



Rain and cold weather this summer saw honey yields from hives fall by almost three-quarters, the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) said today. The average crop per hive was down 72% compared to 2011, with just 3.6kg (8lb) of honey produced compared to an annual average of 30lb (13.6kg), the annual honey survey by the BBKA revealed.

The survey of 2,712 beekeepers in England, Northern Ireland and Wales found that 88% said this summer's bad weather caused the fall in honey yields.

The cold, wet conditions forced the BBKA to issue a midsummer warning to feed colonies if necessary to avoid starvation.

But in London, which recorded the worst results with just 2.5kg (5.6lb) of honey harvested on average, beekeeping experts said that in addition to the bad weather there was a lack of food for bees in the city.

Angela Woods, secretary of the London Beekeepers Association, said: "Rather than putting beehives on office roofs, we encourage companies in London who want to help to look at different ways of supporting bees and beekeepers. We need more forage for the bees and better-educated beekeepers."

Elsewhere, the weather was the main problem. Peter Hutton, a beekeeper in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, said: "It has been the most difficult year I have known in my 53 years of beekeeping."

"Bad weather in spring prevented honey bees in many areas from collecting nectar from early-flowering crops such as oilseed rape, and the rain continued in many places throughout June and July, preventing honey bees from foraging on later crops."

The BBKA warned that as well as reducing the honey harvest, the bad weather is likely to have a longer-term impact as it will have hampered the normal process of breeding for the queens, which mate on the wing on fine, still summer days.

As a result they may have mated poorly and be unable to produce sufficient new brood to see colonies through the winter.