

# News in Brief

## Winter Colony Losses

### Does Varroa Treatment Alter Outcome?

In his article in June 2015 *BBKA News*, *Achieving Balance Between Bees and Varroa* (pp. 207–209), Gareth John briefly referred to the Gwynedd experience of winter losses among beekeepers who did and did not treat for varroa. Here, we should like to share a little more detail and include the 2014–2015 summary results which have recently become available.

There are two beekeeping associations in Gwynedd, one is Meirionnydd (MBKA) and the other Lleyn and Eifionydd (LEBKA). In April 2011 at a well-attended meeting of LEBKA I asked those present what their winter loss figures were for the 2010–2011 winter. This took place against a background at the time of alarming media stories and films of massive colony losses, particularly in the USA, and the looming threat of colony collapse disorder (CCD). It had been a severe winter, and overall losses among the members were 25%. Just how severe the winter was is illustrated by the fact that some experienced beekeepers lost a high proportion of their colonies.

Shân and Clive Hudson, then treasurers of MBKA, on hearing of LEBKA's survey undertook to compile one for MBKA 2010–2011 winter losses. Their survey was more detailed in that it included whether colonies were treated or not, what treatment was used and what kind of hives the colonies were kept in. This yielded the surprising finding that losses among 'non-treaters' were less than half those of 'treaters'. This provided the main stimulus

to run the survey again after the following winter. And it has been carried out after every winter since by Clive and Shân.

For the last four winters, the detailed results were published in *The Welsh Beekeeper* (see references below). The table below shows the summary data from treaters and non-treaters for all five winters since data collection began.

The response rate improved over the years, latterly largely due to the diligence of Clive and Shân in making contact with beekeepers through the associations or on an individual basis. The markedly lower loss rate for the non-treaters seen in the first winter was not maintained in later winters. Furthermore, because of the variability of losses among beekeepers in both groups, treaters and non-treaters, the lower average for all five winters of 13% for non-treaters compared with 19% for treaters is unlikely to be statistically significant. However, we can conclude that these results for over 1,500 colony winters show that no reduction in winter losses was gained by chemically treating.

#### References

1. Hudson C. Results of 2011–2012 Winter Losses Survey. *The Welsh Beekeeper* No.179, Winter 2012, 18–19.
2. Hudson C, Hudson S. Results of 2012–2013 Winter Losses Survey. *The Welsh Beekeeper* No.182, Autumn, 2013, 38–40.
3. Hudson C, Hudson S. Results of 2013–2014 Winter Losses Survey. *The Welsh Beekeeper* No.185, Summer 2014, 25–29.
4. Hudson C, Hudson S. Results of 2014–2015 Winter Losses Survey. *The Welsh Beekeeper* No.189, Summer 2015, 8–12.

By David Heaf\*, with the collaboration of Clive and Shân Hudson  
\*Corresponding author:  
[david@dheaf.plus.com](mailto:david@dheaf.plus.com)

Winter	Survey responders	Colonies reported	Treated Colonies	% loss	Not treated Colonies	% loss
2010–2011	14	71	44	27	27	11
2011–2012	40	355	180	8	175	7
2012–2013	53	251	75	41	176	32
2013–2014	65	396	81	9	315	6
2014–2015	77	500	97	8	403	8
			477	19	1096	13
			(Total)	(Average)	(Total)	(Average)

## Q and A: Do You Have a Question?

Do you have a question about beekeeping that you would like answered? Send it to the editor at [sharon.blake@bbka.org](mailto:sharon.blake@bbka.org) and I will try to answer it for you.

Gerry Collins, NDB

## Just Bee Drinks



From family beehives in Lancashire, to Fortnum and Mason in London, two friends have launched the UK's first range of honey infused spring water drinks.

"We used to make these drinks in our kitchen at home using honey from Dad's hives!" says Joe Harper, co-founder of Just Bee Drinks and in 2014, together with friend and co-founder Andy Sugden, Just Bee Drinks was created. "We didn't really know where to start!" admits Joe. "Neither of us had previous experience in the drinks industry nor had we ever run our own business. But we believed we had a unique idea, using honey to make a refreshing, healthy drink, and it was something we were passionate about!" With the support of a Government Innovation Grant, the friends spent most evenings and weekends throughout 2014 developing recipes. With the soft drinks industry facing so much scrutiny over the excessive use of refined sugar, combined with the growing popularity of honey, their drinks idea appears to be right on trend!

The spring water drinks are made from completely natural ingredients and only use honey as a sweetener, no refined sugar or artificial sweeteners. They come in a range of three different flavours: Apple and Ginger, Blueberry and Lemon and Lemon and Green Tea, all with 1½ teaspoons of honey. "I remember watching all the Just Bees being delivered to Manchester the day after our first production run and thinking that's a lot of Just Bee! At that point we didn't have a single commitment from any customer to actually stock the drinks. It was exciting but also scary; we were taking a big risk. But the next day we made our very first sales call to 'A Taste of Honey' delicatessen in Didsbury, Manchester. Yes, we did call this deli first because of its name, and before we knew it they were making a repeat order!"

But it was a speculative email to London's prestigious Fortnum and Mason store that

extended the friends business beyond their local Manchester area.

It was still incredibly exciting when they contacted us to say "We want to stock Just Bee".

Just Bee has forged a partnership with the BBKA's charity, 'Friends of the Honey Bee' to donate a percentage of profits and help raise awareness of the issues the bees are facing.

You can visit [www.justbeedrinks.co.uk](http://www.justbeedrinks.co.uk) to find your local stockists.

