



All Change

Much has changed since last year's newsletter. Alan Byham stepped down as RBI in December '13 in order to retire to Wales and I took up the role at the beginning of January. Fortunately I managed some handover time with Alan, which smoothed the transition. 2014 was my 6th season with the Bee Unit having previously been a Seasonal Inspector in the Southern Region. I have met a good many of you this past season at both County and Division level and I am steadily getting better with names and faces.

The Bee Health Policy Review has entered the implementation stage. In Jan 2013 stakeholders were consulted and there were 184 responses. Results can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-honey-bee-health> An article was published in **BBKA News, 221 Jan 2014 pages 11-15**, which details the recommended proposals. Work continues on the implementation plan, guided by the Bee Health Advisory Forum (BHAFF), the recommendations nonetheless have started to permeate our work this year – more of which I will touch upon later.

It may not have gone un-noticed from this newsletter header - that we are no longer part of the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) but instead we are now within the newly created Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). The combined Agency has been formed by joining four functions of FERA (Bee inspectorate, the Plants Health and Seeds Inspectorate, the Plant Variety and Seeds Group and the GM Inspectorate) with the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) and in so doing bringing together all animal and plant health inspection functions into a single Agency.

Whilst the Agency has changed, we retain the name National Bee Unit and all office functions and diagnostics remain at York.

You should note that the telephone number for the National Bee Unit Office has changed to: 0300 303 0094 and email becomes: nbu@apha.gsi.gov.uk.

The postal address is broadly the same but now reflects our home in the new agency and that the Sand Hutton campus at York is now multiuser and so the site has also been renamed as the National Agri-Food Innovation Campus. The full address for the Bee Unit Office is now: National Bee Unit, The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), National Agri-Food Innovation Campus, Sand Hutton, York. YO41 1LZ.

The Season

Winter 2013/14 was mild but nonetheless characterised by major storms especially between December and January with many parts of the country experiencing major flooding. This was

reported as the stormiest period of weather for 20 years. The persistent rain during this period leads this to be the wettest winter for England since records began in 1766. Of particular note, so long as your bees managed to stay dry and avoided being washed away, was that the winter had the fewest air frosts since 1961. Mean temperatures over this period averaged 5.2°C which is 1.5°C above average and much of the south still managed to be sunnier than average despite the rain. As it was so mild, many colonies did not shut down brood rearing as much as we usually hope for, leading some to higher consumption of winter stores and shortages in some colonies. Similarly, with brood remaining in some colonies Varroa was able to continue to breed and some beekeepers reported higher than expected mite levels coming out of winter.

Spring was more settled with temperatures remaining above average (a mean of 9°C being 1.3° above average), equal second warmest since 1910 (=2nd with 2007). This combined with the mild winter meant that by the end of May we were seeing some beekeepers needing to take emergency measures to control varroa mite populations in some colonies. For others, mite levels remained well in hand and so this may have been the mild weather showing more than usual those autumn treatments where the efficacy just fell short of that needed.

A settled spring and fine settled weather during June and July saw well advanced colonies continue to build up strongly and in the main produce good surplus. August was cooler and wetter than average, bringing the forage to an abrupt halt in many areas.

From a cooler August, with the bees just starting to wind down, things then changed again with September and the early part of October being especially mild. Corresponding with this, there were reports of bees picking up brood rearing and bringing in significant forage from Ivy and various other urban garden sources. Autumn has been unseasonably mild and in the south east largely frost free until well into November. The average temperature for the period was 12.5°C being 1.4°C above the seasonal average for this time of year. So while many colonies were finding forage late into the autumn, many were also using it at a faster rate also. To top out the autumn period Kew Gardens, London and Gravesend, Kent managed 23.6°C on the 31st October, so no wonder some of our colonies didn't know whether they were coming or going...!

The Team

With my move to the South Eastern region, the region added Buckinghamshire into the fold, together with Karen Smith, a new SBI for the 2014 season. Karen takes on responsibility for the larger part of Buckinghamshire although beekeepers in the north of Sussex may have seen Karen during the season as we targeted one particular disease outbreak, which I will discuss later.

