

LEGISLATION AND PROCEDURES

Imports and Exports of Honey Bees

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Importing and exporting bees has gone on for hundreds of years and there is information available indicating that England was exporting bees to the United States of America as early as 1622, to the State of Virginia.

These were probably a very crude form of export which involved shipping skep hives of our native *Apis mellifera mellifera* to early settlements, which later resulted in the development of the modern hive and movable frame by Reverend Langstroth in 1852.

With the development of the movable frame and a new style of beekeeping, GM Doolittle developed an ingenious system of rearing queen honey bees, in 1889. It involved selecting the right-aged larvae and grafting them into wax cups which imitated a queen cell cup. This concept is still used today by many commercial queen breeders and it spawned the beginnings of a queen rearing industry. It could be said that as a result of Langstroth and Doolittle's ingenuity, honey and bee imports and exports have helped contribute towards the global economy of apiculture which today is worth around £180 billion (Gallai, 2009).

Imports slowed when, in 1936, sanctions were imposed on Italy by the British government and they ceased during the war. Sanctions were later lifted.

Imports and exports of bees peaked after the phenomenon known as 'Isle of Wight disease', which supposedly left the UK with a shortage of native bees after they were apparently wiped out by tracheal mites. This shortage was later refuted by the scientist, Dr Leslie Bailey, in 1981.

Brother Adam

Brother Adam imported many stocks of Italian bees, *Apis mellifera ligustica*, to make up for the loss of his native colonies and to cross breed them in order to get a more gentle and disease-resistant bee. He devoted his whole life to travelling through Europe, Africa and Asia, in search of desirable traits in different strains of bees and shipped queens back (rather illegally) to the UK for breeding purposes. His efforts resulted in the cross breeding of what is now known as the hybrid Buckfast bee – praised for its excellent gentle behaviour, stillness on the comb, disinclination to swarm and increased honey production.

Brother Adam wrote about the benefits of breeding bees and crossing different strains to increase productivity, prolificacy and gentleness, and he was certainly onto something. If you have ever bought bees outside of the UK from those breeders who use his methods to sustain the hybrid Buckfast bee (other strains of bee are, of

course, available), you will no doubt testify to how incredibly gentle and prolific the first generation of this hybrid are.

Many Buckfast queens are now imported into the UK from queen breeders in continental Europe who use Brother Adam's method of breeding and selection. Indeed, since 2013, the number of consignments of which these types of imports are a part has steadily increased:

- 2013 – 232 consignments
- 2014 – 246 consignments
- 2015 – 290 consignments
- 2016 – 312 consignments

See Table 1 for a breakdown of what these consignment figures represent.

Safe and Responsible Sourcing

If you want to import bees from outside the UK, you will need to comply with the following pieces of legislation:

- The Trade in Animals and Related Products Regulations 2011 ('the TARP regulations') – the controls that apply to

Table 1. Imports of honey bees into the UK from the European Union (EU) and Third Countries

EU			
Year	Queens	Colonies/ Nuclei	Package Bees
2014	9984	450	1402
2015	10691	241	918
2016	14162	17	964
Third Country (outside the EU)			
Year	Queens	Colonies/Nuclei	Package Bees
2014	960	-	-
2015	520	-	-
2016	335	-	-

imports of *Apis mellifera* (honey bees) and *Bombus* spp (bumblebees) from other member states and from countries outside the EU.

- The Bee Diseases and Pests Control (England and Wales) Order 2006 ('the Order') – the enforcement provisions for the post-import controls that apply to all imports of bees from countries outside the EU.
- Commission Regulation (EU) 206/2010 – this lists the countries outside the EU from which bees may be imported, health certification requirements and the post-import controls.
- Commission Decision 2006/855/EC – the health certification requirements and the post-import checks (packaged bees) for bees imported from New Zealand.
- Council Directive 92/65/EEC (commonly known as the 'Balai Directive') – the health certification requirements for bees moving between member states of the EU.

European Union Imports

These pieces of legislation underpin each process and action for importing or exporting bees which, in itself, is a very simple procedure (at least for you, the beekeeper).

The first step is to notify the National Bee Unit (NBU) – listed in the TARP regulations as the relevant UK animal health authority to notify. To do this, beekeepers must fill in a New Import Notification form which can be found on the 'Import and Export' pages of BeeBase (www.nationalbeeunit.com). This should then be sent to the NBU office and reach us with as much notice as possible (at least 24 hours before the consignment is due to enter the UK). You can also log into the beekeeper pages of BeeBase and click the 'Add New Import' link from the left-hand index.

Once this form is submitted, the NBU office has been notified of your intention to import and of the expected arrival date of the consignment, which you have provided.

