

# South-East Honey Survey 2011

As always, I want to start my report by thanking all the beekeepers who have spent time responding to my request for honey crop and price statistics. This year the number of replies was up on last year at 260 which I think is a reasonable response. Many of the forms have comments, which are interesting and assist with the remarks that I make below. I thank you all for your participation.

The average take per colony this season was considerably lower than last year at 31lbs per colony, and is actually the worst average that I have recorded since I started surveying in 2004. The year began well in March with warm, dry weather that didn't turn cold again, as so often happens with our British weather. Early spring nectar flows were good and this year, apples, pears; in fact all top fruit, cropped well due to good weather during pollination times. This warm weather led to a good spring nectar flow and we all looked forward to another heavy honey crop at the end of the season, as in 2010. However, after the spring in many areas it was a different story. The weather kept good but there was a decided lack of rain leading to dry conditions and low groundwater levels, which in turn led to low nectar production by many of the usual summer forage plants. Many colonies were low on food and required feeding, especially if a spring honey crop had been taken. If the honey was still on colonies the bees consumed it; the beekeeper didn't need to feed but didn't have any crop to speak of. In some areas there was quite a good late flow from Water Balsam and Heather but these didn't compensate for the poor main flow. A result of this is that this year, I have some figures for Heather honey, the first for some time.

In the discussion below, I have made comparison with the final results from the previous survey asking the same questions about the 2010 season, so that you can compare this directly to last year's survey.

## Results 2011

- **Average Honey Yield per colony:**  
260 replies ranging from 0.0lb to 191.0lb per colony  
2011 average = 31lb                      (2010 = 46lb)
- **Direct Sales Price (Flower):**  
157 replies ranging from £2.00/lb to £13.00/lb  
2011 average = £4.70/lb                      (2010 = £4.32/lb)
- **Wholesale Honey Price (Flower):**  
38 replies ranging from £2.50/lb to £10.90/lb  
2011 average = £4.01/lb                      (2010 = £3.71/lb)

- **Bulk Honey Price (Flower):**

6 replies ranging from £2.25/lb to £6.40/lb

2011 average = £3.28/lb (2010= £2.43/lb)

- **Cut comb:**

21 replies were received ranging from £5.00/lb to £16.00/lb.

2011 average = £8.92/lb (2010 = £7.39/lb)

## **Discussion**

These results are compiled from beekeepers owning between 1 and 55 colonies with total yields between 0lbs and 1760lbs. There is the usual wide variation in reported average honey yields – from 0 to 191lbs per colony. This year 11 responses gave a zero return, 5 of which commented they were new beekeepers this season. The average yield, 31lb, is a large fall from last years high of 46lb, due mainly to this year's weather conditions.

Whilst on the subject of average yields, I base the average on the total honey crop divided by the total number of colonies at the end of the season. (I pick a nominal date of 31<sup>st</sup> August.) I use this end of season number for the average honey figure, as these are the colonies that you will put through winter with all the attendant costs of feeding etc. This is the system I've used up till now to calculate average honey yields and I will continue to do so in future, so that there will be a direct comparison over past years. I use this figure for the calculations of average turnover per colony. However many of you who respond refer to 'numbers of colonies producing' which often differs greatly from the actual number of colonies owned. (I call this the 'fisherman's effect', as it makes the honey crop per colony seem much greater!) I have calculated the average honey yield from colonies producing and it is 36lb per colony. I will, in future surveys, also ask the question 'how many colonies have produced honey' and work an average from that. The total numbers of colonies etc. are given below.

Direct sale to customers is always the commonest method of honey sales - 157 respondents provided a figure for this. This year the price range is wider than ever, from £2.00/lb to £13.00/lb. The top-end prices (£7-£13) may seem high but it is clear that some beekeepers are selling at this price; however, I suspect that careful marketing is necessary. The average price is now a more realistic £4.70, direct sales prices have increased by approx 8.1% over 2010. Nevertheless I feel that there is still scope for improvement in the price, particularly as there must be a lesser supply of honey this year. Perhaps, as the prices rise and honey looks expensive, at over £5 per lb jar, we should take a marketing tip from the supermarkets and sell in smaller quantities, say 12oz? That way each individual purchase doesn't seem so dear. Using figures from this survey, an average crop of honey per colony was worth £145.70 when sold direct at average price. (2010 = £189.64) You can see from this that you, as beekeepers, are making nearly £45 less per colony this year than last!

