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The SBA Survey 2008

by

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Most readers will already know that in the late spring of this year the SBA once again conducted a survey of members. This latest survey was a follow-up to the survey conducted in 2006 which produced some interesting results about the pattern of beekeeping in Scotland and the longer term effects of *Varroa* infestation on managed honeybees in Scotland.

The 2006 survey was carried out via Local Area Secretaries, who distributed a pre-determined number of questionnaires to beekeepers known to them in their own area. This year's survey was able to make use of the SBA's membership records. This meant that a randomly selected sample could be approached; one which could preserve the anonymity of all participants who wished to remain anonymous. In addition, the survey was carefully planned to try to ensure that all areas of Scotland were adequately represented, by stratifying the sample across the country. A sample size of 110 was divided amongst the four main SBA areas, using a method chosen to minimise uncertainty in the statistical estimation of some key quantities of interest, and was then subdivided within these areas proportionally to the numbers of SBA members in geographically determined sub-regions of each area (to try to obtain better coverage of the larger areas). A further 9 SBA members were sampled from the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland, giving a total of 119 questionnaires which were posted to the selected participants by the SBA Membership Convenor.

One drawback of such an approach to sampling is that the lack of any personal contact tends to make those approached less willing to respond. This has been our experience this year, when we have had only 50 responses despite having approached more than twice as many people as this (a disappointingly low response compared to the 77% response to the 2006 survey). Such a low response rate can, unfortunately, have as serious an effect in biasing the findings as can choosing the sample on a non-random basis. We are now considering ways of inducing more people to respond in future. Would the chance to win a Thorne's gift voucher prove an attraction to you if you were asked to participate?

When samples are selected randomly from a population, there is of course no guarantee of any one particular person being selected as part of the sample. This explains why participants in the 2006 SBA survey were in general not selected in the 2008 survey.

The results of the 2006 survey gave a useful picture of Scottish beekeeping and experience and have proved to be of interest to a much wider audience than just Scottish beekeepers. The full report has been circulated to all members of CONBA, an article has been published in *Bee Craft* and two academic journal papers submitted. The main purpose of continuing these surveys is to monitor how beekeeping experience in Scotland may change over time, and we expect that this too will be of interest outside Scotland as well as locally. In particular we hope that our results can play a small part in elucidating

the role of some of the risk factors which have been suggested for various forms of colony collapse. Preliminary findings of the 2008 survey will appear in the Scottish Beekeeper by the end of this year, with a fuller analysis available in early 2009.