

# 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.*

The 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.

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## BeeBase

**Log in to BeeBase**  
Use BeeBase to manage your own beekeeping diary and access your NBU records and reports.  
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### Welcome to BeeBase

BeeBase is the Animal and Plant Health Agency's (APHA) National Bee Unit website. It is designed for beekeepers and supports Defra, Welsh Government and Scotland's Bee Health Programmes. BeeBase supports the aims of [Healthy Bees Plan 2030](#), which focus on protecting and sustaining our valuable national bee stocks.

Our website provides a wide range of apicultural information for beekeepers, to help keep their colonies healthy and productive. It provides a wide range of beekeeping information, such as the activities of the NBU, honey bee related legislation, pests and diseases information which includes their recognition and control, publications, advisory leaflets and key contacts.

We hope both new and experienced beekeepers will find this an extremely useful resource and sign up. Please provide [feedback](#) on what you think and what you'd like to see on the site. Knowing the distribution of beekeepers and their apiaries across the country helps us to effectively monitor and control the spread of serious honey bee pests and diseases, as well as provide up-to-date information in keeping bees healthy and productive. By telling us who you are you'll be playing a very important part in helping to maintain and sustain honey bees for the future. Joining a [Beekeeping Association](#) has many advantages for both new beekeepers and the more experienced. You can also look at our [Who to Contact](#) page for more information.

*Please play your part and help us by [signing up to BeeBase here](#).*

### Recent NBU news

### Information resource for beekeepers

**Sign up to BeeBase**

As well as being able to put the details of your bees and apiaries onto BeeBase including inspections information, you may also be able to arrange an apiary visit from your local inspector who can provide the comprehensive help and advice you need. Please bear in mind that inspectors are very busy with a prioritised inspection programme and that it may not be possible to arrange these visits straight away. This workload means that they will usually only arrange a visit if they think it necessary to see the colonies first hand.



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## Advisory Leaflets, Training Manuals & Fact Sheets

### Advisory Leaflets:

- [Asian Hornet ID Sheet pdf](#) & [ID Poster pdf](#)
- [Managing Varroa pdf](#) (Last updated January 2020)- Please note this leaflet is only available as a pdf;
- [Small Hive Beetle pdf](#) (Last updated April 2017);
- [Foulbrood Disease of Honey Bees pdf](#) (Last updated April 2017);
- [Tropilaelaps: Parasitic Mites of Honey Bees pdf](#) (Last updated April 2017);
- [Starting Right with Bees pdf](#) (Last updated December 2016) ;
- [Statutory Procedures Advisory Leaflet pdf](#) (Last updated June 2017) - Please note this leaflet is only available as a pdf;
- [Contingency Planning Procedures Leaflet pdf](#) (Last updated November 2017) - Please note this leaflet is only available as a pdf;
- [Common Pests, Diseases and Disorders of the Adult Honey Bee pdf](#) (Last updated June 2017) - Please note this leaflet is only available as a pdf;

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

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](http://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!



An NBU inspection underway, arranged through BeeBase.

Photo courtesy of the National Bee Unit.