

National Bee Unit - South East Region



December 2008

The year's overview of the activities of the SE region team of bee inspectors

Inspection Programme

This year the season began on April 7th for the SE team of inspectors. As is usual, it was another busy year in the South East with a total of 2923 colonies/550 apiaries inspected during the season. Of the 2923 colonies inspected 96 were diagnosed with EFB. No AFB was diagnosed in the SE region. Looking at these figures the number of colonies with EFB has kept level (93 in 2007) although the location of the disease has shifted with a large resurgence in the Kent area – as beekeepers you cannot afford to be complacent about checking for disease in your colonies.

Regional inspection and foulbrood summary

| County Code | Colonies Inspected | EFB Colonies | %EFB Colonies | Apiaries Inspected | EFB Apiaries | %EFB Apiaries |
|----------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|
| ESU | 249 | 7 | 2.81% | 51 | 4 | 7.84% |
| GRL | 675 | 4 | 0.59% | 121 | 2 | 1.65% |
| KEN | 1015 | 39 | 3.84% | 207 | 20 | 9.66% |
| SUR | 566 | 20 | 3.53% | 82 | 6 | 7.32% |
| WSU | 418 | 26 | 6.22% | 89 | 10 | 11.24% |
| Totals: | <u>2923</u> | <u>96</u> | | <u>550</u> | <u>42</u> | |

Interestingly and perhaps usefully beebase also shows the summary figures in terms of the numbers of beekeepers that have been visited (of course no details are given) and they read thus:

| | ESU | GRL | KEN | SUR | WSU | <u>TOTAL</u> |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|---------------------|
| Number of beekeepers visited | 42 | 182 | 141 | 108 | 67 | <u>540</u> |
| Number of beekeepers with EFB colonies | 3 | 2 | 14 | 9 | 8 | <u>36</u> |
| Percentage of beekeepers visited with EFB colonies | 7.14% | 1.10% | 9.93% | 8.33% | 11.94% | |

To look at this information in greater detail, check the NBU website, beebase.csl.gov.uk, click on Bee diseases in the menu and then on Disease Incidence and Maps. As last year,

I would encourage Associations to nominate a member with Internet access to check the NBU website regularly and report to the committee. You will then be in touch with the latest information about disease in your area. Confirmed foulbrood incidents are listed as being in an Ordnance Survey 10Km square, (IE TQ39) so that individual beekeepers are not identified. You will therefore need to know which squares cover your Association area. If you check the website and find disease is in your area, please inform local beekeepers, and encourage them to inspect their colonies carefully. If beekeepers check their colonies and are concerned, or wish for an inspector to visit and check their colonies, please contact me and I will make the necessary arrangements.

Last year (Nov 2007) it was confirmed that *Nosema Ceranae* was present in the UK. It is now becoming obvious that *Nosema* spp. infections are widespread and will pose an extra problem for beekeepers struggling to keep their colonies alive through the winter. Many Associations have members who are sufficiently skilled with microscopes to do *Nosema* and Acarine checks and it would be a prudent and simple matter to arrange for bee clinics to check for the presence of these pathogens. Contact me if you would like some guidance on how to arrange these clinics.

Exotic pest surveillance programme

We have again been checking for exotic pests, Small Hive beetle (SHB) and *Tropilaelaps*, across the region and this year we have made 83 apiary inspections especially to look for these pests. We started off the season with a potential SHB outbreak in the SW London area, which fortunately was not confirmed but left the local seasonal inspector, Caroline Washington, the massive task of checking all the surrounding apiaries – just in case! Again I would encourage you all to check your colonies carefully for these pests and contact me, or the NBU, if you find anything suspicious. Details of what SHB or *Tropilaelaps* look like are available by leaflet or on beebase.csl.gov.uk

European Foulbrood research programme

This research programme, which began in 2006, was funded by Defra. Early in 2008, bee inspectors collected the final samples from participating beekeepers. The second part of the research was to investigate whether it is a more successful method of dealing with infection to shook swarm all the colonies in an EFB infected apiary or, only the known diseased colonies. The results of this research are currently with the statisticians at the Central Science Laboratory and will be published shortly.

The main conclusions from the earlier work (2006/7) comparing the effectiveness of shook swarms (SS) and oxytetracycline (OTC) antibiotic treatment for control of EFB are that:

- Disease reoccurrence in the season following treatment is 5 times higher in colonies treated with OTC than those treated with a SS.
- Colony mortality was not significantly different with either treatment.

