



### Change Again

It's been another year of change, both within the wider Agency and the South Eastern Team. This will be my last Annual Report in the South Eastern Region before handing over the reins. This arises as Nigel Semmence has taken on the role of Contingency Planning and Science Office, leaving a Regional Bee Inspector (RBI) vacancy in Southern Region. Following the usual recruitment process, Diane Steele our Seasonal Bee Inspector (SBI) for East and West Sussex was the successful candidate. We have therefore looked at both the South Eastern and Southern Regions and teams, as Diane lives close to the border between regions, but of course, just inside South Eastern region. There were a number of ways the regions could have been restructured to accommodate this. After some thought and consideration it was decided to move me (and hence Buckinghamshire) back into Southern region – restoring the regions to how they were prior to 2013, which now on balance is the best fit for both Regions. Therefore from the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016 I will be the new RBI for Southern region and Diane will take over as RBI for South Eastern region.



Many of you will already know Diane, she is an extremely experienced and capable inspector, having now completed 7 seasons with the Bee Unit. She has a wide knowledge of the South Eastern region and has deputised for me on several occasions over the last two years. I therefore believe that we should have a smooth handover process allowing the South Eastern region to move confidently into the 2016 season, which is now racing towards us.

We have also had a retirement, with Caroline Washington deciding to stand down. Caroline has completed 12 seasons with us and over that time has accumulated a great deal of local knowledge in her London area and so will be greatly missed. Caroline is one of two inspectors that we have in the London and Greater London area and so we will be seeking to recruit a replacement Seasonal Inspector from somewhere within the London/Great London area to fill the gap that now exists. We will then rebalance the London territories between inspectors to suit. The South Eastern team will have two vacancies to fill for the 2016 season, this and also of course the SBI post in East and West Sussex that Diane Steele now vacates to head up the team as RBI. So if any of you reading this in either of these areas have had thoughts of being a Seasonal Inspector, please let me or Diane know, so we can ensure that you receive notification when the advert for the Seasonal Bee Inspector replacements is released. If you would like to have a chat to explore the role, then please feel able to give either of us a call.

In August we welcomed Kay Wreford to the team as the new Seasonal Inspector for North Kent. Kay is an experienced beekeeper and handler and I believe well known in the local area through her Association activities and as a BBKA Exam assessor.

Our move to APHA took place back in October 2014. When the Seasonal Inspectors returned to work on 1<sup>st</sup> April pretty much all of the back office systems and procedures had changed as an inevitability of this move. Much of the 2015 season was a steep learning curve for our inspectors as they coped with finding their way around the new agency and attended a steady round of induction and training sessions intended to harmonise our ways of working. On the whole I think they did well to cope with this distraction while still maintaining business as usual on the inspection side.

There is still further integration to come in the next twelve months as APHA seeks closer integration between the Bee Inspectorate and APHA's wider field operations.

## **The Season**

Unlike the previous winter's major storms, the winter of 2014/2015 was considered benign, mean temperatures were around average, as was rainfall. However it was characterised by being somewhat sunnier than average, as indicated by comparison with the Met Office data series from 1929. It is worthy of note that January and February sunshine averages were 141% and 127% respectively.

This then brings us to the Spring, which following on from a benign and largely average Winter was also considered to be unexceptional overall. Mean temperatures continued the largely average trend. In the south rainfall was below average for March and April but a little above in May. Once again the most notable characteristic was sunshine with England experiencing sunshine averages of 123%, 155% and 100% for March, April and May respectively. Taking these quite remarkable sunshine levels coming out of winter and then into spring into account, alongside otherwise largely average conditions, I think goes some way to illustrating why bee colonies reportedly came out of winter reasonably well and then built up quite nicely benefitting clearly from the elevated sunshine, which in turn benefitted and advanced spring forage.

