspection visits remain free of charge and also continue to include 1:1 training of beekeepers.

Upcoming key activities

- 4th meeting of Healthy Bees Project Management Board in December.
- Pilot road-shows during winter 2009/10 on promoting good beekeeping practice with particular focus on Varroa management.
- Defra-funded study of beekeeping practices due to interview beekeepers in January and February 2010.

The Healthy Bees Project Team is happy to receive feedback and comments

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