

South-East Honey Survey 2012

As always, I will start my report by thanking all the beekeepers who have taken the time to respond to my request for honey crop and price statistics. This year I've had an absolutely fabulous response with 470 replies, so thank you very much. Many of the forms have comments, which are interesting and assist with the remarks that I make below.

The average take per colony this season was an all time low at 19lbs per colony, considerably lower than last year's poor 31lb and the worst average that I have ever recorded since I started surveying in 2005. I made that remark last year and I sincerely hope that I don't have to make it again next! You can compare previous year colony averages in this table.

Year	Average crop/col
2005	53
2006	51
2007	38
2008	47
2009	36
2010	46
2011	31
2012	19

The year began well in March with warm, dry weather, colonies started well, expanding quickly, and the season looked promising. However, the weather then turned to rain that didn't seem to stop for nearly three months. During this period colonies quickly ran out of food stores and often pollen stores, which led to colonies shrinking rather than expanding; much feeding of colonies was necessary. The early spring nectar flows were washed out and top fruit, apples, pears etc. have cropped poorly, as bees were largely unable to pollinate the flowers. When the weather did break from the rain many colonies swarmed but it was still cool and uncertain leading to numerous queen failures and therefore colony failures. The result of all this was that colonies were small and often unable to take advantage of any break in the weather and this, of course, led to poor honey crops in many areas. Many colonies consumed any crop they had collected in the spring and required feeding throughout the summer. Also a large number of beekeepers reported that any honey crop they did gather was very high in water content, often around the 20% water mark. In some areas there was a reasonable late flow from Water Balsam and Ivy but these didn't compensate for the poor main flow. There was some heather honey flow and I have some figures for this below.

In the discussion below, I have made comparison with the final results from the previous survey asking the same questions about the 2011 season, so that you can compare this directly to last year's survey.

Results 2012

- **Average Honey Yield per colony:**
470 replies ranging from 0.0lb to 226.0lb per colony
2012 average = 19lb (2011 = 31lb)
- **Direct Sales Price (Flower):**
166 replies ranging from £3.00/lb to £10.00/lb
2012 average = £4.92/lb (2011 = £4.70/lb)
- **Wholesale Honey Price (Flower):**
54 replies ranging from £2.66/lb to £13.00/lb
2012 average = £4.20/lb (2011 = £4.01/lb)
- **Bulk Honey Price (Flower):**
7 replies ranging from £2.35/lb to £10.70/lb
2012 average = £4.16/lb (2011= £3.28/lb)
- **Cut comb:**
17 replies were received ranging from £5.00/lb to £12.00/lb.
2012 average = £9.52/lb (2011 = £8.92/lb)

Discussion

These results are compiled from beekeepers owning between 0 and 50 colonies with total yields between 0lbs and 1350lbs. This year I had the unusual situation where 2 respondents had lost their colonies, due to poor queen matings by 31st August and therefore returned a survey with no honey and no colonies! There is the usual wide variation in reported average honey yields – from 0 to 226lbs per colony, once again proving that however bad the season is, there is always someone who will collect a large crop. This year 99 beekeepers gave a zero honey return; 195 colonies varying between 0 and 8 owned. 77 responses indicated that they were new beekeepers, I took those that started this year and last (2011) as 'new'. Of the 77, 36 did not gather any honey crop. This year's average yield, 19lb, is 61% of last year's crop (31lb) owed mainly to this summer's extreme wet weather conditions. Part of this low figure is due to the fact that many colonies only collected a small amount of honey and the beekeeper did not feel it was worth extracting, leaving the honey for winter feed. Where mentioned these amounts were not included in the average, only honey that was taken as a crop.

