

Guide for mentoring

DON'T PANIC!

Congratulations on becoming a mentor, your role is vital within our group and it is important that you do not feel uncomfortable or even intimidated by the role. You should feel just as at ease with mentoring as when you inspect your own bees. Think of it as a routine inspection with friendly conversation, if you feel at ease things will go well. Also you are a guide so don't be afraid to keep your hands in your pockets at times unless a more practical demonstration of what is required, is needed. You are not intended as an unpaid worker your mentoree should take responsibility for his or her HOBBY and not treat you as a limitless resource.

You may not be an expert. You will have attained some years of experience, but don't worry about not being as experienced as some of our senior members. You have the confidence and ability to work your own bees, this experience is what your mentoree will lack. Help him/her through initial stages and fears, and you will have succeeded.

Contact

Agree on means of contact email, phone but remember mobile phone conversations can be expensive. You should not be expected to bear the cost of lengthy conversations to a mobile.

Liability

There should be a clear understanding between you at the outset that no liability is accepted by you for any issues that can arise. The service you offer is given freely and in good faith.

Safety

Ensure your mentoree has the relevant equipment suit, gloves, boots etc. and that they are fit for purpose and secured correctly. Common mistakes are made with the zip/ Velcro joining the veil to the suit. It's no fun sharing your veil with half a dozen angry bees. Also casually ask if your mentoree has been stung (by a honey bee) before, there are some reasons for concern if the answer is no, please ensure you are not away from civilisation when your mentoree experiences a sting for the first time.

Equipment

Don't be let down by equipment. Be ready to advise on basic hive assembly and how to build frames, if the hive/frames are assembled don't assume they are correct. Remember bee space point out top/bottom spacing ensure the frames are correctly assembled and correctly pinned also that the foundation is the correct way up. If the equipment is second hand remember blowtorching and ensure it is fit for purpose. Never use old comb and advise against old frames unless steaming or boiling has been involved. Varroa mesh floors should be encouraged. Advise on a transparent crown boards to satisfy the need to look in frequently without disturbing the bees. Don't leave porter escapes on the crown board as they will get propolised and be no use when they are needed. Ensure there is equipment for the future and that it is clean and ready. Remember it is better to be looking at it than looking for it.

The apiary

You may not have been involved with the siting of the bees but be ready to do so, think of the effect on other people and if there any animals too close. The position of the sun and any shelter from wind etc is it a safe place free of trip hazards or dangerous drops nearby. Can you freely access the hive from all sides and is there space to place hive components as you remove them. Don't feel compelled to work somewhere that you feel is inappropriate. Is water freely available for bees or would it need to be provided?

Inspections

Always be ready with smoke and hive tools, prepare well, in fact better than you normally would because it will be a long walk back to your shed. Consult before you do, never assume that because you do something yourself, your mentoree would do it. They may have some views of their own, so ask if they would like the queen marked or if you can cull some drone brood. You would never mark a virgin queen but advise why when inspecting. Point out stores healthy brood (caps like domed digestive biscuits) eggs, grubs and any problems: mite, wax moth, chalk brood etc. Monitoring for varroa is important don't forget to advise on oiling the inspection board to keep the mites in place. You should advise on the importance of varroa treatment and why you choose the treatment you do. Remember there are three basic types of mite control: **chemical** (thymol, oxalic acid, formic acid etc) , **mechanical** (icing sugar, mesh floors) **biological** (drone cull).

Feeding

Remember the importance of good stores but advise when to feed and when not to. Never feed when honey that is to be harvested for sale is being stored. Remember winter feed needs a low water content and fondant is a good choice for this. Strong syrup 1:1 can be used but a damp bag of sugar is always good in an emergency. Summer feeding with syrup 2:1 is good if the forage has dried up or the weather has closed. Remember overwintering successfully is not the hardest time, the spring can be the most difficult. A poor or stop start spring can be treacherous as reserves can be all used up by developing bees and food can be difficult to get. Isolation starvation is the most frustrating, when food is available but the bees can't break cluster to get to it in cold weather.

Harvesting

Always remember that natural honey is best for the hive and keeping a balance between what you take and what you leave is vital. So curb any over enthusiasm. Clearing boards are useful but remember to have the porter escape the correct way around, as it is no fun to return to a super full of angry bees that have been comfort eating.

Notes

Advise on keeping notes and try and confirm any key points you have made in writing. Just drop an email while things are fresh on your mind. This will remove any possibility of misunderstanding and give you a record for your next meeting.