So far, so good, but it didn't really last. June was dry but cool; July and August were both cool and unsettled with spells of heavy rain. To compound problems for our bees there were some particularly cold days and especially cold nights in mid to late July, so in some areas productive forage never really got started again following the June gap and the season's early promise rapidly disappeared with many beekeepers reporting on balance a poor season for honey.



The stop-start nature of the summer meant that many colonies found themselves in close confinement, overcrowded rather than flying. Consequently, Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus (CBPV) took hold and affected a relatively high number of colonies. {Photo to left: shiny, black (because hairless) bee due to CBPV} Currently the best response when finding CBPV is to give the bees more space, minimise drifting between colonies and improve bee

nutrition if possible. We now have an advisory factsheet available to download offering the best advice we currently have, this may be downloaded from Beebase here: <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/downloadDocument.cfm?id=1158> . This particularly high incidence of CBPV was at times confused by beekeepers with suspect poisoning, on seeing high numbers of dead adult bees at the hive entrance and on the hive floor. However careful observation of the adult bees symptoms' and the pattern of steady ongoing daily losses usually allows suspect poisoning to be ruled out quite readily.

Autumn rolling into winter has been reasonably settled, September slightly colder than average, October slightly warmer, both months were drier than average. Like it or loathe it, my bees worked the ivy heavily, but as I saw fewer beekeepers over this period I don't know how widespread this was across the South and South East generally. What is clear is that November brought unseasonable averages. Temperatures for November have been significantly above average – some 3 degrees C above in the south. Rainfall, as we well know from the unfortunate news stories, has been high – some 144% of average and I suspect higher again in December - but as I write this in mid-December the averages are not yet available. It is nonetheless already the 6<sup>th</sup> wettest December on record, with correspondingly low sunshine figures.



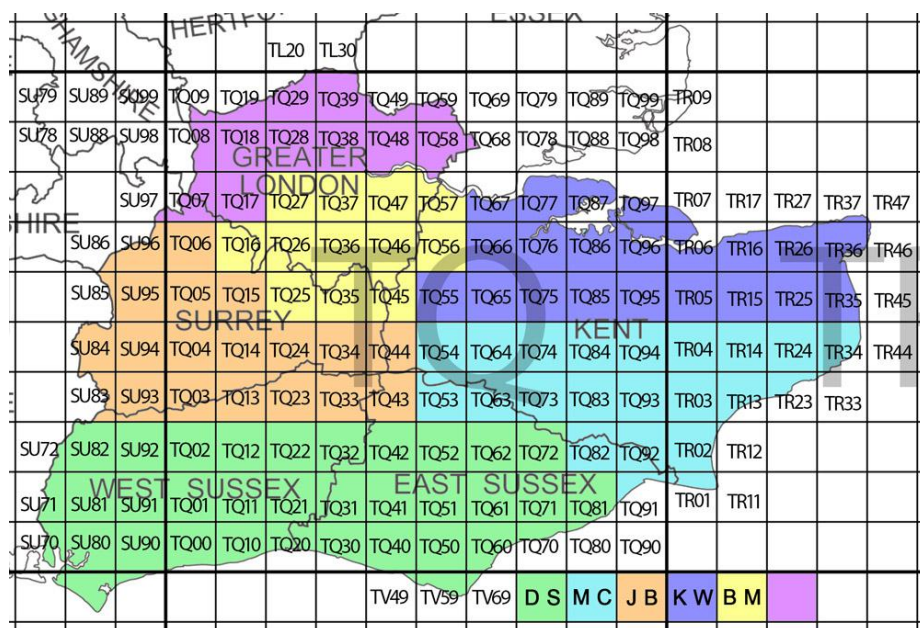
If there is one thing to take away from these autumn figures, it is that colonies will be using up stores far faster than you would normally expect. The high temperatures, being some 3 degrees above the average in November with very few frosty nights (I can only so far recall just 2), means that activity levels within colonies are nowhere near as low as we would perhaps hope it to be. My colonies have remained quite active. I did a quick check on stores in the first week of December and I wouldn't have described them as anything close to clustered. In fact, I recall the outside temperature, recorded by my car, while driving to the out apiary as showing 12 deg C. Forecasters are now predicted that December will be the "hottest" for nearly 70 years as temperatures, a week before Christmas, are predicted to hit 16 deg C, this being some 10 deg C above the seasonal average. So, by the time you read this Newsletter early in the New Year, I would urge and recommend immediate checks on the levels of stores in each and every colony, coupled with a mindful eye on varroa levels.

