



# Leaving Beekeeping

*This leaflet has been written to help those who are disposing of bees and beekeeping equipment. It could be a beekeeper who has decided to give up beekeeping, friends and relatives of a deceased beekeeper or an executor.*

*Honey bees should not be left unattended for any length of time. Between April and August weekly inspections are needed to prevent swarming.*

*Between August and the end of September regular treatments for the parasitic mite *Varroa* are probably required and feeding for the winter may need to be done.*

*At other times an inspection about every 4-6 weeks should be sufficient. If the beekeeper is unable to do this they should be done by a competent beekeeper and the best course of action is to contact the local Beekeeping Association Secretary or Chairman, who should be willing to manage the situation until it is decided what the outcome will be. If you are dealing with a deceased beekeeper's estate it is important you do this as soon as possible and not wait for probate.*

Unattended bee colonies can collapse and die very quickly if heavily infested with *Varroa*, or become a reservoir of disease for some time if they are infected with one of the notifiable diseases known collectively as foul brood.

If you have kept bees for some time and decide to give up beekeeping, you should be aware that you need to do this responsibly, not just 'walk away' and leave the bees to get on with it. Even if you cannot continue beekeeping, you can still help fellow beekeepers and it will be much kinder to the bees.

If you help run a BKA, this leaflet will give you some guidance on following up past members who you know did keep bees – this is in the interests of all your active members. You may like to consider sending this leaflet to lapsed members.

## What will happen to the bees?

If all the colonies have died out, then please make sure that you follow the advice below regarding equipment. Contact the Fera Bee Inspector who will advise you if there has been any notifiable disease in the area. Do not leave empty hives open as they may harbour disease that will be transferred to other colonies, especially if there is honey to be robbed out. Wax moth usually infest combs that have had brood in and in the warmer summer weather can become solid with the cocoons of the greater wax moth quite quickly.

If any bees are still alive and someone else is taking them over please make sure you go through your records with them, including details of any medication they have had. This should help the new owner with planning and managing the bees and the apiary/ies.

If the colonies are at out-apiaries, make sure that the land-owner(s) is/are introduced to the new beekeeper and knows how to contact them.

Remind the new owner to ensure that BDI cover is sufficient for the increased number of hives they are now managing.

If you are registered with BeeBase (see Fera website), please update this information with contact details for the new owner in the Notes section. If the new owner is not registered on Bee-Base suggest that it would be to their benefit to do so.

If you are selling or otherwise transferring the bees to another location, please make sure that the bees are inspected for diseases, ideally by a Fera Bee Inspector, before they are moved and that you keep records of where they have been moved to if possible.

Please make sure that you keep records of your hives and any queens introduced or bees purchased for at least one season after disposal. If a notifiable disease is subsequently identified, the Bee Inspector may need this information.

## What will happen to the equipment?

Old 'hive' equipment can harbour disease for many years if infected. If reused it can transfer disease to the new occupants. To reduce any risk equipment being moved should be thoroughly flame-sterilised (for wooden and metal components) or sterilised with bleach or washing soda (plastic components). Check with Fera and BBKA guidance on the currently advised practices. This should be done on site BEFORE being taken to its new home.

It is quite possible that any unused brood combs have been destroyed by wax moth. These can be burned along with combs that have had brood in any old equipment which is beyond repair. If the bees are alive and there is no sign of foul brood any super combs may be reused, but it would be sensible to disinfect with acetic acid before use. If the new owner wants to be safe, the combs are poor or the bees have died it would be sensible to melt the combs and burn the frames.

Bulk wax (e.g. from a wax extractor) should be wrapped and re-cycled for new foundation via your local BKA or equipment dealer. Solar extractors can be scraped free of wax and thoroughly cleaned and sterilised, inside and out along with the other equipment.

**Note:** If you cannot burn in situ, wrap all material in strong plastic bags – builders waste bags are ideal – and seal before moving to a place where burning is possible.

## Clothing

Used bee-suits, if serviceable, should be boil-washed before being transferred. Used beekeeping gloves are difficult to sterilise and it would be better to burn them.

## Honey Processing Equipment

Old extraction equipment and honey jars etc. should never be disposed of (e.g. via the local refuse collection/recycling system) unless all traces of honey have been removed. EFB and AFB can be transmitted in this way.

Extraction equipment which does not meet current food regulation standards (i.e. is NOT made of food-grade plastic or stainless steel) should not be offered to other beekeepers. If fully cleared of old honey, they could be given to a museum or used as decoration, but cannot be used to process honey offered for sale.

Equipment which meets the current food standards should be fully cleaned before being passed on. For instance, a thorough washing-out with hot washing soda solution will be effective.

## Honey

This may be in jars or in bulk – such as plastic honey buckets or tins. If it is not fermented it should be fit for human consumption. If it is fermented it is not fit for sale but can be used for making mead. It is unwise to feed it to bees in case it has come from colonies that were infected with foul brood. All containers with honey in, should be thoroughly washed before reuse.

## Dealing with 'bee sheds'

You may occasionally be approached for help to deal with the beekeeping store of an ex-beekeeper.

Follow the above advice regarding equipment, but also be aware that any chemicals or compounds should be regarded as potentially hazardous. These may be a variety of 'bee' substances, wood preservatives, garden pesticides/herbicides/fungicides or strong chemicals. Do not handle more than necessary.

If appropriate, wear suitable protective equipment such as gloves and safety glasses. Do not be tempted to use old products; they may not be in the original container and may no longer be appropriate or legal to use. Take them to your Local Authority Civic Amenity site which will have a special facility to deal with them. Do not mix substances and never pour them down the drain.

## Books and records

Local BKAs usually have a library and will probably be glad to receive bee books, especially if they are modern. These can be used by beekeepers or sold to raise funds if they are unsuitable or duplicates.

Some old beekeeping books are inherently valuable in their own right and you should seek advice from a specialist with regard to valuation and/or conservation.

The BBKA is always interested in the archive material of beekeepers. It maintains a library of significant books and records that have national value as part of the history of the craft. Please contact them (details below) for further advice.

---

## 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](http://www.bbka.org.uk) – for the latest information.

This leaflet supersedes: (1st edition December 2011).

Note: The same information is published in our printed leaflet L017 available from the BBKA.

### Disclaimer:

This leaflet is provided for general interest and information only and is not intended to provide specific advice for any individual. BBKA make no representations or warranties about the accuracy or suitability for any purpose of the information contained in this document. No liability is accepted for any injury or loss arising out of the contents or information published within this leaflet.