

Conservation, Study and Improvement of Dark European Honeybee (*Apis mellifera mellifera*)

The above project which concluded in 2011 consisted of a countrywide morphometry survey of Irish strains of Dark European Honeybee which is the native bee of Ireland, Great Britain and Northern Europe. It is now regarded as being on the brink of extinction over most of this territory and has been hybridised to a lesser or greater extent in the remaining areas due to imports of other European sub species and consequent cross breeding. Honeybee morphometry involves measuring certain parts of the bee's body, e.g. wing venations. Two measurements i.e. Cubital Index and Discoidal Shift are deemed sufficient to decide whether a bee fits into the category prescribed for the Dark European Honeybee.

The survey took five years to complete. Samples of worker bees were collected from beekeepers from all counties of Ireland consisting of about fifty bees per sample. Wings were removed from the bees, mounted on glass slides, scanned into computers and measured electronically. The work was carried out by students who were paid accordingly. The final results have been incorporated into a data base which is now available for reference.

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