## **The Team**

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

Brian McCallum	London	07775 – 119478
Jonathan Brookhouse	Surrey	07867 – 351598
Kay Wreford	North Kent	07775 – 119483
Michael Cooper	South Kent	07775 – 119451
Diane Steele	West Sussex, East Sussex	07775 – 119452

Until new SBIs are in post, if you have a foulbrood or exotic pest concern please contact Brian McCallum for the London area and Diane Steele, South Eastern RBI: 07775 – 119452 for East/West Sussex.



Beebase contacts page will be updated as soon as replacement Seasonal Inspectors are in post.

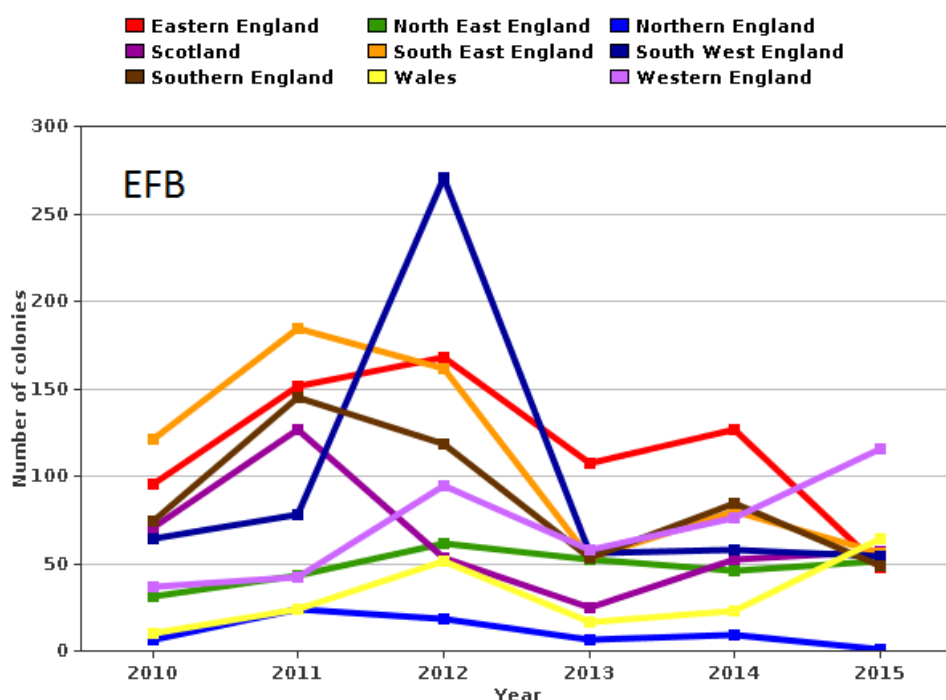
Please remember Seasonal Inspectors only work for the NBU April through to September, so please don't try to contact them "out of season" as they won't be able to assist. Instead "out of season" contact your RBI please. Contact details are at the end of the Newsletter.

Inspector areas can be seen easily on the map above. This also gives a better idea of who to contact by using your Ordnance Survey 10km square map reference for your apiary.

## 2015 Inspection Programme and Disease Levels

Despite the weather being generally favourable, except in the latter stages of the season, inspection numbers were down across the country. The reasons for this were threefold. Firstly, we were operating for 5 months of the season with 9 inspector vacancies nationally; we had one of these vacancies in the SE, now filled by Kay Wreford. Secondly, Exotic Pest Inspections were ramped up significantly in response to the heightened threat of SHB, now established in SW Italy.

