

West Dorset Beekeepers' Association Apiary Management Policy

1.00 Apiary aims

The WDBKA apiary is an educational teaching apiary for:

- Beginners on the WDBKA course to gain bee handling and practical experience under the guidance of more experienced members
- More experienced beekeepers to look at topics of interest
- Trialling techniques or equipment of interest to members under controlled conditions
- Aiming to practise the highest standards of bee husbandry and hygiene
- Providing bees for Melplash Show – for live demonstrations / observation hives and honey to sell at the show to raise awareness about bees and advertise WDBKA to the wider public

2.00 Apiary management

The Apiary Management Committee (AMC) will manage the apiary. The Committee will consist of a minimum of five WDBKA members who are experienced beekeepers. Their role is to:

- Set strategy for the apiary each season and make decisions about colonies
- Lead all sessions with at least one other helper who should be an experienced beekeeper
- Record notes correctly
- Ensure best practice at all times
- Supervise the hygiene and health of members attending apiary sessions. AMC members will be loaned a WDBKA suit for the season solely for use at the apiary.
- Ensure all attendees have read the apiary Risk Assessment, know where the first aid equipment is kept and what to do if they are stung
- Ensure there is a full handover to the AMC member leading the next visit
- Make a commitment for one season at the apiary
- Write regular apiary updates for the Association newsletter

All members are asked to volunteer to help at the apiary.

3.00 Number of colonies

Plan to maintain a core number of four colonies which means the numbers may fluctuate throughout the season to allow for Queen failure and winter losses. However, this needs to be balanced against the work involved in managing larger numbers. The aim is to have four strong, Queen-right colonies in the spring; two National colonies and two in 14x12 hives.

In summer the aim is to have no more than eight colonies, allowing each hive to be split once. If the apiary is becoming too congested then once a colony has been artificially swarmed, the Queen cells and brood may be put into a nuc box and taken off site to a member's apiary until the Queen has hatched and mated successfully and the colony is ready to be transferred into a hive. The colony can be returned to the apiary and put into a hive, whilst the old Queen and flying bees may be sold to a WDBKA member if agreed by the AMC. Preference to be given to members who have regularly helped at the apiary. Prices to be set by the AMC.

4.00 Numbering of colonies

Colonies are to be numbered sequentially – 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. When a colony is split, the new colony's notes should start "Hive 5 (for example) was formed by splitting Hive 1."

5.00 Apiary Notes

It is crucial that the leader of each session ensures proper notes are kept in the agreed format. Only notes for the current season need to be in the file. Old notes from past seasons can be archived and kept away from the apiary.

6.00 Apiary health, hygiene and equipment

- An annual Risk Assessment should be carried out and copies kept at the apiary. Attendees need to sign that they have read this at each session.
- Ensure that medical supplies are kept up to date, the first aid box is clearly visible and all attendees know where it is kept and what to do if they are stung.
- AMC members should carry out an inspection of equipment and resources at the start and end of each season to see what needs maintenance or replacement.
- Varroa control methods are to be decided on an annual basis following NBU recommendations.

The leader of each session should check at the start that all attendees are wearing clean suits, boots and gloves. Anyone handling bees also needs to wear over gloves – a supply will be kept at the apiary. Hive tools and gloves need to be kept clean during a session then washed and dried at the end and tools returned to the correct container.

7.00 Frequency of visits

Following the five visits by Course students there should be weekly visits in spring, less often in late summer and only occasionally in winter. Sessions can alternate between 'business' visits by a leader with a couple of helpers to check the bees and carry out maintenance and 'members' visits for educational purposes. Visit days and times can be varied to include weekdays and evenings (in high summer) so that as many members can attend as possible.

8.00 Publicising the apiary

Attending apiary sessions should be an enjoyable learning experience for AMC members, experienced, novice and would-be beekeepers. If best practice is demonstrated at apiary sessions this should help to raise husbandry standards among all those who attend sessions. The emphasis should be on helping both new and experienced beekeepers to improve. Some possible ways to publicise the apiary are:

- Apiary news as a regular feature in the WDBKA newsletter
- Updates on the website and Facebook page
- Events linked to the apiary such as a frame building evening, preparing honey for showing session or bee safari
- Special sessions such as Queen marking
- Giving members the opportunity to trial processes such as Queen rearing

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