

Beginner Classes - Outline Content - Edinburgh & Midlothian Beekeepers' Association (EMBA)

Aims of the Course

To provide students with the knowledge needed to successfully look after bees. The aim is to ensure that they feed their bees adequately, prevent the bees from swarming (important in urban environments), prevent the bees becoming a nuisance to neighbours & recognise and deal with pests and diseases.

Methods

- Classroom lectures and hands-on manipulation using simulation bee hives.
- Practical demonstration and handling practice in live apiaries.
- A 60 page A4 illustrated booklet is provided for each beginner and a short A5 "how-to" PDF is made available on the EMBA web site as an apiary aide-memoire.

Course Content

EMBA usually start their Beginners **early part of April** with 8 theory nights (**Wed 7-00 to 9-00 PM**) and as soon as possible thereafter, but usually the last week in April/1st week in May, we add a **Saturday visit to an apiary (approx. mid-day to 2pm)**.

The theory nights are currently held at the Pyramids Complex in Bathgate. The practical courses are held at apiaries in the Edinburgh & West Lothian area.

We use 4 apiary's to keep numbers down below 10 (we normally have a class size limit of about 40) and circulate the 4 groups round the different apiaries to expose them to the "variation in beekeeping methods". The theory night after an apiary visit is used to discuss what they saw, answer questions etc. Beginners are expected to make observations during the visit.

We find that getting students involved practically as quickly as possible, pays dividends as far as absorbing knowledge goes.

To this end we also use a **virtual hive** straight away (standard hive with 11 photo brood frames and a super with 10 drawn honey frames). We make them do hive manipulations with this in the classroom and encourage them to say what they see. This "**doing stuff**" is very productive as the old Chinese proverb says "tell me & I remember a little, show me & I remember some more, make me do it & I remember everything".

We also use various videos/powerpoint slides as "break" material).

Games (typically break into groups and name the bee parts on a picture sheet) and honey tasting which also always go down well.

Swarm control is the most confusing concept to get across - we teach Pagden, in spite of needing 2 floors, roofs etc, it is the most straightforward and easy to remember. Again making the beginners practice with two virtual hive sets in the classroom helps them to understand the principle and practice.

There's no perfect teaching method, because every student has different learning methods/needs. However tutors check that everyone is following what's going on; sometimes a student may have a block on one particular aspect.

Index of Theory Subjects

1. The Honeybee - (Simple Biology)
2. Honeybee Management
3. Risk Assessment & Honeybees
4. Honeybee Products
5. Swarm Prevention
6. Taking & Hiving a Swarm
7. Bee Hives -Function & Types
8. Bee Diseases
9. Varroa Monitoring
10. Source Material & Organisations
11. Follow-on Beekeeping Education - Practical tests & Theory Modules

Index of Practical Classes

1. Lighting the Smoker, Opening the Hive and Checking the Brood frames
2. FEDSS -The 5 vital checks -Food, Eggs (laying queen), Disease, Space, Swarming
3. Checking for Queen cells and if necessary creating an Artificial Swarm
4. Checking the progress of the "swarmed" colony.
5. Discussion of equipment
- 6.

On-going

After Beginners have had bees for a year or two EMBA runs Basic Beemaster (BB) mentoring classes to prepare Beginners for their Scottish Beekeepers' Association (SBA) BB assessment, a 1 hour combined practical/oral examination.

One of our committee members is tasked with keeping track of the beginners.

We also run a "Nucleus (Nuc) provisioning" list - (anyone attending the Beginners course is entitled to purchase a Nuc from the EMBA apiary for £160 (until the Nucs run out). A Nuc is a starter pack of bees containing 5 combs of bees with a queen and can be inserted into a hive and fed in order to build up a full size colony before winter.

Technical Data Sheet 18 from the SBA web site www.scottishbeekeepers.org.uk is referenced for obtaining Nucs.

We try to "hand-hold" a bit via e-mail round-robins in the beginners first season - e.g." It's time to feed guys, have you checked varroa levels -see "Managing Varroa" on Beebase, Put on a block of fondant" -that sort of thing. However it is even better if 2 beginners can co-operate or get a local established beekeeper as a mentor in the early days.

See the EMBA web site www.edinburghbeekeepers.org.uk for up to date details of courses and enquire at the beginning of the year about availability and book with the person stated on the web-site. The current cost of the course is £70 (includes 1 yrs. membership of EMBA) and allowance should be made for a bee-suit & gloves which will add about £80.

Prior to attending the course those interested are welcome to attend the EMBA winter talks (2nd Monday evening of the month) which usually start around September or October.