38 respondees sell honey wholesale to a retailer. The average price has risen by 30p to £4.01, a reasonable price when you don't have to market it yourself but don't forget you still have to jar and label. At the average wholesale price, an average crop of honey per colony was worth £124.31, (2010 = £164.12) again £40 less than last year.

Honey was sold in bulk by 6 beekeepers, the same number as last year. At the average bulk price, an average crop of honey per colony was worth £101.68. (2010 = £106.92) Here the difference against last year is much less due to the 85p increase in the average selling price.

21 replies indicated selling cut-comb honey and it is assumed that the majority of this cut-comb is sold direct. This year the average price per pound has risen to £8.92 but only a small percentage of the total crop is sold as cut comb. Out of the 43 beekeepers that produced some cut comb, the maximum crop was 65lb most being 10 lbs or less. I always feel this is an under-produced crop, but it does need careful selling to the right buyer. At average cut comb price, an average crop of honey per colony was worth £276.52 (2010 = £327.80)

The heather yields weren't large but enough to give some figures. The average price for heather was £5.00/lb, prices ranging between £3.00 and £6.50. 6 contributors gave information about heather honey crops, the maximum crop being 79lbs. At average heather honey price, an average crop of honey per colony was worth £155.

Some figures of interest from the survey:

Total number of responding beekeepers	260	
Total number of colonies	1261 (on 31 <sup>st</sup> August 2011)	
Average number of cols/beekeeper	4.9	
Average honey crop/beekeeper	151.4lbs	
Total number of colonies 'producing'	1104	
Total honey crop	39375lbs	17.58Tons
Of which		
Heather honey	167lbs	
Cut comb	493lbs	
Flower honey	38715lbs	

Approximate total honey production in the SE area:

Number of beekeepers registered to Beebase in SE	3600
Estimate of 'unknown' beekeepers say 25%	900
Total Beekeepers	4500
Total number of colonies 4500 x 4.9	22050
Total honey crop 22050 x 31lbs	305Tons

## National average figures

Below are figures from other regions for comparison. These regions are the administrative regions of the National Bee Unit as shown here and can also be found on the NBU website: [www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com)



Region	Flower Wholesale £/lb	Flower Direct Sales £/lb	Flower Bulk Sales £/lb	Cut comb £/lb	Maincrop yield (lb)
Western	£3.18	£4.09	£2.45	n/a	55
Wales	£4.00	£5.50	£2.50	£9.00	42
Northern	£3.93	£4.30	£2.66	£10.09	37
South East	£4.01	£4.70	£3.28	£8.92	31
Southern	£3.50	£4.50	£2.20	£8.00	59
Eastern	£3.20	£4.00	£2.20	£6.00	40
South West	£4.00	£4.77	£2.50	£7.73	44
North East	£3.63	£4.25	£2.74	£6.85	57
<b>Average</b>	<b>£3.68</b>	<b>£4.51</b>	<b>£2.75</b>	<b>£8.08</b>	<b>46</b>

The SE average honey price, £4.70 is above the national average honey price of £4.51 but by no means is it the most expensive, which at £5.50 shows what the market can stand. The average maincrop yield figures indicate that the SE had by far the poorest average honey crop of all the regions.

### Approximate total honey production in England and Wales:

Number of beekeepers registered to Beebase	25000
Estimate of 'unknown' beekeepers say 25%	6250
Total Beekeepers	31250
Beebase average colonies per beekeeper	5.07
Total number of colonies 31250 x 5.07	158437
Total honey crop 158437 x 46lbs	3254Tons

Alan Byham  
S.E. Regional Bee Inspector  
National Bee Unit  
Tel: 01306 611016  
Email: [alan.byham@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:alan.byham@fera.gsi.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.nationalbeeunit.co.uk](http://www.nationalbeeunit.co.uk)