



BBKA

Research Funding Campaign Tool-Kit

Bee Health at Risk! **An economic & ecological disaster in the making**

Background:

Honey bee research has suffered a funding drought in recent years notwithstanding a growing awareness of the need to gain a better understanding of the existing and potential threats to bee health. Promises given by Government during the successful campaign against proposed cuts in the Bee Inspection service in 2005, that research funding would not be cut have not been honoured and important work (e.g. on varroa management), has stalled due to lack of funding. The emergence of Colony Collapse Disorder which has devastated bee stocks in the USA and elsewhere, has further underlined the need to raise our game on beekeeping research. Following the BBKA Research Colloquium (July 2007) the BBKA has developed a research agenda in the form of a 'wish-list' of research to undertake. This list, produced in conjunction with leading researcher groups is under review in terms of priority and scope; indeed, the BBKA met key researchers during April to develop further the research agenda and keep researchers informed of developments. The key research areas are listed later in this tool kit.

The BBKA produced a document setting out the need and basis for more beekeeping research which was submitted to Lord Rooker (Minister for Sustainable Farming and Rural Affairs) in the Autumn. However, at a meeting with the Minister in December, he made it clear that despite acknowledging that we might lose our honey bees within the next ten years and that they were of great economic and environmental importance, **no additional funds for urgent research would be forthcoming from Government**. At our Annual Delegate Meeting, 12 January 2008, the membership unanimously condemned the Government position and mandated the BBKA to campaign for the additional funds required.

The Campaign

The campaign which has been developed, contains a number of elements which call for actions centrally by the BBKA and locally by Associations and members; we want to involve the press and public too, of course. We need to emphasise the economic and ecological damage that loss of honey bee pollination will have on our daily lives, what we eat and the survival of our wildlife and the country-side.

The BBKA has a programme of activities directed towards Government and politicians. A key element of this is the Parliamentary Briefing which will take place at Westminster on 22 April 2008. MPs and Peers have been invited based on in-house lists and names submitted by Associations. Various follow-up activities are planned for the briefing. A programme of supporting media activity is planned.

Association and Member Involvement:

The 2005 campaign was characterised by two major elements involving Associations and individual members. Firstly, letter writing to MPs, Ministers, the Chancellor and PM and secondly, raising a petition condemning the Government's position and seeking change. We want to build on the success of our earlier campaign. The aim is to collect more than 250,000 signatures for the petition and deliver this to Government. This tool-kit is provided to enable your full involvement in the Research Funding Campaign.

The Tool-Kit

The tool-kit contains

- Background information
- Facts & Figures
- Details of the Research agenda
- Petition forms (separate pdf)
- Suggested draft letters for members to send to MPs and Ministers
- Suggested letter for the public to send to MPs and Ministers
- Flyers, posters and stickers (separate pdfs)

Most of the components are also available in the campaign section of the BBKA web-site: www.britishbeekeepers.com Flyers, posters, petition forms and stickers are also available from the BBKA Stoneleigh on request.

Letters:

The tool kit contains a couple of suggested letters in different styles, which you might use as the basis for your own letters to MPs and Ministers. Don't forget to let the Chancellor and the PM, who control the purse strings, know your concerns as well as your MP and Defra. Remember that your local MP already might be sympathetic to the cause. There is also a suggested letter for the public

It is hard to be 'against' beekeeping and we are not asking for hand-outs or direct support. We are simply asking for modest sums to be directed to beekeeping research to ensure the economic and environmental contributions made by honey bees are assured. Beekeeping ticks all the green boxes! Your MP may well refer your letter to Defra for comment and we will see standardised replies. Don't just accept Defra's put-off reply; write again, criticising their response – keep up the pressure.

Shows and Events:

There are electronic petitions out there, but you can't beat handing the Minister bulging folders of petition sheets – they can't 'click to delete' them! We have the local and county shows, honey shows, farmers markets etc ahead, all fertile ground. Don't forget your local library, schools, gardening clubs, allotment associations, RSPB branches, WI branches and what about some door to door canvassing. Local honey sales outlets may also be sympathetic to putting a petition on the counter.