These Exotic Pest Surveillance (EPS) inspections take substantially longer to complete than foulbrood inspections and hence fewer inspections can be completed in a day. Thirdly, as mentioned at the start of the newsletter, returning SBI's were faced with a plethora of training and induction demands arising from the move to APHA and this too inevitably robbed inspection time.



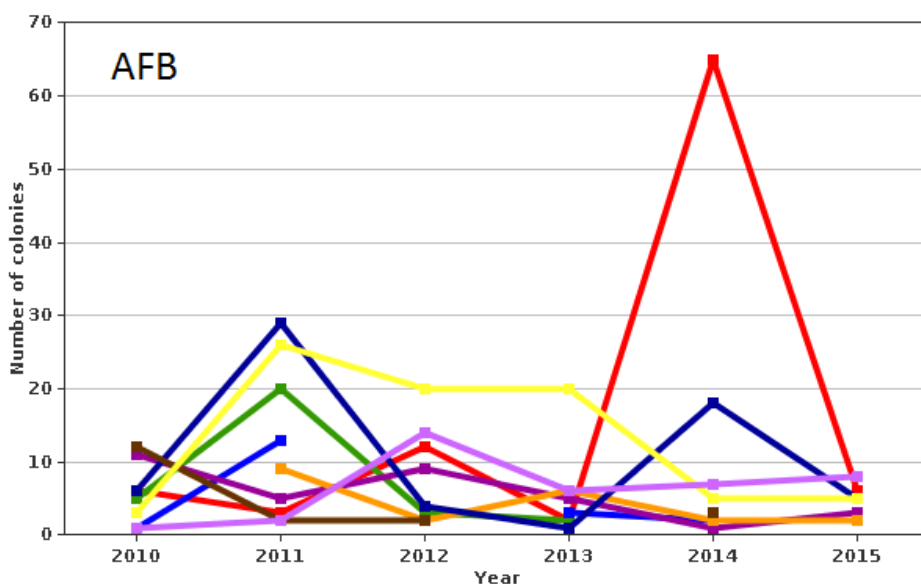
In the SE Region we inspected a total of 2,663 colonies in 522 apiaries. The number of cases of European Foulbrood (EFB) was down slightly, year on year, at 67 colonies. This reflects the national trend as being largely unchanged this year. We still have embedded and persistent EFB in the Tunbridge Wells/Forest Row/East Grinstead neighbouring 10km grid square area. Nearly half the cases of EFB for the whole region were in this area. Sadly, we are still discovering unregistered beekeepers that

we didn't previously know about and consequently diseased colonies are evading our efforts and continually infecting and re-infecting surrounding beekeepers. If you believe that you know of any beekeepers that may be "off radar" then please do let inspectors know, so we can track them down and ensure their colonies are clear of disease. The quicker we can find the remaining sources of disease, the sooner we will see levels in the area drop.

May I please urge heightened

vigilance if you have your bees in these areas. Far too much disease continues to go un-noticed by the beekeeper, despite colonies clearly failing to prosper with patchy brood patterns. This should raise immediate alarm bells when checking colonies. If I can once again remind you; if you have any unexplained winter losses, please avoid the temptation to re-use drawn comb and

■ Eastern England    ■ North East England    ■ Northern England  
■ Scotland    ■ South East England    ■ South West England  
■ Southern England    ■ Wales    ■ Western England



County	Colonies Inspected	EFB Colonies	EFB %
Buckinghamshire	440	2	0.45%
Greater London	316	0	0.00%
Surrey	366	11	3.01%
West Sussex	772	13	1.68%
East Sussex	397	26	6.55%
Kent	372	15	4.03%
<b>SE TOTALS</b>	<b>2663</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>2.52%</b>
National	30993	578	1.86%

equipment that hasn't been sterilised. If you find a colony has died out, but can't immediately clean it up, then please seal it up, so it is bee proof, to avoid robbing and potential disease spread.