Last year I worked out an average figure for 'producing' colonies, being those colonies from which a beekeeper says they collect honey, rather than the total number that they own. This year, as promised last year, I asked that question on the survey form and the results are interesting. My strong belief is that the average honey crop figure should be based on the total number of colonies owned and put

through winter with all the attendant costs of feeding/treating for varroa etc. This is the system that I use to calculate average honey yields and will always continue to do so in future, so that there will be a direct comparison over the past years surveys. I use this figure for the calculations of average turnover per colony. So, although the average per colony is 19lbs, the average per producing colony is 33lb. If this number is compared with either of last year's figures of 31lb and 36lb respectively it doesn't seem as though this year has been particularly poor at all! There is a danger that trying to 'big up' the crop, by giving the average of those colonies that produced rather than those that are owned, may be misleading. According to this survey, of the 1985 colonies owned, only 1142 produced any honey.

Figures for average turnover per colony

Direct sales:

166 replies provided a figure for this.

Price range £3.00/lb to £10.00/lb.

Average price £4.92 – 4.5% higher than 2011

An average crop of honey per colony was worth £93.48 when sold direct at average price. (2011 = £145.74)

Wholesale sales:

54 replies provided a figure for this.

Price range £2.66/lb to £13.00/lb

Average price £4.20 – 4.5% higher than 2011

An average crop of honey per colony was worth £79.80 when sold at wholesale price. (2011 = £124.31) £44 less per colony than last year.

Bulk sales:

7 replies provided a figure for this.

Price range £2.35/lb to £10.70/lb

Average price £4.16 – 21.2% higher than 2011

An average crop of honey per colony was worth £96.35 when sold at bulk price. (2011 = £101.68)

Cut Comb sales:

21 replies provided a figure for this. 34 beekeepers said they collected cut comb honey. Max crop 200lbs

Price range £5.00/lb to £12.00/lb

Average price £9.52 – 6.3% higher than 2011

An average crop of honey per colony was worth £180.88 when sold at cut comb price (2011 = £276.52) £95 less than last year!

Heather honey sales:

5 replies provided a figure for this, 4 for direct sales and one for wholesale. 13 beekeepers said they collected heather honey. Max crop 110lbs.

Price range £6.50/lb to 10.00/lb for direct sales; £10.00 for wholesale

Average price £7.96 – 37.2% higher than last year (£5.00)

An average crop of honey per colony was worth £151.24 when sold at heather honey direct sales price (2011 = £150.00)

County results

This year I have worked out averages for the separate counties in the SE region to determine whether there was any appreciable difference in crop or price:

County	No of replies	Av crop lbs	Av direct sales price
East Sussex	36	13	£4.68
Greater London	153	20	£5.47
Kent	87	19	£4.30
Surrey	123	20	£5.06
West Sussex	67	21	£4.57

It appears from this that East Sussex has the poorest yields but Kent has the lowest prices.

Some figures of interest from the survey:

Total number of responding beekeepers	470
Total number of colonies	1985 (on 31 st August 2011)
Average number of cols/beekeeper	4.2
Average honey crop/beekeeper	80.4lbs
Total number of colonies 'producing'	1142

Total honey crop		37785lbs	16.87Tons
Of which	Heather honey	376lbs	
	Cut comb	777lbs	
	Flower honey	36632lbs	

Approximate total honey production in the SE area:

Number of beekeepers registered to BeeBase in SE	4276
Estimate of 'unknown' beekeepers say 20%	855
Total Beekeepers	5131
Total number of colonies 5131 x 4.2	21550
Total honey crop 21550 x 19lbs	183Tons

National average figures

Unfortunately, as I write this, I don't yet have any comparison figures for other regions but will try to give some idea of total honey yield using the SE region figure (19lb) but please remember that other regions may have had considerably different averages for the season:



Approximate total honey production in England and Wales:

Number of beekeepers registered to BeeBase	28608
Estimate of 'unknown' beekeepers say 25%	7152
Total Beekeepers	35760
Beebase average colonies per beekeeper	4.84
Total number of colonies 35760 x 4.84	173078
Total honey crop 173078 x 19lbs(SE average)	1468Tons

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