

BOGLANDS BEES • NATURAL WARRÉ BEEKEEPING

Bee Natural

Course Companion

Mike Davies • Boglands Bees

Daingean, Co. Offaly • Day Courses 2027

BOG HOUSE MEDIA

Welcome

[MIKE TO PERSONALISE]

You're very welcome to Boglands.

Today is about bees, not paperwork. We'll keep the talks short and spend as much time as we can at the hives. Ask anything, as often as you like. There are no silly questions in beekeeping, only stung ones.

We keep native Irish black bees in Warré hives: tall stacks of small boxes where the bees build their own comb and we open the hive as little as we can. We don't use any treatments, and we leave the bees their honey. They stay healthy because they're left in peace.

This booklet is yours to keep. Bring it to the apiary, write in it, get honey on it. The full book, *Bee Natural*, is free to read online. Scan the code on the back cover.

Mike Davies

Boglands Bees, Daingean, Co. Offaly



The old stone building at Boglands, home to a wild colony.

In this booklet

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Your course day

10:00 to 16:00 at the Boglands apiary. No more than eight people, so everyone gets hands-on time. Lunch, tools and protective gear are included.

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 10:00 | Welcome, tea & safety talk. Introductions, allergies, how the day works. |
| 10:30 | The Warré way. The hive, the bees and the thinking behind natural beekeeping. |
| 11:15 | Suit up & into the apiary. Reading the entrance, hefting, a first look inside. |
| 12:30 | The bee year in Ireland. Forage, swarms, nadiring. |
| 13:00 | Lunch. |
| 13:45 | Hands-on. Building a box, fitting bars and starters, filling a quilt, a nadiring demonstration. |
| 14:45 | Swarms, feeding & winter. What to do and when. |
| 15:30 | Bee health & the Irish rules. Questions, getting your first bees. |
| 16:00 | Finish. |

[MIKE TO CHECK: timetable]

Bring: boots or wellies, long trousers, a light-coloured long-sleeved top, and any medication you need (tell us beforehand if you carry an adrenaline pen). **Leave at home:** perfume, aftershave and woolly jumpers. Bees dislike all three.



Safety & stings

Bees sting to defend the nest. Calm handling and good gear make stings rare, but expect one sooner or later.

At the hive

- Always wear at least a veil. While learning, wear a full suit or jacket, gloves, and boots with your trousers tucked in.
- Approach from the side or the back, never across the flight path.
- Move slowly. Don't knock or jar the boxes. Don't swat.
- Use only a little cool smoke at the entrance, then wait a minute.
- Don't open hives in thundery weather, in rain or late in the evening.

If you're stung

- **Scrape the sting out straight away** with a fingernail or the hive tool. Speed matters more than how.
- Walk away from the hive. The sting gives off an alarm scent that draws other bees.
- A cold pack and an antihistamine help. Swelling and itching for a day or two is normal.

Anaphylaxis is an emergency

Watch for swelling of the face, lips or throat; wheezing or difficulty breathing; dizziness or fainting; a rash spreading over the body.

Call 112 or 999 at once.

Help the person use their own adrenaline pen if they have one.

Site rules at Boglands

- Stay with your group and follow Mike's lead at the hives.
- Keep children and dogs away from the flight paths.
- Tell us at once if you feel unwell.
- First aid kit and phone: kept at [MIKE: location].

The Irish black bee



Native black bees at a Warré entrance.

Ireland's native honey bee is the dark European honey bee, *Apis mellifera mellifera*. Ireland is now one of its last strongholds in Europe: in a study of 412 bees from 24 counties, 97.8% were pure (Hassett et al., 2018).

- **Hardy and thrifty:** flies in cool, dull weather; keeps small winter clusters; doesn't use up its stores quickly.
- **Suited to Ireland:** copes with damp autumns and late springs.
- **Worth protecting:** please don't import queens, packages or nucs. Imported bees dilute local genes and can bring in pests and disease.

