



Honey Bees & Beekeeping in Scotland – An Introduction

This document aims to provide people with outline information on Honeybees and Beekeeping in Scotland.

Honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) are one species of a huge number of species of bees. There are, in addition, in the UK, 24 species of bumble bee and about 240 species of solitary bee. Bees gather nectar and pollen from the flowering plants to use as food and are important plant pollinators (plants need pollinating in order to form fruits and seeds).

There are about 2000 beekeepers in Scotland, most of whom are hobby beekeepers with typically one to a dozen hives. There are also about 30 Bee Farmers, i.e. beekeepers operating on a commercial or semi-commercial basis with up to several hundred hives.

The Scottish Beekeepers' Association (SBA) is the main charity in Scotland for honeybees and hobby beekeepers, but does also have bee farmers as members. The bee farmers also have their own UK based Bee Farmers Association. Hobbyists in England are catered for by the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) and in Wales and Northern Ireland by the Welsh Beekeepers Association and Ulster Beekeeping Association respectively.

The SBA is an Incorporated Scottish Charity (SCIO 09345), run by volunteer trustees. It does not have a permanent headquarters but operates from the homes of the volunteer trustees and is registered at the home of the current Secretary. Its main aim is to support honeybees and beekeepers in Scotland.

Governmentally, honeybees are devolved, i.e. the Scottish Government (SG) is responsible for honeybees and honeybee health matters in Scotland. The SG runs a voluntary registration scheme called Beebase as an aid to providing advice to beekeepers and as a means of keeping track of bee disease outbreaks should they occur (there are some statutory notifiable bee diseases). It is estimated that about 80% of the beekeepers in Scotland have registered with Beebase.

The SBA publishes a monthly magazine called the Scottish Beekeeper (SB), which is read by about 70% of the beekeepers in Scotland. The SBA also provides other benefits for its members including 3rd party insurance. The SBA also has a unique and comprehensive library, The Moir Library, located in the Fountainbridge library in Edinburgh.

There are about 46 local beekeeping associations in Scotland, most of which are affiliated to the SBA as Affiliated Beekeeping Associations (ABA). Those wishing to start beekeeping should join their local ABA, many of which run Beginner classes –see elsewhere on the web-site below, for the ABA Map and contact point.

After having attended a beginner's class, you would have sufficient knowledge to look after a colony of bees. Your local association would advise on how to get bees and beekeeping equipment. You should set a budget of about £700 for your first year's beekeeping. It is best to start with a small colony (a small colony on 5 frames is called a Nucleus (confusingly the word Nucleus is often also used to describe a half size hive capable of holding 5 or 6 frames) – a full size hive would have 11 frames of bees).

The ABA's run winter talks and the SBA runs events, workshops, attends shows and runs an extensive education and examination system.

Most of the hobby beekeepers in Scotland are members of an ABA and or the SBA and in addition there are many members who do not keep bees but simply have an interest or sympathy towards them. See membership area of the web-site. Members receive a monthly magazine and third party insurance cover.

The SBA web-site aims to provide information about all aspects of beekeeping in Scotland.

www.scottishbeekeepers.org.uk See in particular the Advice and Learn sections (contains beekeeping video clips at BeeBasics).

Honeybees are the only true eusocial bees in the uk (social insects, caring for their young all the way through from egg laying to fully developed adult and capable of keeping a colony going on a continual as opposed to only on an annual basis like the semi-eusocial bumble bees). They live in large social groups called colonies. The honeybee colony is sometimes described as a superorganism, because it has much greater abilities than the individual bee.

There are 3 different types of bee in the colony, the queen, the only egg laying female in the colony, the workers, sterile females that form largest part of the colony population and the drones (several hundred), males, developed from unfertilised egg, whose sole function is to mate in flight with virgin queens.

Honeybees are the only bee species that has evolved the ability of bringing a large population through the winter (up to 8000), by storing honey to keep them alive when there are no flowers. This enables them to make a supercharged start in the Spring when the flowers appear again. The honeybee queen can lay over 1000 eggs per day and the colony can quickly build up to 40 or 50 thousand.

Honeybees are important and effective pollinators due to the large population sizes.

Honeybee colonies are kept in bee hives, constructed of either wood (often western red cedar or pine) or increasingly of high density polystyrene. The bee hive comprises a large brood box containing typically, 11 removable frames and smaller supers or honey boxes (again with removable frames), sitting on top of the brood box in which the bees store honey. The bees build honeycomb in the frames. The honeycomb is composed of hexagonal wax cells, made by the bees from their wax glands and is used to store honey (and pollen) and as cells for raising the young larvae into young bees. Honeybees produce large amounts of honey to fuel the colony and store surplus honey for winter. The beekeeper harvests some of the surplus.

Scottish Beekeepers Association (SBA) – Supporting Scotland's Bees & Beekeepers

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