Keep the message simple; the public is quick to catch-on and usually very interested. No honey bees – no pollination – no healthy diet – amore boring diet, too! Send petition sheets to Stoneleigh as soon as they are complete., please

Local press and media:

Most local papers, radio and TV like a local campaign to support but need 'case histories' to bring the story to life. Identify one or two of your members who have lost a lot of colonies, and invite the press to see the empty hives.

Set your association or branch a target number of signatures and ask your local paper if they will publish a weekly thermometer or ladder (traditional fundraising barometers) so you can let people know how your campaign is growing. Offer

papers, short, simple features based on the campaign facts and figures. Look at the **Eatwell Plate**, produced by the Food Standards Agency, find it on: food.gov.uk, and identify what would be missing if Lord Rooker's prophecy of 'honey bees being wiped out in 10 years time if nothing is done' comes true.

Talk to the editor, news editor or features editor on your paper, forward planning desk at TV and radio stations. Contact details should be on their websites and in your local library.

Coordination & Communication:

These are the watch-words of any successful campaign. Please keep the BBKA informed of your activities, send copy letters to and from MPs to Stoneleigh, send in your petition forms and tell us what works and what doesn't.

The Research Agenda:

As a result of expert advice we have identified some key areas needing further research. These are listed here but not necessarily in order of importance although we would all probably be in agreement that varroa is the primary scourge to overcome. The indicative budget is £8m over five years.

- Varroa** – Fungal control; OA; Thymol; treatment paradigms
- Nosema** – Fumidil MRL; *N.ceranae* in UK; New preparations
- Foul Brood** – Biology/ pathology/ incidence/ treatments
- Small Hive Beetle** – Control/Security; treatments, prophylaxis
- Husbandry** – Queen rearing; mesh floors; hive cleansing; swarming
- Bee Breeding** – Stock improvement; disease resistance;
- Medicinal Honey**

Campaign Facts & Figures

Figures

- Honey bees contribute £165 million pa to the agricultural economy of the UK; much of this goes back to the treasury through corporation tax, PAYE, VAT etc.
- At present the government spends about £1.5 million on honey bees, the Inspection Service mandated by law accounts for £1.2 million of that.
- Currently the government spends just £200k on applied beekeeping research. This work is determined by DEFRA/NBU without reference to the concerns of beekeeping associations.
- The UK government receives €700k pa from the EU for the management of varroosis and this money must be match funded by the UK government
- Beekeepers receive about £12 million pa for the sale of honey etc
- Each hive contributes over £600 per annum through pollination to the agricultural economy

Beekeeping Facts

- CCD is a major problem in the USA and could affect bees in the UK
- UK Beekeeping is different compared with the USA and the rest of Europe because it is mainly conducted by non-commercial amateur beekeepers
- DEFRA (Lord Rooker) admits that without further research work it is possible that the UK population of honey bees could be lost within 10 years
- The varroa mite is resistant to key approved medications and the viruses it carries are destroying honey bee colonies
- The honey bee is now reliant on beekeepers for its survival in this country
- Feral colonies are rare and usually die-out after a couple of years due to disease
- The inspection service provided by NBU is welcome but is now at a critically low level
- Beekeepers run their own compensation scheme (Bee Disease Insurance) for colonies which are compulsorily destroyed (by DEFRA/NBU) unlike other forms of animal husbandry

Training & Research

- Beekeeping Associations are responsible for nearly all the training in honey bee management and disease control.
- Most academic research institutes have given-up asking DEFRA to support their work because of constant refusals
- The BBKA Research colloquium last year identified the work to be done
- Subsequently the BBKA has worked with research institutes to develop a 5 year programme of essential honey bee research, the programme will cost £1.6 million pa over the next 5 years.
- DEFRA expect beekeepers to take ever more responsibility for the health of their bees but without more research and support from the Government's Bee Health Strategy will fail.

Letters

1. Suggested Member's Letter to MPs etc:

Dear (MP or Minister)

Bee Health Research

Honey bees play a vital role in the agricultural economy and the environment at large. They contribute some £165 million per annum to agricultural output through pollination activity and wild animals and birds are heavily dependent on seeds and fruits set by bee pollination.