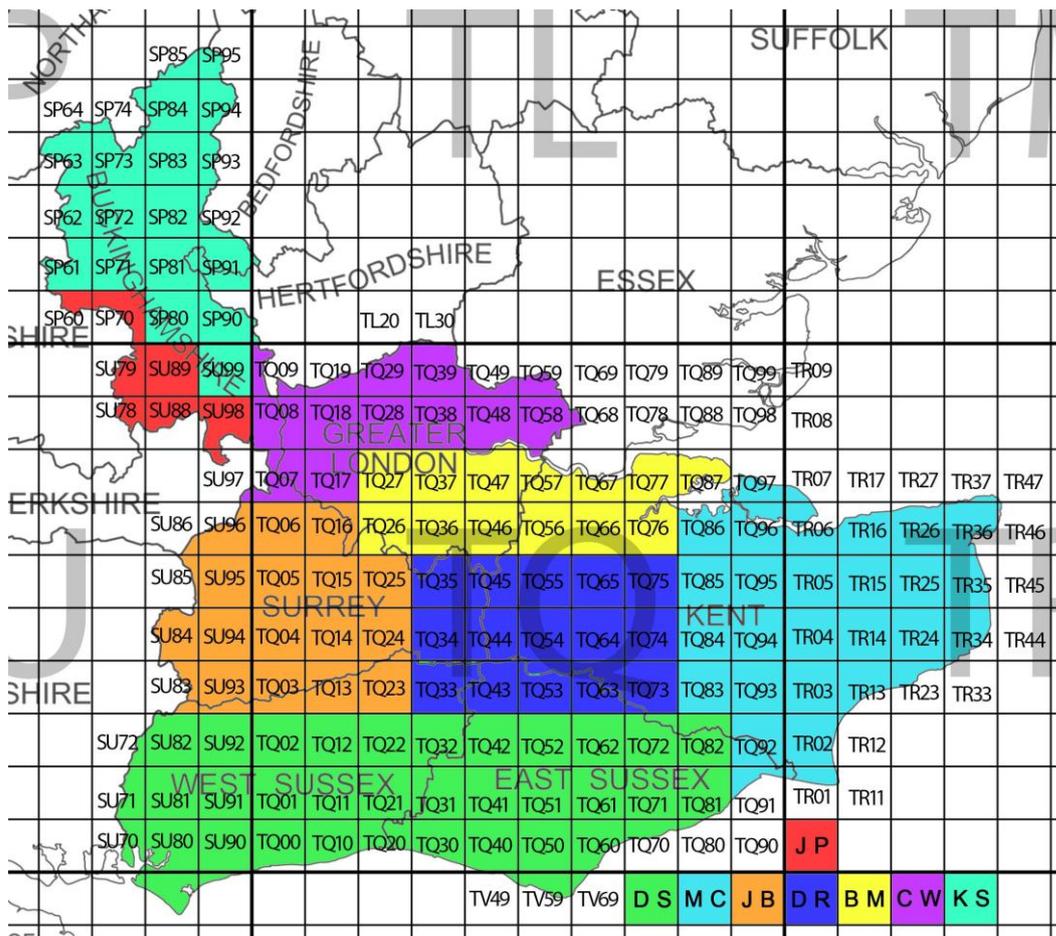
Sadly, Bee Inspectors are not immune from the effects of extreme weather and David Rudland was unfortunately flooded out by the winter storms. We therefore lost David partway through the season as he understandably took a leave of absence to chase insurers and drive forward repair work. David's patch was temporarily reassigned to neighbouring team members for the balance of the season. This did stretch resources and inspectors, particularly as covering David's patch meant extended travelling times for all of us, but hopefully we will see some return to normality this coming season - all being well.

From April, barring unforeseen events, the region and inspector areas should look like this:

Brian McCallum	South London, North West Kent	07775 - 119478
Caroline Washington	North London	07775 - 119449
Karen Smith	Buckinghamshire	07979 - 119374
Jonathan Brookhouse	West Surrey	07867 - 351598
David Rudland	East Surrey, West Kent	07775 - 119448
Michael Cooper	East Kent	07775 - 119451
Diane Steele	West Sussex, East Sussex	07775 - 119452

These areas can be seen easily on this map. This also includes the area that I inspect and gives a better idea of who to contact by using your Ordnance Survey 10km square map reference.

