



National Bee Unit

Best Practice Guideline No. 1.

The Essence of beekeeping

The best way to keep colonies productive is to pay attention to the two major areas of colony management – colony husbandry and disease recognition and control. Colony losses usually occur when these are not effectively addressed.

Inadequate colony husbandry includes:

- Poor apiary or hive hygiene which allows disease to take a hold and flourish;
- Insufficient nutrition - many beekeepers feed their bees but sometimes not what the bees need.

Solutions:

- Regular comb changing;
- Ensuring that each colony **always** has sufficient carbohydrate (honey or sugar) and protein (pollen) as well as access to suitable water sources;
- Better choice of apiary site with a wide variety of forage available to the bees;
- The best feed is that which is left on the colony;
- Removing less honey from the colony means less feeding will be needed;
- Make sure you source healthy disease free queen bees and honey bees stocks from a reputable source, with a known disease free record, preferably locally. When sourcing queens, choose a reputable supplier with queens that suit your circumstances;
- Concentrate on improving your stock – cull the queens which least suit your requirements, breed from those which most suit them.

Disease recognition and control should include:

- *Varroa* management is an ongoing task which should be practised throughout the active season, not just in the autumn;
- Check for disease each time you examine your colony. Foulbrood disease should be dealt with by the bee inspector but the beekeeper can deal with other diseases;
- Colonies not building up and/or showing signs of dysentery should be checked for *Nosema spp.*;
- More frequently seen diseases such as Chalkbrood or Sacbrood should be addressed.

National Bee Unit

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Solutions:

- Consult the National Bee Unit brochure “Managing Varroa” which gives full details of virtually every effective *Varroa* control technique (www.nationalbeeunit.com);
- Aim to have healthy bees with minimum *Varroa* levels to go into autumn and winter. They will have a higher chance of surviving winter and helping the queen to raise brood in the new year;
- Foulbrood (and other brood diseases) can be identified by reference to the Fera brochure “Foulbrood Disease of Honeybees”;
- If you have concerns about *Nosema*, consult your association microscopist who will help you identify the presence or otherwise of *Nosema*.
- Changing combs can make a big difference in keeping pathogen numbers down on the combs and therefore controlling Chalkbrood and Sacbrood; re-queening from a different strain of bees can often help.

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