American Foulbrood (AFB) remains at a very low level, there being just 2 affected colonies in the whole region again this year. These colonies had just been moved into region, were discovered quickly and the apiary and surrounding

beekeepers have since remained clear. We have back traced these two colonies to their previous apiary location and checked all surrounding beekeepers. This apiary was located next to an open air tea room serving cream teas and it seems likely that the bees may have had access to (imported) honey being served in small "breakfast" sized comfiture jars. It would only take one jar thrown into an open litter bin without the lid being refitted. Either way, it seems it was an isolated incident. Nationally, AFB was down this year to 40 colonies (from 103 last year) representing 0.1% of all colonies inspected. Similarly EFB at 578 colonies nationally represents 1.9% of all colonies inspected. The above table shows the Counties where EFB is higher than the national average.

Imports of bees continue at a high level despite the increased risk presented by Small Hive Beetle, now present in Italy. It would be nice to see beekeepers making greater efforts to become self-

Queen Bees or nucleus colonies imported from the EU into England, Scotland and Wales in 2015					
Country of origin	Number of consignments imported	Batched number of queens	Batched number of nucleus	Batched number of packages	Batched number of Colonies
Austria	4	31	0	3	0
Cyprus	8	138	0	6	0
Czech Republic	7	179	80	176	0
Denmark	34	1483	0	16	0
Germany	27	297	0	3	0
Greece	99	4337	0	11	0
Ireland	1	48	0	1	0
Italy	27	210	0	1862	0
Malta	1	65	0	0	0
Netherlands	4	6	0	0	15
Poland	2	0	30	350	0
Romania	3	320	0	0	1
Slovenia	67	3192	0	13	0
Spain	1	0	115	0	0
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>10306</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>2441</b>	<b>16</b>

sufficient in queens and colonies. If you are starting out, or increasing and buying bees, or queens, check when buying where the bees have come from.

Does a UK nuc mean nothing more than made up in the UK from imported package bees or does it genuinely mean produced in the UK from UK maintained

stocks? If you don't ask these questions, you may not be buying what you think you are buying.

Imports of queens from the EU, as I mentioned at the SE Forum this year, have broken through the 10,000 level for the first time. A truly staggering 10,306 queens were imported this year into the UK from the EU. Packages were also at a particularly high level and clearly suppliers and beekeepers have not been put off buying Italian bees by the Small Hive Beetle threat, judging by the record number of 1862 imported Italian bee packages in 2015. We have very few imports from third countries. In 2015 we had a single import of 520 queens from Argentina.



If you wish to delve deeper into any of these figures, all of this information and much more is readily available on the public pages of Beebase – [www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com).

### **South Eastern Region Associations' Forum**

Back in August we had a very well attended and represented Associations' Forum. This is the first time one has been held for a number of years and now having re-established this event I believe it would be beneficial to repeat it regularly, as it provides an opportunity to strengthen our relationship with local associations, exchange ideas and views and work better together.

This year, inevitably, we looked in particular at exotic pests, we updated what was happening in Region, we re-introduced the idea of Association Bee Health Advisors, canvassing your opinion and Dr Katherine Roberts provided a R&D Roundup detailing the projects Fera Science Ltd and the Bee Inspectorate are currently involved with.

Over the last month or so, we have withdrawn the Bee Health Advisor Scheme (BHA). Looking at BHA's in the context of exotic pest contingency planning (one of the two key objectives of the BHA scheme), it has become clear that we could not use BHA's as we had originally envisaged in the event of an outbreak. Insurance at an association level for members providing bee health advice has been expressed as a concern (local bee health advice being the other BHA key objective), although this does seem to have resolved itself. I know this will be a disappointment to many of

you, having just promoted BHAs to you at this year's forum, however even an RBI's powers of foresight have their limits.

