



Allotment Beekeeping

To the Allotment Manager.

On behalf of the British Beekeepers Association (the BBKA), thank you for considering the possibility of honey bees being kept on your allotment. As you are probably aware they play a vital part in pollination, not just for our food but also for many other plants. They also produce food and most of us like honey...

The increasing prevalence of diseases in honey bees means they need more and more support from man to help them survive. Feral colonies are usually short-lived because of untreated diseases, so managed colonies of honey bees are vital to us all.

The following is intended to answer questions you may have about bees and 'your' beekeeper(s). More information can be obtained from the BBKA.

Location of Hives:

Ideally, a suitable site would be fairly open, light and airy. To avoid being a nuisance bees can be forced to fly above head height by surrounding the hives with hedging, solid fencing or simple screening such as is used for windbreaks.

Bees are very precise about their flight paths in order to save their energy and do not generally go off course. It might be a good idea for all bees to be kept in one designated area, rather than spread around the site.

How many Hives?:

In a normal situation there is no particular upper limit on the number that can be kept in one place, but on an allotment it is reasonable for this number to be kept at a manageable level.

Each situation will be different and it may make sense for there to be an agreed upper limit, but be aware there are some times during the summer when it is part of normal management techniques to temporarily increase colony numbers.

Swarming:

All honey bees try to swarm, although not every year. This is the only way they can reproduce and your beekeeper should be aware of how to deal with this.

In general, an inspection of each hive is required at least once a week to check for signs of swarming preparations during the 'swarming season', which is roughly April to July in the UK. There are a number of swarm control techniques which a competent beekeeper will be aware of.

If and when swarming does occur, as it sometimes does despite the best efforts of the beekeeper, there is no need for other allotment holders to be concerned.

Despite the 'busy-ness' of the bees, the swarm should settle down in a short time into the normal cluster and can be recaptured if it is safe to do so.

Bees are NOT normally aggressive when they are swarming. By the way, the so-called 'killer bees', (more correctly called Africanised honey bees), DO NOT OCCUR in the UK.

Water:

Bees need water, just like any other living creature. They like 'damp things', such as pond margins, for they can drown in deep water. However, once bees have found a source of water they like, they will continue to use it.

Making them change if this is inconvenient may require co-operation of other allotment holders to temporarily cover water or some other intervention.

Unattended Hives:

Beekeepers should not use allotments as storage space for equipment that does not contain bees. No wax comb should be left exposed in an apiary; it should be stored in a bee-proof way.

Beekeepers should not knowingly put aggressive colonies of bees onto allotments. If you suspect that this is occurring, then the beekeeper should be asked to remedy the situation immediately.

It is a good idea to ensure that all hive equipment has some sort of identification mark placed on it by the beekeeper and that reliable contact information for the beekeeper(s) is available at a known communal point on the allotment, perhaps in a tea-hut or suchlike.

Vandalism:

Please try and ensure that long objects, such as poles and ladders are secured. Our experience is these may be used to push hives over from a safe distance.

Stings:

In general, bees will normally only sting to defend their home if provoked. They will react to their hive being tampered with.

First Aid for stings:

Stings may cause swelling and itching for several days, this is normal. Any sign of dizziness is more serious; consult your GP.

In the case of sudden fainting/collapse (or of stings inside the nose or mouth) call an ambulance. Stings near eyes should receive prompt medical examination. If possible remove finger rings quickly if stung on the hand.

For further information please see BBKA Leaflet L002 "Bee Stings" which has a separate sheet that can be laminated and displayed in a prominent position.

Children who are stung should be observed for an hour or two to make sure there are no adverse effects.

Wasps and bees:

These are often confused, but wasps nest in the ground, in buildings or in the open making "paper" nests. Wasps can be a real nuisance to bees, as they may rob hives of the honey.

Wasps are valuable insect pest predators in spring and summer because they eat pests like aphids.

Insurance:

The BBKA provides third-party insurance cover to all beekeepers who are fully paid-up members. This insurance cover is in respect of their own beekeeping activities. The BBKA issues membership cards and your beekeeping allotment holder should be able to show their card.

Be aware that if they cease to be a BBKA member they may not be insured. Other non BBKA beekeepers may need to prove that they have the required degree of cover from other sources.

Qualifications:

The BBKA operates a well-established national system of assessments and examinations for beekeeping skills at a number of levels.

The starting point is the 'Basic Assessment', which all beekeepers are eligible to take after they have kept bees for one full year or had equivalent experience.

Spraying and pesticides:

Honey bees are very vulnerable to the effects of insecticides.

You should ensure that any applications under your control are made with due consideration for the bees and that other allotment holders are also aware of the correct procedures. This should still be the case even if there are no bees on your allotments.

Fera Officials:

As with all livestock, honey bees are susceptible to diseases, some of which are more serious than others and may be highly infectious. Some of these are 'notifiable' to Fera, under the same general regulations as other livestock diseases, such as foot-and-mouth disease in cattle.

In these instances, the Fera Bee Inspectors have statutory powers to inspect hives, deal with disease and to survey the extent of the spread of disease from other colonies.

They can issue 'standstill' notices to prevent colonies and equipment being moved and 'destruction' notices which may require the affected colonies to be burnt and buried in-situ. Please co-operate as fully as you can, the need may be urgent.

General points:

This leaflet is one of a series intended to help beekeepers and non-beekeepers. If you believe the contents of this leaflet are relevant to you, please seek further advice from an experienced beekeeper or your tutor.

Information is updated regularly – please check with the BBKA web site at: www.bbka.org.uk – for the latest information.

This leaflet supersedes No3 (2009 2nd edition).

Note: The same information is published in our printed leaflet L015 available from the BBKA.

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