# BeeBase – Why Bother?

## Parallels with COVID-19 control measures

By Paul Aslin, Seasonal Bee Inspector and Colin Pavey, Regional Bee Inspector

# Signing up to BeeBase could not be easier nor more important. Paul Aslin and Colin Pavey explain why.

he national response to COVID-19 has depended largely upon community action and acknowledgment that some personal commitment can be of tremendous benefit to the wider community. BeeBase and COVID vaccination are both disease control measures, both very important to beekeepers and, luckily, both provided free of charge by the Government! But the similarities do not end there. Both benefit the individual as well as the community and the effectiveness of the measures increases as the proportion of the community who participate increases. The measures are voluntary but, in both cases, the vast majority of the community recognise the benefits and are keen to participate, while a small minority are sceptical.

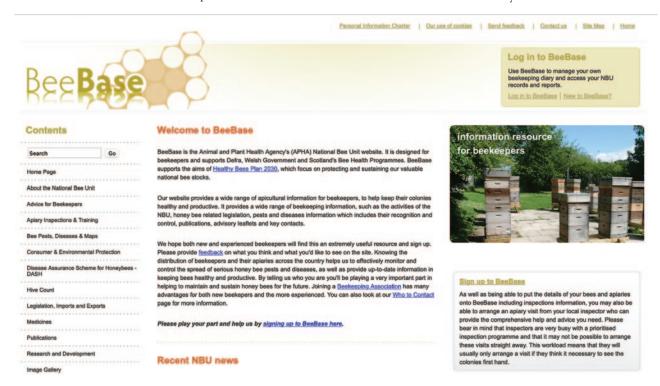
Signing up to BeeBase has a huge impact on disease control in our beekeeping community; registering ownership and location of your apiaries means National Bee Unit (NBU) inspectors can target visits to those apiaries which are closest to known disease. The more beekeepers and apiaries registered, the more effective the NBU inspectorate response can be.

#### BeeBase can 'track and trace'

The NBU BeeBase system also has similarities to the concept of the COVID Track and Trace system. When notifiable disease is confirmed, an email is sent to all beekeepers, for whom we have an email address, with registered apiaries within 3km of the confirmed disease case. Those beekeepers are asked to inspect their colonies and be vigilant for signs of foulbrood. At the same time a priority list of inspections is generated for the local bee inspector, based on distance from the outbreak and known contact points with the apiary. Efforts to trace the disease source and checking all apiaries within bee distance have been highly effective measures in controlling many foulbrood outbreaks. So, the NBU was tracking and tracing well before the recent NHS system came into being!

### Registration is voluntary but brings many benefits

It is not a perfect system. Registration of beekeepers and apiaries is not compulsory. The main representative bodies for beekeepers: the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA), Welsh Beekeepers Association (WBKA) and the Bee Farmers' Association (BFA) all encourage registration on BeeBase. But joining a BKA or being a BFA member does not mean you or your apiary details automatically are put onto BeeBase. Currently, the BBKA/BFA membership lists are not integrated with BeeBase and there are many beekeepers who keep bees outside of these established bodies. If there are unregistered colonies in a disease zone, they can be reservoirs of disease and may be a factor in recurrence.





The NBU needs you to encourage any beekeepers you know to sign up and to keep your own apiary records up-to-date; apiary locations are more important than precise colony numbers. Up-to-date email addresses and phone numbers are necessary for ease of contact and for alerts. If you are contacted by a Bee Inspector it will be for good reason and you should grant access to your colonies for inspection, without delay. Newer, less experienced beekeepers can, as a side benefit, get one-to-one advice from the Inspector and even experienced beekeepers can learn something from having an NBU inspector check their colonies for disease.

#### The two 'faces' of BeeBase

There are two distinct sides to BeeBase, firstly, the secure database, with access for the NBU and for the individual beekeeper to their own record, and secondly, the public access beekeeping husbandry and information side.

The NBU database:

- Provides disease alerts to individual beekeepers close to disease outbreaks.
- Enables beekeepers to be included in the area inspection programme, during which inspectors will also provide specific advice on bee health and husbandry if required.
- Issues husbandry alerts, such as for in-season starvation risks.
- Informs the contingency response in case of exotic pest detection or other emergencies.
- Forms part of the Hive Count which provides a national picture for national strategy and funding decisions.
- Contributes to England's, Wales' and Scotland's Bee Health



An NBU inspection underway, arranged through BeeBase. Photo courtesy of the National Bee Unit.

programmes, which include apiary inspections, surveillance for exotic pests, management of bee diseases, NBU training days, advisory material and support for beekeeper training courses and materials in partnership with stakeholders.

Offers a simple way of providing information, e.g. to meet the new requirement for all beekeepers to report *Varroa*.

The public-facing website provides a wealth of information for beekeepers, including:

- Definitive guidance, advisory leaflets such as Managing Varroa and Common Pests, Diseases and Disorders, best practice guidance notes on subjects as wide-ranging as Apiary and Hive Hygiene to the Sale of Nuclei and Bee Improvement. There are over twenty fact sheets on subjects such as the Care of Colonies after Shook Swarm procedure and Preparing Colonies for Winter.
- A Varroa calculator, to estimate the population of Varroa in the colony.
- Live disease incidence reports and maps, so you can check the disease history in your area.
- Beekeeping and husbandry advice, links and contacts.
- Import, export and legislation information and links.
- Food safety advice and Veterinary Medicines Directorate Honey residue monitoring programme.
- Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme; the process for investigating suspect poisoning incidents and Health and Safety Executive pesticide monitoring.
- Image gallery full of photos, many with a disease theme, which may help you identify something that you have seen in an inspection but are unsure about.
- Beekeeping news items and Annual Season Reports penned by the Regional Bee Inspectors across England and Wales.

To access all this information and to register your apiaries and colony numbers, simply visit www.nationalbeeunit.com.

#### In conclusion

Signing up to BeeBase means becoming personally involved and doing your bit to help the beekeeping community. If you are not already registered, please sign up and add your own contact details and register your apiaries and colony numbers. If you are already registered, please ensure your apiary details are correct and up-to-date. The more beekeepers we can all encourage to register on BeeBase the better the system will work for all of us. And the good news is, unlike the COVID-19 vaccination, there is an unlimited supply of BeeBase registration numbers and you do not have to wait your turn!