

Harsh winter hits honey bees: Number of colonies who did not survive up by a third

- **The level of colony losses across England is more than double what it was last year**
- **Poor weather stopped honey bees from foraging and gathering pollen**

By Emily Beament

A third of honeybee colonies did not survive the winter following last year's wash-out summer, a survey of beekeepers has revealed.

The level of colony losses across England is more than double what it was last year, up to 34% from 16% in 2012, the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) said.

The results reflect poor weather last summer, which frequently prevented honeybees from foraging and gathering pollen, and reduced the amount of food available from flowering plants, as nectar production is temperature dependent.



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As a result there was inadequate nutrition for bees, especially during late summer when the specialised bees which take the colony through winter are born.

The poor weather also hit mating for new virgin queens, causing their colonies to die out.

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It is the worst set of results since the BBKA started its annual survey of members to see how honeybee colonies were faring over winter six years ago.



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Beekeepers in the south west were worst hit, with more than half (53%) of colonies lost, while all areas of England saw significantly higher losses than last year, the survey showed.

And the situation may have worsened since the survey was completed at the end of March, as bees have continued to face bad weather and the late arrival of spring.

David Aston, chairman of the BBKA, said: 'Those honeybee colonies which have survived the winter and are now prospering have done so in the main due to the careful nurturing through the winter by beekeepers who have spent much time and effort feeding and carrying out frequent checks on hives, incurring significant additional expense meeting the need to continually feed their bees.

'The training and education of beekeepers to be able to adapt their beekeeping practices to help their honeybees cope with this period of changing weather patterns is a high priority for all beekeeping associations.' Honeybee colonies which are suffering from poor nutrition become more vulnerable to disease and other stress factors.

If colonies are smaller as a result of the poor summer, they can also find it harder to survive the winter as they cluster together in cold weather and can starve if the smaller cluster is not close to food stores within the