

SBA Executive Meeting 23 May 2009

Bee Diseases Convener Report

1. Draft Scottish Honeybee Health Strategy

On 2 April 2009 the Scottish Government held a meeting in Pentland House to discuss the draft Scottish Honeybee Health Strategy. Attending from SBA were Prof Alan Teale, Bron Wright, Ian Craig, Una Robertson and Gavin Ramsay. John Mellis and Nigel Robertson of BFA (Scotland), Graeme Sharp of SAC, Jon Pickup of SASA and the relevant staff from the newly reorganised Animal Health and Welfare Division in the Scottish Government Rural Directorate also attended, with Dr Colette Backwell (Deputy Director of Animal Health and Welfare Division) in the Chair. Dr Backwell is attending the Aberdeenshire beekeepers beginners group, and the constructive atmosphere of recent meetings with the Scottish Government continues. Discussion included the role of the Bee Inspectors, and contact details have now been published in the magazine. The need for benefits to SBA members of cooperation creating a database was stressed, and government were reminded of members' concerns on GM crops and the importation of bees. It was agreed to take forward discussion in smaller steering groups in the following areas:

- a. Surveillance. It was suggested that additional seasonal bee officers together with the existing bee officers could both improve expert surveillance and help train beekeepers and trainers in local associations to enhance their own current surveillance for pests and diseases. Gavin Ramsay will represent SBA interests in these discussions with Graeme Sharp and Duncan MacRae.
- b. Training and Education. This is seen by government as the most important part of the strategy. A group would form, to include Graeme Sharp, Steve Sunderland, Ian Craig, Alan Teale with a view to strengthening and enhancing the current training structures.
- c. Bee medicines. Given the important implications of EU veterinary medicines legislation, it was proposed to set up a small group to discuss the implications in Scotland. The legislation will mean that bee medicines will fall under existing rules for other veterinary medicines, and mechanisms will be required to ensure that beekeepers can have access to such medicines legally. A suggestion was made that bee officers could become responsible

persons authorised to prescribe medicines. The group to take this forward comprises Dr Nick Ambrose, John Mellis, Alan Teale and Gavin Ramsay.

A further meeting to finalise the draft strategy was cancelled at short notice and a near-final draft of the strategy was recently circulated. The agreed strategy will be launched at the Royal Highland Show and it is likely that the SBA display will feature in the publicity associated with the launch.

2. Meeting of interested parties with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Defra.

A meeting was held on 20th April at Weybridge which I joined by telephone. It was chaired by John Fitzgerald of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and attended by representatives from the Bee Unit at CSL (now FERA), BBKA, BFA, AMTRA and government in the devolved administrations. For those interested in following the UK response to EU legislation on veterinary medicines VMD has set up a web page showing their action plan and giving lists of medicines available throughout the EU:

<http://www.vmd.gov.uk/VetSQP/Bee/bee.htm>

There is a category of products currently on sale (with the acronym AVM-GSL, Authorised Veterinary Medicine – General Sales List) covering bee medicines which is currently illegal and will be withdrawn once a system is in place which regulates availability to these medicines via prescription only. In addition, there is a desire to make available products available elsewhere in Europe to beekeepers in the UK through what is called the cascade which will also require prescription by a vet or vet surrogate. This system can cost, in John Mellis' experience, £25 per hive for treatment, three times more than illegally purchasing the product on the internet. A system of training SQPs (suitably qualified persons) to act as surrogates for vets was under consideration. After enquiry it was said that VMD will continue to regard products such as oxalic and formic acid as outside this system as long as no claims of efficacy are made.

3. Donna Clark of Moray College/UHI.

Donna Clark proposes to run a project on the spatial distribution of Varroa in the Highlands and to look at local differences in the response to Varroa. She was put in contact with the relevant people.

4. Future.

There are two suggestions to make to take forward the work of the SBA in relation to bee diseases. The post is regarded as a 'convener'. As bee health has a high priority these days, should we establish a small committee to take forward work in this area? Is the group meeting to discuss bee health issues with the Scottish Government the nucleus of this committee?

Secondly, we currently have a survey of members which provides a useful snapshot of the state of Scottish beekeeping from time to time. Winter losses are the issue of the moment however, so should the SBA develop a detailed questionnaire to collect data on the reasons for winter losses? Such an exercise could also serve as a focus for the training of beekeepers, as an important part of such an exercise would be to provide a guide as to the conducting post mortems on lost colonies. Currently the Diseases Convener frequently responds to questions from members on specific winter loss incidents, and it has become clear that collating ideas on diagnosing these could be very useful for all Scottish beekeepers.

Gavin Ramsay

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