



Honey found to contain neonicotinoid pesticide residues

One in five samples of UK honey were found to contain neonicotinoid pesticide residues following the introduction of the EU-wide ban on the use of neonicotinoid pesticide seed dressings on flowering crops.

Neonicotinoids were also found in around half of the honey samples taken prior to the ban's introduction. Whilst the percentage of samples that tested positive after the ban was introduced had declined, the persistence of such pesticide residues indicates the need for further research.

The new results are from a national survey conducted by scientists at the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, published in the scientific journal PLOS ONE this week.

The researchers analysed 130 honey samples, provided by bee keepers across Great Britain during 2014 and 2015, to assess the effectiveness of the current EU-wide ban on neonicotinoid pesticide seed dressings on flowering crops, such as oilseed rape – a policy that aims to reduce exposure risk to honeybees and other pollinators.

Lead author Dr Ben Woodcock said, "While the frequency of neonicotinoid contaminated samples fell once the EU-ban was in place, our data suggest that these pesticides remain prevalent in the farming environment."

The concentrations of neonicotinoids in honey were found to have declined between May to September during 2015. The researchers also found a positive association between neonicotinoid concentrations in honey and the amount of oilseed rape grown in the vicinity of the hive.

Dr Woodcock said, "Honey samples collected earlier in the year, when oilseed rape is in flower, were more likely to contain neonicotinoid residues than samples collected in late summer when bees feed on other flowers"

The study suggests that the neonicotinoid residues found in honey after the ban may come from crops that are attractive to bees (particularly oilseed rape) being grown in soils contaminated with residues of these pesticides from previous crops.

UK farmers continue to treat a large proportion of cereal with neonicotinoid seed dressings as this practice is currently exempt from EU restrictions. If treating cereals with neonicotinoids results in soils contamination that lasts from one year to the next this may pose a risk to bees feeding on flowering crops sown into the same fields the following year.

Countryside Stewardship: detail of new simplified offers

Four new offers will open for applications in the New Year to make it easier for farmers and landowners to apply.

Significant improvements have been made to the scheme to make it simpler and easier for farmers and land managers to apply.

The four new offers – Online Arable Offer, Lowland Grazing Offer, Upland Offer and Mixed Farming Offer – will provide tailored options covering the full range of different farm types, so farmers and land managers can deliver environmental benefits no matter where they are or what they farm.

The popular Hedgerows and Boundaries Grant will also receive additional funding from 2018, with farmers and land managers able to apply for a maximum grant of £10,000, up from £5,000 in previous application rounds.



Rare Barbastelle bat found living in London for the first time in 50 years

The Barbastelle bat, which has already disappeared from some countries, was discovered in Hainault Forest Country Park.

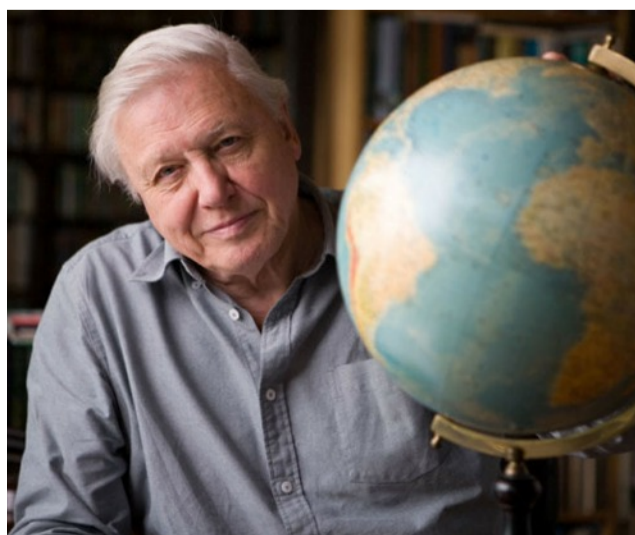
Static bat detectors set-up in the Old Farm Buildings detected the creature which is entirely absent from Scotland and Northern Ireland.

A sonograph sound spectrum recorded evidence of the bat's return to the capital. No verified records of the Barbastelle bat have been noted from the Greater London area since the late 1950s.



Save what we have before 'rewilding' with wolves, says Sir David Attenborough

Sir David Attenborough has spoken out against plans to reintroduce extinct species like wolves to the British landscape, saying there's enough to be done keeping the surviving wildlife alive and well.



"Putting beavers back [in the wild] seems relatively innocuous. But I just feel we've got enough on our plate as it is." said Sir David Attenborough. As a result, schemes to reintroduce now former native species such as wolves, bears, beavers and lynx are either happening or on the cards. But opponents of the movement point out that wild animals can be unpredictable and prone to wreaking havoc and say there may be unintended consequences of putting them back into an environment which has been developing without them for hundreds or thousands of years.

"We have got a hell of a lot of problems even keeping alive what is already surviving here." Sir David told BBC Focus magazine.

But Sir David came out in defence of zoos, after an episode of Horizon asked whether they were still relevant. He said zoos had a hugely important role to play in educating people about wild animals they would never normally see. "Until you've actually seen [an elephant] shifting and creaking as it moves around, you don't understand how big it is."