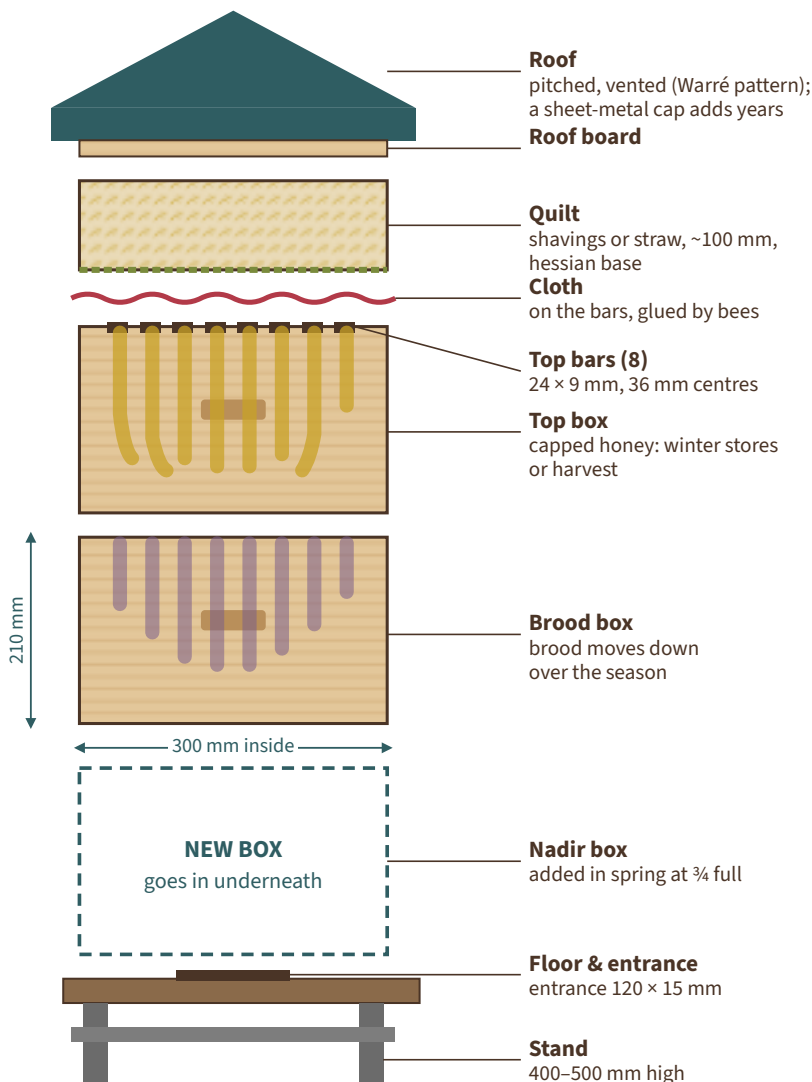
Who's who in the colony

Queen	One per colony. Lays up to 1,000+ eggs a day in spring and holds the colony together by scent.
Workers	20,000–40,000 in summer, 8,000–15,000 in winter. Clean, nurse, build wax, guard, then forage.
Drones	A few hundred males, raised in spring to mate with queens from other colonies, and thrown out in autumn.

Join the Native Irish Honey Bee Society (NIHBS) to help conserve the black bee.

The Warré hive explained

A stack of small boxes that copies a hollow tree. The bees build downward from the top bars, and you add new boxes **underneath**.



Key measurements

Box, inside	300 × 300 mm, 210 mm deep
Walls	20–25 mm untreated timber (outside about 350 mm)
Top bars	8 per box, 24 mm wide × 9 mm thick, 320 mm long, 36 mm centres
Rebates	10 × 10 mm on two opposite walls
Floor entrance	120 mm wide × 15 mm high
Quilt	About 100 mm deep, with a hessian base
Roof	Warré pattern: a pitched cap over a flat roof board, ventilated. A sheet-metal cap adds years to the roof



Handmade boxes in the workshop · a quilt filled with shavings.

The five principles

1. **Natural comb:** no foundation; the bees choose their own cell sizes.
2. **Top bars only:** no frames and no extractor.
3. **Nadiring:** empty boxes go on the bottom.
4. **The quilt:** soaks up moisture, which is vital in an Irish winter.
5. **Few inspections:** read the entrance and the weight, and open the hive only for a reason.

Roofs at Boglands. Our roofs are curved for now, made from timber we had to hand. This winter we're making new roofs to Warré's pattern, with sheet metal on top for long-term protection. Building your own? The full cutting list is in Appendix B of the online book.

