

Honey Survey of SBA Members for 2011

Honey Survey forms were given to members at the Autumn Convention and sent to Association Secretaries for forwarding to members. 59 completed forms were received. Overall this has been a better year than the past 2 years but there has been a significant difference between the east and west parts of the country. A number of new beekeepers returned forms showing a modest return from nucs which they had started with earlier in the summer which was clearly gratifying for them. Many beekeepers were focussed on rebuilding their apiaries and not in getting honey. Several were providing honey only for their friends and immediate families.

The early spring had some excellent weather with a deterioration in later May and then unsettled weather in the mid to late summer. There were gales in many parts in late May which damaged blossoms and led to a pollen dearth temporarily which further held back the development of some colonies. Overall the east had a poor season whereas the west and south-west had a very good harvest of honey.

The breakdown of the results given by region is set out below; because of the limited number of replies the figures can only be taken as a rough guide to what has been happening.

However comparison of the results between experienced and new beekeepers shows similarities. For example in the Central –East region which had a poor honey year, the experienced beekeepers were just as badly affected as the inexperienced.

Last winter (2010 to spring 2011) had been severe and difficult for bees with some areas suffering significant losses of up to 30%. Anecdotally I received the impression this was worse in the east. Chalk brood had become more of a problem and was widely reported and it was early summer before some stocks cleared this. Again, as in previous years, there were many new beekeepers who were looking for stocks and this required beekeepers to focus more on the production of nucs at the expense of honey gathering.

North East

There were 12 replies; 46% felt this had been a ‘poor or very poor’ year. Only 18% claimed a good year and 36% an average year. The average crop of flower honey was only 23lbs/hive and the heather crop was very low at 7lbs/hive.

Retail prices for local honey were holding up well at £4.50 per lb jar of flower and £5.00 per lb jar of heather. Cut comb flower was £6.00 per lb and cut comb heather £8.00 per lb. Bulk sales of honey were correspondingly lower at less than £2.00 per lb.

North West

Unfortunately only 1 report returned with an average of 50lbs honey per hive.

Central East

There were 15 completed returns of the survey questionnaire. 75% stated this was a ‘poor or very poor’ year. A couple felt it had been average but no-one considered it a good season. The average honey return was very low at around 12lbs per hive; it is important to realise that these results are from a wide area and there were a good number of beekeepers concentrating on rebuilding apiaries and providing nucs for beginners. One beekeeper reported having to feed his bees at the heather simply to keep them alive!

Average retail prices per lb jar of flower honey held at £4.50 with heather at £5.40 to £6.50 per lb jar.

Central West

There were 19 replies and the overwhelming majority reported a ‘good or very good’ season. The average honey harvest per hive was 45lbs with one dedicated and experienced beekeeper managing an overall average of 98lbs per hive. Retail prices in this region varied from £3.00 up to £5.00 per lb jar of flower honey.

South West

Results from this region showed a mixed picture but the overall average was good at 41lbs per hive. April had been excellent with a poor May and June and an excellent flow from the lime for some which really boosted the average. Retail prices were frequently over the £4.50 mark for flower honey per lb jar. Cut comb honey could reach almost double the price of honey in the jar in more specialised outlets.

South East

There was a low number of replies from the south east and Borders Region with an average of 30lbs of honey per hive. Retail prices were in line with the rest of the country.

Summary

The east side of the country has had a poor honey harvest compared with the west. Fewer hobbyist beekeepers are reporting an annual migration to the moors. Concern over stress to the bees, fear of spread of disease and of course the cost of fuel all play their parts. The reports from those who did go to the heather indicate a very poor return for their efforts this year. Prices remain good for beekeepers selling their honey locally and where there is a specialised market this can be quite exceptional. I have added a brief supermarket price survey for various honey types taken in September 2011 which may be useful as a guide for those selling honey.

I would once again remind members that when selling honey it is good practice to add to the labels a warning that honey should not be given to infants of less than a year. I posted an article on our website last year explaining the background to this due to the small but medically accepted risk of infant botulism possibly linked to honey consumption. This cannot be categorically proven but the risk is there and the advice has been again confirmed by the Food Standards Agency. The labels are inexpensive and can be obtained from major dealers.

Supermarket Honey Price Survey

September 2011

Supermarket Blends

Description	Price per 100G	Price per lb
Basic clear blend	29.4p	£1.33
Major honey packer blend	70p	£3.18
Squeezy bottle blend	76.2p	£3.45
Organic clear/set blend	80.9p	£3.67

Supermarket Specialist or Regional Honey

Description	Price per 100G	Price per lb
Orange Blossom	70.3p	£3.19
Australian Blend	73.2p	£3.31
Canadian Clover	87.9p	£3.99
Romanian Lime Blossom	87.9p	£3.99
New Zealand Thyme	87.9p	£3.99
Tasmanian Leatherwood	87.9p	£3.99
Heather Hills Blossom	96.8p	£4.39
Major Honey Packer Greek	£1.17	£5.31

Scottish Honey in Supermarket

Description	Price per 100G	Price per lb
Heather Hills Honey Farm	£1.26	£5.72
Scottish Heather Honey	£1.41	£6.40

Manuka Honey

Description	Price per 100G	Price per lb
Rowse Manuka 10+	£2.94	£13.34
Rowse Manuka 15+	£3.38	£15.34

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