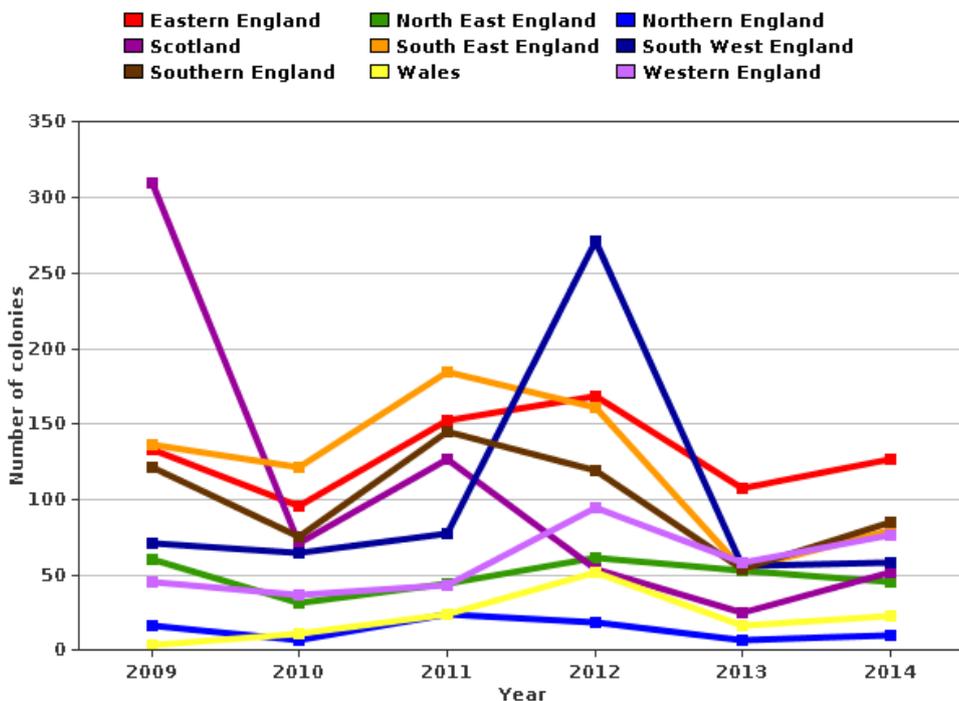
Please remember Seasonal Inspectors only work for the NBU April through to September, so please don't try to contact them "out of season" as they won't be able to assist. Instead "out of season" contact me please. My contact details are at the end of the Newsletter.



2014 Inspection Programme and Disease Levels

The weather remained kind to us for inspections this year, with days rained off being better than average. Consequently we managed to inspect more colonies this year even after allowing for the addition of Buckinghamshire to the region and despite inspectors' losing significant time to travelling whilst covering David Rudland's area. We also managed to run a 2 day exotic pest contingency exercise – clearly absolutely essential given the recent news of small hive beetle in Italy - but of course this took further time away from inspectors. All in, within the SE region, we inspected a total of 3922 colonies in 694 apiaries (642 more colonies than last year). The number of cases of EFB was up on last year at 80 (32 – 2013) in part this reflects an increase across England 482 – 2014 up from 390 – 2013, but also a noticeable outbreak of EFB in the Tunbridge Wells/Forest Row/East Grinstead neighbouring 10km grid square areas. Within this fairly well

defined area we had 20 cases of EFB much of which was related and after the initial finding more was discovered by carrying out our usual 3km sweeps. Given the extent of the outbreak, several “out of region” inspectors were drafted in during late August and early September to assist with a targeted effort to contain the disease and prevent any further spread. Thanks to the efforts of the “guest” inspectors we were able to complete our sweeps of “at risk” apiaries and so can be reasonably confident of having contained the outbreak before the season ended. Nonetheless, “contained” cannot guarantee elimination, so the area will have follow up inspections in the spring to seek out any reoccurrence and I would urge all beekeepers in this general area to exercise increased vigilance, whilst this area remains a current “hot spot”.



In nearly all of these cases the disease had gone un-noticed by the beekeeper and whilst it is most often the bees that spread the disease through robbing, the bees only have the opportunity to do this if the disease goes un-noticed by the beekeeper. This highlights the importance of beekeepers maintaining good disease recognition skills in order to prevent disease from taking hold and establishing. Please also remember that foulbrood has the potential to reoccur almost immediately if beekeepers reuse comb and equipment from colonies that may have been infected.

County	Colonies Inspected	EFB Colonies	EFB %	AFB Colonies
Buckinghamshire	273	4	1.4%	0
Greater London	599	16	2.7%	0
Surrey	510	14	2.7%	1
West Sussex	1108	15	1.4%	0
East Sussex	771	21	2.7%	1
Kent	661	10	1.5%	0
TOTALS	3922	80	2.0%	2

So please, if you have any unexplained winter losses, avoid the temptation to reuse drawn comb and make sure that equipment is sterilised before reuse.

