

North Area Report for 2011

Sheila Barnard

31 January 2012

The winter of 2010/11, while not generally as cold as that of the previous year, was still pretty severe. By contrast, the winter of 2011/12 has been characterised by mild, wet weather, bees still raising quantities of brood in November, a hurricane and a few lesser storms, and hives saturated throughout December into January. There was concern in November that the bees were using up their stores and winter feed too fast; all will doubtless be revealed in spring.

April 2011 saw bees and associations in good heart. Colonies built up rapidly and it was looking like a good season for honey. In May, throughout the North area the weather collapsed for four weeks; bees were confined to their hives and ate their way through their stores at a prodigious rate. Colonies were lost where emergency feeding was neglected; others took the rest of the summer to recover. However, most beekeepers fed in good time and maintained strong colonies.

July provided much better weather than usual and was an exceptionally swarmy month but also excellent for mating queens. Supers filled rapidly and those who'd fed their bees during the May Gap were well rewarded. The swarming tendency at least helped associations and individual beekeepers to supply nucs to beginners.

Inverness-shire's Co-op Plan Bee participants completed their initial training and were supplied with their equipment and bees. Lochaber's membership soared to an all-time high. Mull's association apiary was formally opened, stocked with two nucs from Colonsay, and used for demonstrations from July onwards. Oban beekeepers had their first decent honey crop for years. Easter Ross were unfortunate enough to find varroa in their association apiary but generally North area associations that don't already have it seem to be keeping it at bay. Much of this is due to members' vigilance and willingness to forgo honey crops in order to raise nucs for those who might otherwise be tempted to import unsuitable bees. Finally, we were delighted to welcome the Western Isles BKA to our area. They submitted their constitution in November and were warmly accepted for affiliation to the SBA.