Moving forward we can still offer some structured training to associations, keen to upskill disease recognition for a few of their members. This would still help establish a disease specialism within an Association that members may refer to.

### **Beebase Registration and Association Membership Lists**



An annual plea to register on Beebase and to keep your apiary details up to date. For effective disease (and pest) control we rely on three ways of detecting colonies; voluntary registration on BeeBase, association membership lists, and being told about neighbouring apiaries during visits

Voluntary registration is very important and can be done online at [www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://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**

If you believe that your members would benefit from a County Bee Health Day, please get in contact. We can only offer a limited number of these each year due to other demands on time. Generally speaking, higher priority will be given to Counties that have not hosted one in recent years and where a County is confident that take-up and attendance will be high. RBI's will tend to limit their participation to County level events. SBI's may be available during the season for a limited number of Bee Safaris. Looking at the inspection priorities and other demands for the coming year, it is unlikely that SBI's will have time available for evening talks.

## **Exotic Pests**

### **Asian Hornet**

Awareness of the Asian Hornet (AH) threat appears to be building in the South East, within both the beekeeping community and the public at large. I have had a number of call-outs this year, all thankfully false alarms, but it is at least encouraging that the level of concern is such that the calls are coming in. I would far rather have a few false alarms if that means we detect the hornet early on, rather than a lack of interest leading to the first incursion being missed. In any event, I can usually triage the calls over the phone and filter out obvious native hornets. One such call where I couldn't reassure myself that the caller was describing a native hornet prompted one of this year's visits. Soon after arrival however, I was quickly able to see that this was just a rather delightful nest of *Vespa Crabro*. The photo on the right shows these hornets warming themselves in the early morning sunlight, at the entrance to their nest - a disused woodpecker hole. As



you can see; if the colouration/markings on the abdomen are just like a giant wasp then it is not AH (*Velutina*). Compare this to the inset AH image. You may also have noticed when the tabloid press run stories on AH, the first hornet photo they usually manage to find is *Mandarina*, the Asian Giant Hornet, which doesn't exactly help accurate identification, but we do try to get these corrected, especially when they are online news items.