Some other interesting results from the research are:

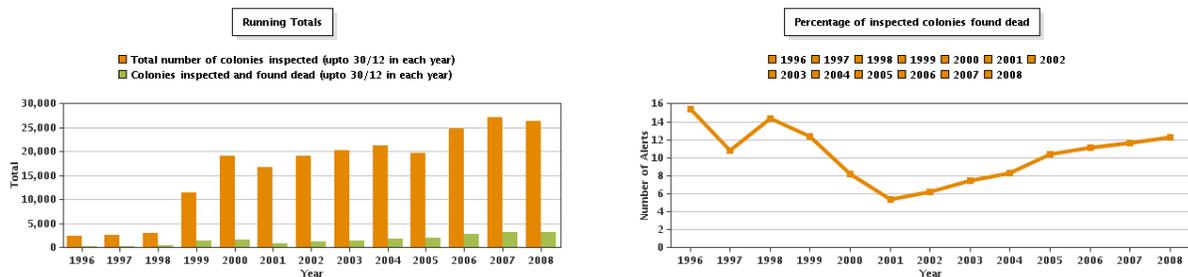
- Asymptomatic colonies from apiaries showing EFB symptoms frequently tested positive for *M. plutonius*.
- The risk of colonies carrying the EFB bacterium is doubled for colonies located in apiaries with infected colonies compared to those with no infected colonies.
- The amount of infection on adult honeybees was surprisingly high for what is reported to be a brood disease of honeybees.

Varroa

Varroa still remains the biggest threat to colony survival and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. It is critical that varroa levels are kept low to avoid the worst consequences of the associated viruses, so keep checking the colony mite drop regularly and carry out varroa control as necessary. There is widespread resistance of varroa mites to pyrethroid chemicals in the SE area, although there are still isolated pockets where they still appear effective. You have two choices:

- To be absolutely sure if pyrethroids are ineffective carry out a resistance test. If you want to do this and you are not sure how, contact me and I will send you details. If you do test for resistance, please let me know the results or send them in to the NBU at York.
- Assume that pyrethroids do not work and use other methods to control varroa.

Colony Losses



The above two graphs show colony losses against colonies inspected since 1996. This year (2008) a total of 26462 colonies were inspected and of these 3260 were found to be dead, making a 12.4% loss of colonies inspected. Our figures show that the losses in the SE area were much less than those reported in other regions.

Honey

I have had the best response ever to the request for honey statistics and am writing up the results separately. I would like to thank all the beekeepers that have given data about honey crops and prices. This year the average honey crop per colony in the SE is 45lbs, which is very much better than the averages reported in other regions. A reasonable spring was followed by a cool, wet summer but it seems from the replies that I have had that bees were out collecting nectar. Much field bean was planted this season, which yields well if you are lucky to be near enough. Many beekeepers reported that they collected nothing from the Ivy this year; it was very wet in most parts in the autumn.

That leads me on to a concern that I have about winter-feeding. Many colonies that I have seen late in the year are low on stores. It would be a great pity to have beekeepers call me in the spring to report heavier than usual winter losses only to find that it is due to starvation. Please check your bees and ensure they have enough food to pass the winter, if they are low on stores then feed candy but remember once you start feeding you will have to carry on until the bees can fend for themselves in the spring. If in doubt – feed!

Educational events

On the events scene we have, once again, had a busy season with 73 events, which comprised apiary tours for associations, talks, apiary demonstrations, IPM days, Bee Health workshops and Organic acid workshops.

I am now planning the diary for next year; so if you would like an inspector to give a talk or demonstration to your Association, or to be involved in any of the above activities, please contact me to discuss your requirements.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the seasonal bee inspectors who make up the SE team for all their hard work during the season: Caroline Washington, Bob Smith, Nick Withers & David Rudland.

I would especially like to thank Bob Smith for all his input to the SE area team; he retired as a bee inspector this year. I know this will not stop his involvement with beekeeping; indeed it will give him more time to catch up with all those little projects that are connected with beekeeping! Good luck in the future from all of us at the NBU.

The NBU is currently recruiting for Seasonal Bee inspectors over the SE region, so if you are interested in working with bees and beekeepers contact the NBU office or me.

Alan Byham

For further information please contact:

Alan Byham, CSL Regional Bee Inspector. Tel. 01306 611016

Email a.byham@csl.gov.uk

National Bee Unit website: beebase.csl.gov.uk

National Bee Unit Tel. 01904 462559