Siting & reading the hive

Siting checklist

- ☐ Morning sun, ideally facing south-east
- ☐ Shelter from the west and south-west wind (a hedge, wall or hurdle)
- ☐ Not in a frost pocket or a hollow that floods
- ☐ Firm, level stand 400–500 mm high, out of reach of badgers
- ☐ Level from side to side; tilted forward a few mm
- ☐ Water nearby (a basin with stones)
- ☐ Flight path not across a path or the neighbours' door
- ☐ Forage within 1–2 km: willow, bramble, clover, ivy
- ☐ Neighbours told, and the entrance pointed away from their doors



Reading the hive from outside

Most of what you need to know is at the entrance. Watch for a few minutes on a flying day in late morning.

- **Pollen going in:** the queen is laying and there's brood.
- **Busy, calm traffic:** a healthy colony.
- **Fighting or bees at every crack:** robbing.
- **Dead or crawling bees, deformed wings:** look closer (page 16).
- **Heft:** lift the back of the hive. Heavy is good; light in March is an emergency.

Observation checklist

Photocopy this page. Fill in one column per visit. After two seasons your notes will tell you more than any calendar.

Hive: _____	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3	Visit 4
Date / weather				
Boxes on				
Weight (heft or kg)				
Entrance traffic				
Pollen going in?				
Bees on bars (lowest box)				
Brood seen?				
Capped honey above?				
Temper (1 calm – 5 cross)				
Mite drop / 7 days				
Quilt dry?				
Action taken				
Notes				

Before you open: the core rule

Open the hive only when a job follows: nadiring, harvesting, combining, or checking for disease. In winter, don't open it at all. Every opening costs the colony heat and calm.

Healthy bees are undisturbed bees.

The bee year in Ireland

Midlands timings. The year can shift two or three weeks either way, so trust your own records.

	In flower	Bees	Your jobs
Jan	Winter heath, gorse	Clustered; first brood	Leave alone. Check roofs and straps after storms. Heft.
Feb	Hazel, gorse	Cleansing flights	Heft. Fondant above the top box if light. Build boxes.
Mar	Willow, gorse, blackthorn	Fast build-up	Danger month: heft weekly. Clear the entrance.
Apr	Dandelion, fruit, sycamore	First drones	First nadir at $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Bait hives out.
May	Hawthorn, sycamore, rape	Swarm peak	Nadir. Splits. Collect swarms.
Jun	Bramble, clover (June gap)	Strong	Heft in the June gap. Second nadir if the flow continues.



Bees "bearding" on a warm summer evening.

July to December

	In flower	Bees	Your jobs
Jul	Bramble, clover, lime, willowherb	Main flow	Watch for capped boxes. No new nadirs after late July.
Aug	Ling heather, balsam	Flow ends	If taking honey, take only capped surplus. Reduce entrances (wasps).
Sep	Ivy, late heather	Winter bees raised	Finish harvest. 15 kg+ stores . Mouse guards on.
Oct	Ivy	Ivy flow	Heft. Strap down. Dry quilt. Watch for Asian hornets.
Nov	Ivy ends	Clustering	Leave alone.
Dec	—	Broodless	Leave alone. Make new roofs and boxes.

The two big rules. Nadir in spring when the lowest box is about **three-quarters full**. Go into winter with **at least 15 kg** of stores: a full box of honey above the cluster.



Warré towers in the Boglands apiary in summer: five boxes by August.

Watch the bees, not the calendar. Willow pollen, the first dandelions and hawthorn buds tell you more about the season than the date does. Note them in your records each year.

Swarms

Swarming is how a colony reproduces. The old queen leaves with about half the bees to find a new home. Swarm season here runs from late April to early July, peaking in May.



A swarm hanging under a timber eave.

- **Prime swarm:** the first and biggest swarm, with the old, mated queen.
- **Casts:** later, smaller swarms with young unmated queens.
- Swarming bees are full of honey and usually gentle, but always wear a veil.
- Nading early reduces swarming but won't stop it.

Swarm call? Ask: where is it, how high, how big (a football or a rugby ball?), and how long has it been there? Swarms often move on within a few hours to a day.

Collecting & hiving a swarm



A swarm in a conifer hedge · shaken into an empty Warré box.

1. **Collect:** hold a box or skep under the cluster and give the branch one sharp shake. On a wall, brush the bees in gently.
2. **Wait:** set the box down nearby with a gap for bees to get in. If the queen is inside, bees fan at the entrance with tails raised.
3. **Move at dusk:** close the box once the flying bees are in.
4. **Hive:** in the evening, shake the bees into the top box of a two-box Warré with the bars removed. Replace the bars, cloth, quilt and roof.
5. **Leave them:** for 7–10 days. Feed 1:1 syrup in a box under the quilt if the weather turns wet.