AFB was found again this year, but just 2 cases (6 – 2013) and these were

geographically dispersed and unrelated in any way. I haven’t shown this as a percentage on the above table as given the low incidence a percentage is pretty meaningless. Across England as a whole EFB colonies as a percentage of colonies inspected was 1.5%. Similarly there were 96 AFB colonies across England, 0.3% of colonies inspected, but just over half this number relates to a single AFB outbreak in Norfolk which appears to be connected to imported bee colonies.

Earlier I mentioned the EFB outbreak in the Tunbridge Wells TQ53 and Forest Row/East Grinstead TQ43 grid squares. Looking at East Sussex you might conclude that the EFB percentage is no higher than some other areas, but the key point here is the very tight area (just 2 x 10km grid squares) over which nearly all the foulbrood for the County was found (part of TQ43 is

also in W.Sussex and so some of W.Sussex EFB also relates to this outbreak). In comparison in most other areas foulbrood occurred over a wider more diverse range of 10km grid squares. This concentration (20 cases) in just two OS 10km grid squares is significant I believe.

If you wish to delve deeper into these figures, all of this information and much more is readily available on the public pages of Beebase – www.nationalbeeunit.com.

Bee Health Policy Review Outcomes

I thought it might be worthwhile to touch on some of the areas we will be looking at next year in the South East in response to the Policy Review:

Association Forums:

RBI's are encouraged to hold regional forums where local associations are invited to attend and discuss the implementation of the bee health review and local issues. In this way it is intended that the forum provides an opportunity to develop a relationship between the NBU and local associations in order to better tackle bee pests and disease. Similarly, the forum helps build better relationships between associations. I believe that forums have been held in the region in the past, but I would very much like to resurrect them this year and so I will shortly circulate an invitation to Associations with an agenda and venue.

Bee Health Advisors (BHA's):

This in some ways is related to Forums as I will be looking to promote BHA's at this first forum meeting. BHA's are experienced beekeepers who volunteer to provide a first line of advice for local beekeepers in an association. In some areas where this initiative has been run in the past they have been previously known as Disease Liaison Co-ordinators. They are additional to Bee Inspectors, helping less experienced beekeepers when they suspect disease or a problem in a colony, to correctly identify the problem. Sadly, we get a vast number of call outs from beekeepers that end up being false alarms because the beekeeper is unable to identify common maladies, a BHA would assist with this and help with triaging suspect bee health issues.

With increasing calls on inspector time and the increased threat from exotic pests BHA's can potentially help reduce abortive call outs, support local beekeepers and increase the discovery of foulbrood. In many areas this already operates informally in some Associations, however the BHA scheme gives us the opportunity to formalise this and provide a day of training to volunteers, aimed at foulbrood detection and to issue a supply of lateral flow devices to be used in the field to aid identification before an inspector is called out.

The scheme is by no means mandatory, but is available to those associations that would like to have several experienced members attend training intended to provide a pool of local disease knowledge that may be called upon by Association members to assist in the identification of disease. If we can come up with sufficient names then I am happy to provide a day's training. As a guide I would suggest one BHA per 100 beekeepers.

If you are interested in being a BHA or think your association should provide them, then please talk this over with your local secretary or chairperson and they should contact their county secretary who will arrange the training with me. This will be one of the key discussion items at the

Association forum meeting and after which, if there is sufficient interest, I will organise a training date.

Better Regulation:

The Disease Accreditation Scheme for Honeybees (DASH) has been set up in collaboration with the Bee Farmers Association (BFA) as an accreditation scheme for beekeepers with large numbers of colonies. Beekeepers that join the scheme are trained in disease recognition and barrier management and will carry out self-diagnosis, reporting and treatment of foulbrood infected colonies. When disease is present an improvement in disease management practices will be expected. They will be audited and there are rules and penalties for non-compliance. The first tranche of 28 beefarmers have been trained and inspection of apiaries took place in 2014. Successful candidates in the first round are now accredited. Further entries to the scheme take place annually.

