

Becoming a better beekeeper- a look at educational opportunities currently on offer

One of the important strands of work incorporated in the HEALTHY BEES PLAN (the government funded project tackling issues of bee sustainability in the UK) is the work of the Husbandry and Education Group -see <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?sectionid=41> .

The BBKA is the main charity responsible for promoting beekeeping education for its members, but the involvement of FERA has led to a welcome increase in resources to promote good beekeeper learning. The BBKA's scheme of practical assessments and written examinations remains but is supplemented by a number of welcome initiatives from both the Education and Husbandry Committee of the BBKA and the Examination Board of the National Diploma in Beekeeping . (This Board has been in existence since 1954, and promotes the highest qualifications in beekeeping –the NDB. <http://www.national-diploma-bees.org.uk>)

The BBKA system is already familiar to many beekeepers. Take a look at the attached revised schedule showing the two strands of approach-the practical assessment and the written examination. The Basic Assessment is the starting point for all candidates, and can be taken after bees have been kept for a full year. After that the route is either a practical one, tackling the General Certificate in Beekeeping Husbandry, which can taken after a minimum of three years of beekeeping experience and then the Advanced Certificate in Beekeeping Husbandry which is a qualification designed for those who aspire to lecture in beekeeping. Assessments are conducted by suitably qualified beekeepers, appointed by the BBKA Examination Board.

Turning to the Module examinations, which are written examinations, each lasting 1 1/2 hours, these are in two groups. The first 3 cover General Management, Products and Forage, and then Pests, Diseases and Poisoning. If you are successful in all of these and also gain one module from the second group, you are awarded an Intermediate Theory Certificate. The second group of Modules cover Biology, Behaviour, Selection and Breeding and Management, Health and History. Completion of all 7 Modules (Module 4 has been discontinued) brings the award of the Advanced Theory Certificate.

Module examinations are normally held on the third Saturday in March each year. We use the Memorial Hall at Winchmore Hill for the candidates from Bucks County. There are plans to introduce a 2nd Examination date in the autumn in 2012.

If you achieve both the General Husbandry Qualification and the Intermediate Theory certificate, you have the status of Qualified Beekeeper. Passing all the Modules and the Advanced Husbandry Certificate brings the title of Master Beekeeper.

There are 2 other practical routes you can follow. You can follow a course leading to the Certificate in Microscopy, perhaps taking advantage of the various workshops offered on this subject at Stoneleigh and other venues. If you are interested in developing your showing and ultimately judging skills, explore the syllabus for the Certificate for Show Judge.

To help you with your learning.....

there are now a number of opportunities underway. "Course in a Case" is a series of packages being produced by the BBKA providing information for the various stages in beekeeping learning. Many local associations have purchased the first two of these at the introductory price. They are designed for beginners and for those beekeepers undertaking study for the Basic Assessment. Two more are promised for this year containing material designed to assist those aiming for Intermediate level and Advanced Module level, so keep an eye on the BBKA website for news of their introduction.

There has been a system of Correspondence Course tuition available for some time to assist those studying Modules and BBKA also intend to develop an interactive learning system called Moodle. Fuller information about all these initiatives may be found in the Members Pages of the new BBKA website. www.bbka.org.uk

Most local associations have a good selection of the books you will require to help you with your study and Northern Bee Books is a good source if you have gaps here. The BBKA publishes a booklist of recommended reading for the Modules which can be found on their website.

NDB Short Courses-a new initiative

In addition, a number of Regional Centres have been established around the country and a range of short courses are being offered by beekeepers holding the NDB qualification. None of these centres are close to Bucks, unfortunately, being located in Kent Devon and Cheshire. These cost around £70 per day and may also involve overnight accommodation as well as travel costs, so around £200 would be your budget. Talk to your local association about whether any help is available towards any of these costs.

You can find full information about what is on offer by looking at their website <http://www.national-diploma-bees.org.uk> The programme of short courses for the period August-December 2011 has just been announced and includes the following:

Month	Dates	Course	Lead Tutor	Venue
Aug	13,14	Successful Wintering	Ivor Davis	Cheshire
	20,21	Successful Wintering	Ivor Davis	Devon
Sept	8,9	Nutrition & Pollen	Robert Smith	Kent
	19,20	Microscopy for Beekeepers	Graham Royle	Devon
Oct	8,9	Adult Bee Disease	Ken Basterfield	Devon
	8,9	Anatomy and Dissection	Graham Royle	Kent
Nov	5,6	Anatomy and Dissection	Graham Royle	Cheshire
	11,12	Adult Bee Disease	Ken Basterfield	Kent
Dec	2,3	Teaching for Beekeeping Tutors	Bridget Beattie	Devon
	4,5	Integrated Pest Management (IPM)	Bridget Beattie	Devon

No prior qualifications are required for admission but competition for places is fierce and more experienced beekeepers may be given priority. The Regional Training Centres are modern, purpose-built facilities and are a welcome update to the portfolio of learning opportunities. High quality equipment, where needed, is available and light refreshments and lunches are provided. Further details can be found on the NDB website, together with an application form.

Examination fees are £15 for the Basic, £20 for each Module and £40 for the General Husbandry. Correspondence Courses cost £45.

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Bucks County Examination Secretary August 2011