

AN OVERVIEW OF MATERIAL PRODUCED BY THE NBU

Advisory Information

Jason Learner and Kate Parker, National Bee Unit (NBU)

One of the key roles of the National Bee Unit (NBU) is the development and dissemination of advisory information to promote honey bee health.

Materials produced cover a wide range of topics, from foul brood recognition and varroa management, to advice about honey bee imports and exotic pest surveillance. We produce these materials in several formats.

While we have focused on making information available online through our BeeBase website (www.nationalbeeunit.com) and via the distribution of hard copies, we also recognise the need to expand and improve the way we deliver educational material. This is especially pertinent today, with a more computer-literate demographic, supported by the influx of new registrations (five years ago fewer than 7% of beekeepers on BeeBase had an e-mail address registered – now there are over 60%).

With this in mind, the NBU has been exploring other ways to aid communication of bee health messages and general advice about good beekeeping practice. The

following paragraphs outline some of the existing sources of information and advice available through the Unit and introduce, in more detail, our newest training option for beekeepers.

Visit BeeBase

BeeBase provides a wealth of information about beekeeping practices. It uses the NBU's valuable dataset to map live foul brood incidence and potential entry points for the exotic pests *Tropilaelaps* and small hive beetle. This mapping feature can also be a useful tool to help inform beekeepers about areas to where they want to move their colonies in order to establish whether the area is free from foul brood disease. If you wish to use this map it can be found at <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/maps/map.cfm>

There are additional pages dedicated to providing advice and answering the most frequently asked questions (FAQs) received at the NBU as well as a photo gallery to assist with educating beekeepers on the recognition of bee pests, diseases and common disorders.

Advisory Leaflets

Many readers may be aware of the advisory leaflets that the NBU produces for beekeepers. These cover foul brood disease, managing varroa, and the exotic pest threats *Tropilaelaps* mites and small hive beetle. All of these publications are available in hard copy as well as online. In addition, on BeeBase you will find a wide selection of fact sheets and best practice guidance notes offering advice on a variety of management practices.

We have recently updated this range of materials, which covers a further selection of topics such as how to sterilise your hives, how to carry out an artificial swarm and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques such as varroa control using organic acids including application of the new Mite Away Quick Strips (MAQS®). We also provide tips on how to prepare honey bee colonies for winter and information regarding comb replacement, queen trapping and its uses and drone brood removal.

We hope that this collective body of information will provide beekeepers with good tools towards maintaining healthy honey bee colonies. To view, download or print out any of these leaflets, go to: <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=167>

The BeeBase website



Your Local Bee Inspector

While carrying out their statutory inspection duties, your Seasonal and Regional Bee Inspectors are on hand to offer one-to-one training and advice. Occasionally they may also carry out apiary safaris in conjunction with local associations where they will inspect a group of apiaries in the area and offer advice and tips on

how to look out for statutory diseases such as foul brood, advice on the control of *Varroa destructor* and general comments on the health of the colony – all free of charge. Similarly, the NBU regularly attends beekeeping functions, providing talks on specialist topics to wider audiences.

The NBU Technical Advisor

With the appointment of the Technical Advisor, Jason Learner, beekeepers are now able to direct their e-mail or phone enquiries should they need advice about practices or husbandry techniques. As part of his role he will disseminate information regularly using a range of outlets including articles in the popular bee press and the e-mail alert system on BeeBase. Advice can be as broad ranging as how to extract honey from hive to jar while adhering to the health, safety and hygiene measures that need to be taken both in the apiary and honey room and how certain diseases affect colony health.

eLearning

Finally, our newest platform. In a project led by our BeeBase Coordinator Kate Parker, we have been developing new eLearning modules using information contained in the existing leaflets as our starting point. These will shortly be introduced to beekeepers. Described below, each module has been written and constructed in accordance with our current practices and the most up-to-date knowledge. They have been produced by a team of highly skilled personnel which includes a specialist eLearning company and the NBU Bee Inspectors. They offer an alternative way of learning, in your own time and at your own pace. The eLearning delivers a 'learning on the move' experience that is increasingly craved in a modern society and the chance to access well-informed, structured training completely free-of-charge.

eLearning gives those beekeepers who are unable to attend practical training events the chance to take responsibility for their own development. All material included in our advisory information is created to supplement the Healthy Bees Plan (HBP), published in 2009, with the aim of keeping pests and diseases to a low risk level and promoting good husbandry practices to all beekeepers.



eLearning materials

The NBU's eLearning modules will cover six main topics.

- **Varroa:** in this module, beekeepers will explore the problems faced by *Apis mellifera* since the introduction of the mite *Varroa destructor*. By learning about the life cycle of the mite, you will discover why it is such a huge problem and what they can do to control it.
- **Foul broods:** the foul brood module outlines beekeeper responsibilities and the legislation implemented in the control of each foul brood. You will learn about the biology of the organisms and how to identify the disease in your colonies, how to prevent the spread and infection of the pathogens and what treatments, if any, are available should a colony become infected with either of the foul broods.
- **Exotic Pests:** once beekeepers have completed this module we hope that it will add to their understanding of the plans to be put in place should an exotic threat arrive into the UK and what impact each pest could have on honey bee colonies. Additionally, through learning about the biology of each exotic pest, beekeepers will discover how to monitor, identify and treat/control each pest, should it arrive into the UK.
- **Other Brood Disorders:** this module will outline how to identify the signs of brood disorders such as chalkbrood, sac brood, bald brood, black queen cell

virus, drone-laying queens and laying workers. Beekeepers will learn how each brood disorder is spread between colonies and what can be done to treat it.

- **Other Pests:** in this module, beekeepers will learn how pests such as rodents, wax moth, woodpeckers, wasps and badgers can cause problems for colonies within the UK. By the end of the module we hope that you will be able to identify signs of each pest in the apiary and know what can be done to manage them.
- **Adult Bee Diseases and Viruses:** this module will help beekeepers identify adult bee diseases such as nosemosis, acarapisosis (tracheal mite), amoeba and honey bee viruses. You will learn what symptoms are attributed to each disease and virus, how each one is diagnosed, the ways in which they are spread between colonies and, if available, what treatments to use.

Like all our material, the aim of these modules is to provide you with a good understanding of the issues that might affect colony health. They will be available via our website and be accessible on most mobile devices.

We will publish further details about the launch of the NBU's eLearning programme in later editions where we will outline how to access the programme once it becomes available online in 2014.

BeeBase Registration

We encourage beekeepers to register on our BeeBase database. Although not compulsory, it is important to sign up to BeeBase so that we can help protect your colonies better. By registering, you will receive pest and disease alerts regarding incidences in your area, enabling you to take extra precautions when inspecting your colonies. If we don't know where apiaries are, then in the event of a foul brood or exotic pest outbreak, we will not know where to send our Bee Inspectors and our eradication and containment efforts will be seriously jeopardised.

You can register yourself on BeeBase via the following link:

<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/public/register.cfm> □