Beebase Registration and Association Membership Lists:

In the UK we currently have quite a contradictory system of voluntary registration of beekeepers and apiaries combined with the expectation that if notifiable disease turns up in an area that all the colonies close to it will be inspected by us. This means we have the legal right to inspect when colonies are at risk (i.e. close to other colonies with notifiable disease) but you don't have to tell us beforehand where your bees are located!

Therefore we rely on three ways of detecting colonies; voluntary registration on BeeBase, association membership lists, and being told about neighbouring apiaries when disease is found. Voluntary registration is very important and can be done online at www.nationalbeeunit.com or by calling our office on **0300 303 0094**. This should be followed by periodic updating of Beebase records. To do so you will need a username and password and this can be obtained when registering or by calling the office. If you are registered on BeeBase and we have your current email address then you will receive an automated disease alert when notifiable disease is found within 3km of your apiary.

Your association can send us their list of members if they wish but can only do this if they satisfy the requirements of the Data Protection Act. The easiest way to do this is to amend the membership renewal form to contain the following phrase;

“Please note that a condition of membership is your agreement to membership details being held on a computer. This information will be used for the efficient running of the association by its officials, for the distribution of the BBKA magazine, for BBKA Insurance, for Bee Disease Insurance, and passed to the Regional Bee Inspector for inclusion on BeeBase to aid them in the control of notifiable bee diseases”.

These lists are very useful to us as they allow us to identify new beekeepers and to update contact details for existing beekeepers. Secretaries – if you currently have this in place, please email me your current membership list, so I can ensure our records are as accurate and complete as possible. This is something that will be incredibly important if we are unfortunate enough to find Small Hive Beetle or Asian Hornet in the UK in the coming season.

Training Events:

Training events are a key part of the education remit of the NBU. However, we are under a lot of pressure to ensure these are delivered in an efficient and professional manner and have competing and increasing demands on our time. Going forward, we will only deliver education events that cover pests and diseases and associated husbandry. RBI's will be focussing on county level talks with large attendances (>50), bee health days and comb workshops. SBI's will focus on bee safaris and apiary demos and will help the RBI at bee health days. We will no longer be able to give talks for beginner's courses on diseases or "health and hygiene" as this can be handled by the local association trainers

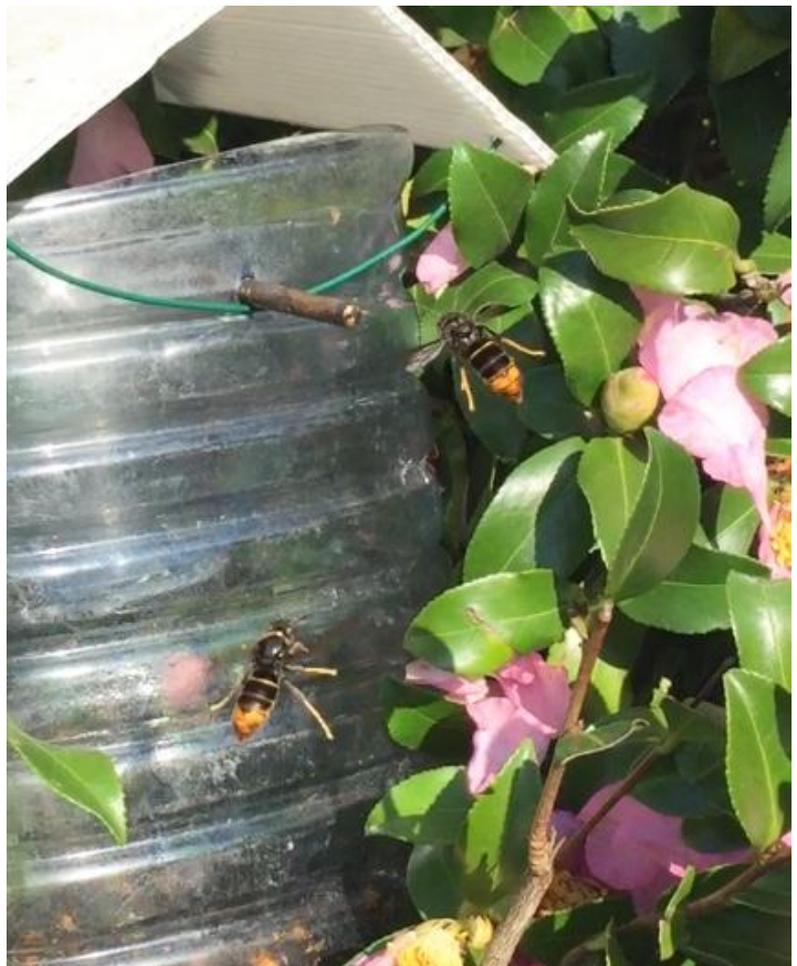
Ordinarily, events such as bee health days, safaris and apiary demos should be run during the week to reduce demand on the Inspectors' weekends. Inspectors are no different in having to make time at weekends for their own bees and families. Contrary sometimes to popular myth, bee inspectors don't work 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, as sometimes appears to be the belief if the odd hours that we receive calls is anything to go by...!