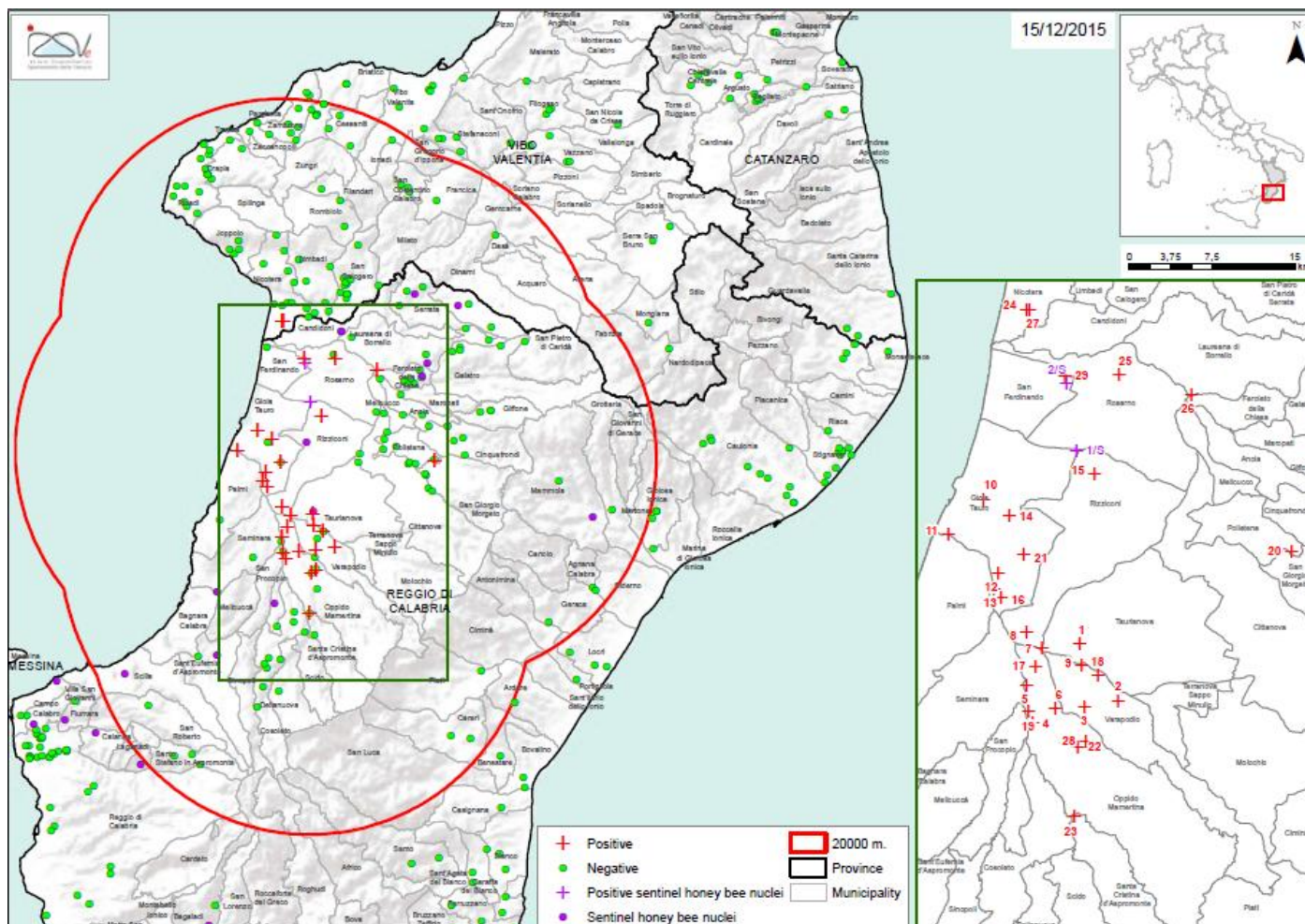
We now have Asian Hornet videos available for viewing on the APHA YouTube channel which may be found here:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLouExecY1KnfANGcLUd2D6KkLRHEn\\_-T](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLouExecY1KnfANGcLUd2D6KkLRHEn_-T)

### **Small Hive Beetle**

Small Hive Beetle (SHB) appears now to be established in the Calabria region of SW Italy having been found once again this season. At the moment with the sea to one side and mountains to the

other three, it would seem that this may be forming something of a natural barrier, but it is of course really too early to say with any certainty. In any event, natural barriers or not, all it will take to spread the beetle is an illegal movement of an infested hive out of the protection area and SHB could be spread a great distance.



The current situation and spread of Small Hive Beetle in Italy may be found here:

<http://www.izsvenezie.com/aethina-tumida-in-italy/>

Additionally, an extremely detailed paper has just been published by the European Food Safety Authority and may be accessed and downloaded from here:

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4328>



## **Finally**

I have had an enjoyable and varied two seasons as RBI for South Eastern Region and so my imminent move to Southern will have its bitter-sweet moment, I will miss this team and the many South Eastern beekeepers I have come to know. Nonetheless, having originated from the Southern team it's a relatively easy transition for me to make and with Diane the successful RBI candidate this is the most cohesive option. The coming season will be full of fresh challenges, but let's just hope that we manage to escape the exotic pests for one further year at least. Our priority will be surveillance and preparedness; we will do our utmost to keep them out.

My very best wishes to Diane, taking over the Region as your new RBI and my thanks to the South Eastern Seasonal Inspectors for their work this season.

I wish you a successful and trouble free season in 2016, but if the worst happens we are here to help and on that note, I have placed Diane Steele's contact details at the foot of this newsletter, for use from 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

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