



# National Bee Unit

## Best Practice Guideline No. 1.

# The Essence of beekeeping

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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.

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### 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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June 2018

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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](http://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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