Exotic Pests – a real and imminent danger

Many of you will have been following the recent finding of Small Hive Beetle (SHB) in Southern Italy and the onward march of Asian Hornet (AH) through France and now into Spain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium and just recently Germany. We have been warning about these two pests for several years, but never has the threat been so close and impending. SHB being now within the EU raises the level of threat significantly as does the proximity and growing population of Asian Hornets.

May I please remind you of the need for heightened vigilance for both of these pests in the spring and then throughout the season? AH could, given favourable weather conditions, fly across the Channel, but it doesn't need to, as it has plenty of opportunity to stow away on a lorry, cargo container, caravan, daytripper's car etc returning on a ferry to the UK. It only takes one queen hornet....



Use a fizzy drinks bottle as a trap – details may be found on Beebase (www.nationalbeeunit.com/downloadDocument.cfm?id=844) – but please remember to size entry and exit holes correctly to protect beneficial insects. Experiences in France show baited traps to be highly effective at trapping and detecting hornets. The photo below shows just one day's catch!

Similarly SHB is most likely to come into the country through bee, bee products (such as wax) or

bee equipment imports. Please monitor your colonies for SHB and if you really must import bees or queens then be especially vigilant. If you are buying bees from a UK supplier ask about origins of the bees, so you know what you are buying and understand the risk. All nucleus and package bee colonies imported from Italy and arriving in the SE region during 2014 were checked at time of arrival and then rechecked when SHB was discovered in Italy, so we can be as confident as we can be that it hasn't yet arrived in these imports, but every new import now increases the chance of it being introduced. The current position in Italy can be found here:

<http://www.izsvenezie.it/aethina-tumida-in-italia-2014/>



This year once again beekeepers imported a substantial number of bees from the EU, totalling 9792 queens, 580 nucleus colonies and 1402 bee packages. Of these 1767 queens and 1202 bee packages came from Italy.



These Asian Hornet photos were taken on a recent study visit to France to learn first-hand from French beekeepers the effects of AH and how it is being managed. Note how the underside of the hornet is fully striped, but how the upper side of the hornet is the distinctive all black with a single orange band. The face of the Asian Hornet is an unmistakable bright orange and when in an apiary hawking outside a hive it almost flashes at you like a beacon as the hornet flicks from side to side seeking out returning honey bees. If you have AH visiting your apiary you will be in no doubt as to what you are seeing. In France the bees have

learnt to position extra guard bees at the entrance to form a defensive cluster. Sadly the bees fail to prosper as they stay in the hive too “scared” to risk flying.

In 2014 the South Eastern Region carried out a 2 day Exotic Pest contingency exercise to practice our response to SHB or AH being discovered. My sincere thanks to Sussex Beekeepers for their assistance with this very essential and timely exercise. Western Region also ran an exercise in 2014. A further two exercises are planned for 2015 in other regions to maintain our readiness.

Should you suspect either Small Hive Beetle or Asian Hornet please report it immediately to the National Bee Unit (**0300 303 0094** or by email: nbu@apha.gsi.gov.uk) Remember photos are always good and help us immensely, as do specimens if you get the opportunity to catch or sample. Additionally, Asian Hornet should also be reported to the GB Non Native Species Secretariat here: <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/alerts/index.cfm?id=4> where you can find both the email address for reporting and an online reporting form.

Finally

I have had an enjoyable, if busy, first season as RBI in the South Eastern Region. I look forward to the opportunity to meet more of you in 2015. If anything the coming year will be busier still as we balance the control of foulbrood with the advancing threats from exotic pests.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the South Eastern Seasonal Bee Inspectors for their hard work this season,

I wish you a successful and trouble free beekeeping season in 2015, but if the worst happens we are here to help and on that note, my contact details follow at the foot of this newsletter.

Julian Parker
Regional Bee Inspector, South Eastern Region

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