

Honeybee Husbandry Survey 2015/16

Summary

This is the eighth consecutive survey of beekeeping husbandry issues in Northern Ireland. A questionnaire survey was sent out hardcopy to beekeeping associations and an online copy made available on the AFBI website. 93 beekeepers in total responded.

Overwintering colony losses averaged 31%. Comparable 2016 surveys from Rol, Wales and Scotland gave 30%*, 22%* and 18%* losses, respectively. 41% of NI beekeepers surveyed reported no losses. The highest overwintering colony loss to date was 43% in 2013.

Table 1. Regional overwintering colony losses in Northern Ireland for 2016.

County	Production colonies live before winter	Colonies lost due to death/queen problems	% loss
Antrim	87	25	29
Armagh	75	19	25
Down	245	87	35
Fermanagh	40	12	30
Londonderry	72	19	26
Tyrone	15	5	33
Total	534	167	31

Table 2. Annual overwintering losses in Northern Ireland for the past 8 years.

Year	Colony loss
2009	23%
2010	13%
2011	16%
2012	19%
2013	43%
2014	9%
2015	19%
2016	31%



84 colonies were found to be dead after winter 2015-2016. The main reasons given were finding dead workers in cells while food was present in the hive (36 colonies) and having no or only a few dead bees in or in front of the hive (23 colonies).

The number of production colonies increased slightly from 393 in Spring 2015 to 404 in Spring 2016.

83 colonies were lost due to queen problems while 139 of the wintered colonies were weak but queenright after winter 2015-2016. 72 beekeepers' wintered colonies had a new queen in 2015. 10 beekeepers imported queens from Rol or GB. No beekeepers imported queens from outside of the British Isles. 42 beekeepers observed normal queen problems in their colonies in 2015 compared to what they usually had while 31 beekeepers noticed more queen problems. 16 beekeepers felt that compared to their colonies with old queens, their colonies with new queens had survived winter better whereas 14 beekeepers thought that colonies with new queens had survived winter worse.

84 out of the 93 beekeepers surveyed either monitored or treated their colonies for Varroa. The most popular treatment was Thymol used by 67% of those surveyed followed by Oxalic acid (58%). Mite away quick strips (MAQS) were used by 21%.

* Data provided by the Europe-wide COLOSS project.