The arrival of the parasitic varroa mite in the 1990s has had a serious effect on bee populations and matters are becoming worse since the mite has developed resistance to some of the key approved medications we have available. These mites now carry lethal viruses which are destroying colonies. We do not have adequate answers to this onslaught and indeed, many other honey bee diseases are still poorly understood, making treatment difficult. The emergence of Colony Collapse Disorder, an unexplained but devastating loss of bees experienced widely in the USA has made beekeepers in the UK fearful of its arrival here, perhaps in another form. The threats to honey bees and all the benefits they bring, have never been greater.

The British Beekeepers' Association, of which I am a member, has asked Defra for increased funding to enable essential work to be undertaken, but Lord Rooker, Minister for Sustainable Farming and Rural Affairs has refused to provide additional funds. The BBKA has presented a programme of research to Lord Rooker which has an indicative budget of £8 million over five years, during which time our bees will contribute over £800 million to agriculture. It seems foolhardy not to find the modest funding required given what we stand to lose if the research needed is not undertaken. I look forward to your support on this important issue.

Yours truly

etc

2. Suggested member's letter to MPs etc

Dear (MP)

I am a beekeeper and a member of your constituency. You may have heard that there is world wide concern about the health of honeybees following the catastrophic losses due to Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) in USA and continuing un-determined losses in Europe. We British Beekeepers are very worried that the problems overseas could reach these shores and, indeed, there have already been some unexplained colony losses over the last 2 or 3 years.

Through the British Beekeepers Association, of which I am a member, we have had discussions with Lord Rooker (DEFRA) about our concerns and the need to protect honeybees in this country. Lord Rooker has agreed that the economic benefit of honeybees through pollination is at least £165 million pa and that without further research into the causes of colony losses in this country there is a possibility that we could loose our honeybee population in the next 10 years.

Honeybee health is the responsibility of local beekeepers but it is impossible to do this without help and support from the government, through the National Bee Unit (part of Plant Health Division of DEFRA). The unit has a statutory responsibility to help beekeepers with the control of a number of infectious diseases of honeybees. Their role is welcomed by beekeepers. The National Bee Unit costs about £1.3 million pa and is part funded by monies from the EU hypothecated for the control of Varroosis (a mite that is causing major damage to Honeybee colonies worldwide). In addition DEFRA is only able to allocate £200k pa for research into the maintenance of honey bee health. It has been shown in the past that beekeeping and the impact of diseases in this country is different to Europe and USA because 99% of beekeepers in this country are not commercial and could be considered to be equivalent to small holders.

The British Beekeepers Association held a colloquium in June 2007 to identify the current research needs for honey bee health and subsequently have submitted proposals to Lord Rooker for priority re-allocation of research funds to honeybees. The response has been that he understands the problem and sympathises with the case but is unable to identify a further £1.6 million pa for the next 5 years to this area.

We recognise and accept that it is difficult for the government to allocate new funds to this work (even though the sums involved are trivial) but would ask you to help us by raising the priority of this research work so that the Government can find the £8 million over 5 years to meet this research programme.

Your response and that of the government is waited with anticipation.

Yours sincerely

3. Suggested letter from member of the public:

Dear MP or Minister

Honey Bee Health at Risk An Economic and Ecological Disaster in the Making

I am a member of your constituency and am writing in support of the British Beekeepers' campaign for more funding for Bee Health Research.

I am seriously concerned about the diseases and viruses which are currently affecting our honey bees and the devastating effect it could have on our environment and our diet.

Honey bees don't just produce honey but play a vital role in pollinating plants for food and other crops, making a substantial contribution of £165million annually to the agricultural economy. Their decline threatens what we eat at every meal.

Honey bees also have an important environmental role, being responsible for pollinating wild plants which produce seeds and fruits on which birds and wild animals depend. Their decline threatens to turn our brightly-coloured meadows into grey hinterlands.

I understand that the emergence of Colony Collapse Disorder, (CCD) an unexplained but devastating loss of bees experienced widely in the USA has made beekeepers in the UK fearful of its arrival here, perhaps in another form. The threats to honey bees and all the benefits they bring have never been greater, yet Lord Rooker, Minister for Sustainable Farming and Rural Affairs has refused to provide additional funds for essential research to take place.

The BBKA has presented a programme of research to Lord Rooker which has a budget of £8 million over five years, during which time our honey bees will contribute more than £800 million to agriculture. It seems foolhardy not to find the modest funding required given what we stand to lose if the research needed is not undertaken. I look forward to your support on this important issue.

Yours sincerely