These records must be updated if the date is expected to change. This can be done via your BeeBase login or by contacting the NBU office.

The beekeeper must notify all imports in advance to the NBU and ensure that consignments are accompanied by a health certificate (photocopies are not acceptable), required under Council Directive 92/65/EEC, which should be obtained by the supplier and issued once the packages have been checked by the relevant veterinary authorities of the exporting country.

The exporter should be registered with the government veterinary authorities if they wish to export bees to another member state. The health certificate will also be sent to the NBU via the TRACES system, but a paper copy is still required. If you are going to collect consignments from other countries in the EU and bring them back personally, this health certificate will be needed at each country or region's check point, as stated in the Balai Directive. This

A large consignment of packaged queens from Argentina



Photos courtesy the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), Crown Copyright

certificate will confirm that the packages are free from the statutory, reportable disease American foul brood (AFB) and the exotic pests small hive beetle and *Tropilaelaps*; without it, there is no guarantee that these checks have been made and your consignments may not be allowed to pass through into the next country.

Once in the UK, the NBU carries out document checks on every consignment from an EU member state and sends out an inspector to carry out physical spot checks on them at the destination apiary. This inspection service is risk based and all registered apiaries have an attributed risk category. If the imported bees are being transported directly to your apiary, they should have a separate certificate and should not be included in a certificate covering bees destined for a number of locations.

If you do not register your import, or the consignment has been sent to the UK without a health certificate, there are provisions in the legislation for the package to be destroyed. It is your responsibility to ensure the consignment meets all the rules. You also run the risk of a package being missed by our inspection service, potentially putting your own bees and those of other local beekeepers at risk

Importing from Outside of the EU

The term 'third country' is used to define any country which is not one of the 28 EU member states. The commodity you wish to import will determine which countries you are allowed to import from, so:

- queen bees may only be imported from selected third countries, mainly those that

list AFB, small hive beetle and *Tropilaelaps* as notifiable pests. We are aware that currently only Argentina, Australia and New Zealand meet these requirements, but a detailed list can be found in the Commission Regulation (EU) 206/2010.

- Package bees from outside of the EU may only be imported from New Zealand and must comply with post-import controls. These controls are aimed at reducing the risk of the introduction and spread of exotic bee pests.

Again, when importing from a third country, the process is easy but has one difference from the EU regime. You need to notify the NBU at least 24 hours before the package is due to arrive in the UK, but in addition to this you must notify one of the three Border Inspection Posts (BIP) through which your consignment will arrive: Manchester, Heathrow or Gatwick airports. The consignment must be taken to the BIP for the bees to be checked and you must obtain a certificate to confirm that the checks have been carried out and the bees comply with the import rules. When you receive a consignment of imported queen honey bees from a third country, you must:

- transfer the queens to new (queen) cages before they are introduced to any local colonies
- send the original (queen) cages, attendant worker bees and other material that accompanied the queen bees from their country of origin to the NBU within five days of receipt for examination for the presence of small hive beetle and *Tropilaelaps* mites. Bee



Package bees supplied from within the European Union

packages from New Zealand are subject to a percentage check (depending on the quantity imported) at the destination apiary and this needs to be discussed and agreed in advance with your local bee inspector.

As stated earlier, failure to acquire a valid health certificate and import through the proper channels will mean that you are committing an offence under the TARP regulations and, as a result, you could have the bees seized and destroyed or, worse still, you could be responsible for infecting colonies with a serious pest or disease.

So, importing bees is neither difficult nor a chore. Should you choose to import bees, make sure you do it responsibly and correctly as the benefits of importing a better quality of bee can be rewarding and enjoyable.

The BeeBase factsheet, *Advice on Obtaining Honey Bees*, provides useful tips for you to consider.

References:

Honey bee legislation:

- Council Directive 92/65/EEC
- Commission Decision 2006/855/EC
- Commission Regulation (EU) 206/2010
- The Bee Diseases and Pests Control (England and Wales) Order 2006
- The Trade in Animals and Related Products Regulations 2011

BIBBA. The Dark Bee *Apis mellifera mellifera* in the United Kingdom. <https://bibba.com/amm-in-uk/>

Gallai, N, et al (2009). Economic valuation of the vulnerability of world agriculture confronted with pollinator decline. *Ecological Economics* **68**(3), 810–821.

Oertel, E, *History of Beekeeping in the United States*. USDA ARS: <https://www.ars.usda.gov/ARSUserFiles/64133000/PDFFiles/1-100/093-Oertel--History%20of%20Beekeeping%20in%20the%20U.S..pdf>

The Monk and the Honey Bee (DVD)