

'Food prices to rise' after bee deaths

'Free service' lost due to series of soggy summers

JULIA HORTON

FOOD prices could rise after record numbers of honey bees were wiped out across Scotland last year, experts have warned.

Research by the University of Strathclyde found more than a third of managed honey bee colonies north of the Border died last winter – almost double the numbers lost the previous year.

Scientists warned the deaths could spark a hike in the cost of food by jeopardising the key natural "free service" bees provide in pollinating crops, threatening agricultural yields and "therefore food supply".

The Scottish Beekeepers' Association (SBA), which commissioned the study, blamed the latest "disconcerting" losses on last year's washout summer. But study authors added that the use of pesticides was also a factor.

Dr Alison Gray, co-author of the study, said: "This is an extremely high loss rate.

In fact, the loss rate last winter is the highest we have found since these surveys began in 2006 – and is similar to that over the winter of 2009-10, when we estimate that 30.9 per cent of colonies were lost.

"Results from European colleagues conducting similar surveys show the loss rate in Scotland is among the highest in Europe this year, while similarly high losses have been reported from England and Wales."

Warning that the losses should be "of major concern" due to the multi-million-pound benefits the natural behaviour of bees brings to the nation's farming sector, she added: "Honey bees worldwide are having to contend with habitat loss and reduction in variety of forage sources due to pressures of intensifying land use, increasing spread of new and old pests – caused by globalisation of trade in bees and bee products – as well as possible adverse effects of agricultural pesticides.



The Sumatran tiger, above, and western lowland gorilla, right, have seen their survival chances boosted by conservation programmes carried out within British zoos

Picture: PA

Revealed: animals zoos save from extinction

ANGUS HOWARTH

AMUR leopards, a fig-loving bat and endangered monkeys are among the top ten mammals avoiding extinction with the aid of zoos.

The list was announced as ZSL London Zoo welcomed two female mangabey monkeys – one of the rarest primates in the

world, which is in the top ten – from Dublin Zoo to boost the breeding programme for the species.

There are only about 50 wild Amur leopards in the world, but zoos are working towards the first big cat reintroduction with animals that have been bred in



captivity. The list drawn up by the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums to highlight the conservation work of zoos includes the Grevy's zebra, a species found in northern Kenya which was at risk from an anthrax outbreak.

Also in the top ten are the western lowland gorilla, the Sumatran tiger and the Livingstone's fruit bat, one of the largest species of bat.

"For bees in northern Europe, poor weather conditions – combined with these other factors – are certainly making beekeeping a challenge and survival difficult for honey bees generally."

Experts also collected data from volunteers across Scotland on wild honey bees not managed by beekeepers. They found

that 11 out of 20 colonies known to be alive last September have died out.

The study was based on responses from 300 members of the SBA, which represents most of the country's estimated 1,300 beekeepers.

Phil McAnespie, SBA president, said: "It is disconcerting but

understandable because the last two summers were so wet and bees can't get out in those conditions, so colonies get smaller. With the good weather we have had this summer, the bees are beginning to build up again, which should make a huge difference to next year's colonies."

Earlier this year, the Scot-

tish Government announced a £200,000 fund to help commercial bee farmers restock and rebuild colonies devastated by extreme weather conditions.

The beekeepers taking part in the latest survey managed a total of 498 colonies, of which 156 colonies (31.3 per cent) were lost during the winter of 2012-13.

Bike tragedy sentencing was 'unduly lenient'

CATRIONA WEBSTER

THE sentence of a motorist who was convicted of killing a cyclist was "unduly lenient", a court has been told.

Prosecutors are appealing the sentence of Gary McCourt, who was found guilty in April of causing the death of Audrey Fyfe, 75, by driving carelessly.

She died two days after McCourt clipped the back wheel of her bike in Edinburgh in August 2011. McCourt, who was sentenced in April, was banned from driving for five years and ordered to carry out 300 hours of community service by Sheriff James Scott.

At the end of his trial at Edinburgh Sheriff Court, it emerged he was jailed for two years in 1986 for causing another cyclist's death by reckless driving. George Dalgity, 22, was killed as he cycled along the capital's Regent Road on 18 October, 1985.

Cycling groups and Mrs Fyfe's family criticised Sheriff Scott's sentencing and the Crown lodged an appeal on the grounds that it was not tough enough. A hearing took place before three judges at the Court of Criminal Appeal in Edinburgh yesterday.

The trial sheriff had erred in applying sentencing guidelines, resulting in an unduly lenient sentence, Solicitor General Lesley Thomson said. He had been wrong to reach the conclusion that the accident had been the result of "momentary inattention" on the part of McCourt, the court was told.

McCourt admitted he had manoeuvred before looking, and his failure to carry out the most basic principle of driving had directly resulted in the accident, Ms Thomson said.

The sheriff was wrong to take into account the fact that Mrs Fyfe was not wearing a cycle helmet, she said. No evidence had been led about the effectiveness of wearing a helmet and the sheriff had "entirely formed his own view" on the matter. Mrs Fyfe was not at all to blame.

The starting point for sentencing should have been eight months' imprisonment, Ms Thomson said. Lord Menzies, Lady Dorrian and Lord Glennie will give a decision in a written judgment.



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