

# Taking the Basic Assessment – Part 2

This is the second article about taking the Basic Assessment and will primarily deal with honey bee health. At one time we used to talk about diseases but from the Basic Assessment point of view the important ability is to be able to recognise a healthy colony and be aware when things are not quite as they should be. In depth understanding of adult and brood diseases comes later (in the modular examinations and in the General Husbandry Assessment). I hope by now you have obtained a copy of the syllabus. This is available at ([http://www.bbka.org.uk/freefiles/syllabuses/basic\\_all.pdf](http://www.bbka.org.uk/freefiles/syllabuses/basic_all.pdf)) as this does help you to understand the scope of the Basic Assessment. You should also seek out an experienced beekeeping colleague who can help you by watching you as you inspect your colony. Soon the weather will be warm enough to have a look at the colony and you can start to get some practice.

Passing the Basic Assessment will give you a feeling of competence that can be recognised by beekeepers and members of the public. You can rightly claim that you are qualified to keep bees. This will help to raise your status, the status of your association and ultimately the status of the BBKA when it is in discussion with the government to ensure adequate support for beekeeping in this country.

Good luck and I hope these notes help and encourage you to take the Basic Assessment this year.

## Passing the Basic – Part 2 Honey Bee Health

### ■ Varroa

■ This is the main problem for all beekeepers and is present in all colonies. Therefore, having bees, you will be very familiar with this and will not need much revision.

■ You need to know how to detect varroa

■ Use a varroa floor and look for dead mites on the screen. The number of dead mites can be related to the number of mites in the colony.

■ Uncap sealed drone brood.

The number of drone larvae that have a varroa mite on them is an indication of the number of mites in the colony

■ You need to know how many mites that the colony can tolerate before it is damaged

■ The National Bee Unit have a very useful calculator on their web site

(<http://beebase.csl.gov.uk/public/BeeDiseases/varroaCalculator.cfm>) that will tell when treatment is necessary based on the number of mites found on the floor or found from drone brood uncapping

■ You need to know how to control varroa in the colony

■ Use of Apistan or Bavaryl (pyrethroids) is fine where there is no evidence of pyrethroid resistant (PR) varroa. Insert strips for the six week period as instructed

■ In areas of PR varroa use Apiguard or a similar thymol product and practice Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

■ You need to know a bit about IPM. The main elements are:

■ Drone brood removal  
■ Open mesh floors  
■ Dusting with icing sugar

■ Recognise healthy sealed brood

■ Sealed brood has biscuit coloured cappings

■ There should be no perforated cappings

■ The pattern should be uniform (not patchy)

■ Recognise healthy open brood

■ Larvae are creamy white

■ They should be curled in the cells

■ Larvae of the same age (size) should be together

■ Variations in the size of larvae should be uniform on the comb (a progression from eggs to small larvae to large larvae to sealed brood)

■ Describe unhealthy brood

■ AFB and EFB (and to a certain extent varroa) result in patchy brood (many unfilled cells in an area of sealed brood)

■ Some cappings may be perforated (holes in the centre)

■ Chalk brood is characterised by 'dummies' in the cells (usually white hard chalk like deposits)

■ Chalk brood 'dummies' are easily removed from the cells and can be seen on the floor of the hive

■ Describe unhealthy bees  
Main adult diseases are

■ Nosema (microsporidian) lives in the gut of the bee. It affects digestion and shortens the life of the bee. The pathogen can be seen under a microscope (x400). It can induce dysentery and result in stained frames and hive

components

■ Acarine (mite) lives in the trachea (breathing tubes) of the bee. It can transmit viruses to the bee and also weaken the bee. The effect is a weakened colony and shorter lived bees. The mite can not easily be seen but under a microscope (x40) it is possible to see damage to the trachea caused by the mite.

■ What to do if a notifiable disease is suspected

■ Notifiable diseases are: EFB, AFB, Small Hive Beetle and *Tropilaelaps* (another mite). The last two have not been found in the UK yet.

■ If suspected contact an experienced beekeeper for second opinion

■ If still suspected contact local Authorised Bee Inspector

■ Then do as he tells you. It could be treatment or destruction in the worst case.

■ Poisoning

■ Recognised by 100s of dead and dying bees outside hive entrance

■ Collect three samples of about 200-300 and store in freezer.

■ Contact local spray liaison officer

■ Do as instructed - send off one sample to CSL with as many details as possible about the incident and keep the other two for backup in case of a legal outcome.

■ How to prevent wax moth

■ Do not leave wax around to attract moths

■ Frames should be prepared before they are stored. Either

■ Spray with Certan before putting away

■ Deep frozen for 24 hours and then stored away from any potential source of wax moth larvae

■ Protect from winter pests

■ Use mouse guards to stop mice entering the hive in winter

■ Protect from woodpeckers (chicken wire about hive or plastic strips over hive sides) so they cannot peck holes in side of hive.

That is all there is to it! It sounds detailed and tedious but if you are keeping bees much of this is just common sense or common knowledge. Remember the assessor is not there to trip you up but will help you to get the right answer. The assessor wants you to pass!!

*Ivor Davis*

## Approaching the BBKA Exams

At the ADM, the report from the Examination Board prompted questions that led to a lively discussion. Observations regarding the examination system will be published in the next BBKA News. Unfortunately they will not reach candidates before the next set of written Modules, scheduled for March.

To score the highest marks you are able to, it is critical to get your answers down on paper within the time available. You can improve your ability to do this by practising against the clock on past papers: and then checking the accuracy of your answers by referring to the recommended books in the Book List.

Joining the Correspondence Course, or setting up a local study group, may increase the effectiveness of your practising in this way. Past papers and the Book List can be downloaded from the BBKA web site and are also available by post from Val Francis, the BBKA Examinations Secretary. Remember, all Modules excepting Module 4 are set at a 'senior' standard.

Board Members wish all the candidates useful study and success during the examinations. Good luck.

*Margaret Thomas,  
Assistant Moderator*

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