Bait hives

A single Warré box with old comb or starter bars, a roof and a small entrance, set 3–5 m up from April, often catches a swarm for free.

Nadiring & harvest

Nadiring, step by step

1. **Check:** in spring, the lowest box is about $\frac{3}{4}$ full of comb, bees cover the bars, and a flow is on or coming.
2. **Prepare:** get a new box ready with waxed starter bars.
3. **Lift:** raise the whole stack (two people or a hive lifter) and put the new box on the floor.
4. **Lower:** set the stack down gently, square and level.
5. **Never** nadir in cold weather, in a dearth, or after late July.



Harvest without frames

At Boglands we don't take honey; the bees keep it all. If you do take a crop:

- Take only **fully capped** boxes from the top, and leave 15 kg+ for winter.
- Separate the box with a cheese wire, brush off the bees, and bring it indoors quickly.
- Cut the comb out, crush it in a food-grade bucket, then strain it through coarse then fine mesh.
- **Ling heather honey** sets like a jelly: press it, or sell it as cut comb.
- **Ivy honey** sets hard in the comb: leave it for the bees.
- Melt down the wax in a solar melter.

Feeding & winter

Natural beekeeping means leaving honey, not replacing it with sugar. Feed only to save a colony.

When	What	How
Newly hived swarm in bad weather	1:1 syrup (1 kg sugar : 1 L water)	Small feeder in an empty box above the top box, under the quilt
Light in September	2:1 syrup (2 kg : 1 L)	As above; finish by the end of September
Light in winter or March	Fondant	As above; never syrup in cold weather

Winter checklist

- ☐ 15 kg+ of stores: one full box of honey above the cluster
- ☐ Mouse guard on (about 9.5 mm holes) before the first frosts
- ☐ Entrance reduced to 50–70 mm
- ☐ Quilt dry. If it's sodden, refill it with dry shavings on a mild day
- ☐ Roof sound and overhanging; hive strapped down for storms
- ☐ Entrance clear of snow and dead bees
- ☐ Heft once a month and leave the hive closed



A skep on a Warré box - a quilt with its hessian cloth.



Bee health

Varroa

The varroa mite is everywhere in Ireland. **At Boglands we use no treatments at all.** Our bees are healthy, and we believe that's because they're not disturbed.

- **Minimal disturbance:** open a hive only when a job must be done.
- **Local, native bees** that winter on their own stores. Breed from the best.
- **Swarming allowed:** it gives a natural break in brood, and in mite breeding.
- **Watch the entrance:** deformed wings or crawling bees are a warning sign.

The law, if anyone does treat: only medicines authorised for bees in Ireland may be used, and records must be kept for 5 years.

Notifiable diseases: report to DAFM

American foulbrood	Sunken, greasy, holed cappings; brown ropey larvae; a foul smell
European foulbrood	Twisted, melted-looking, yellowish larvae; a sour smell
Small hive beetle	Not yet found in Ireland
Tropilaelaps mite	Not yet found in Ireland

If you suspect any of these: close the hive, move nothing, and email beekeeping@agriculture.gov.ie. DAFM tests bee and brood samples free of charge.

Other problems

Chalkbrood (white "mummies") and **sacbrood** usually clear when the flow improves. **Wasps:** reduce the entrance. **Mice:** a mouse guard. **Wax moth:** freeze stored comb for 48 hours.

Quick troubleshooting

Light in March	Fondant above the top box, under the quilt, today
No eggs or brood	Queenless: combine, or give a bar of eggs
Fighting at the entrance	Robbing: reduce the entrance, stop open feeding
Wet quilt	Refill with dry shavings; check the roof

Irish rules

Checked October 2026. Check gov.ie (DAFM) and hpra.ie for updates.

1. **Taking honey to sell or supply?** Register with DAFM as a *Primary Producer of Honey* (free; email RegisterFBO@agriculture.gov.ie). Keeping bees without taking honey doesn't need that registration.
2. **All beekeepers:** report notifiable diseases (AFB, EFB, small hive beetle, *Tropilaelaps*) to beekeeping@agriculture.gov.ie, and report Asian hornets (below).
3. **Medicines, if anyone treats:** only HPRA-authorised bee medicines may be used, with records kept for 5 years (Reg. (EU) 2019/6 Art. 108; S.I. 462/2024).
4. **Selling honey:** register as above, and label it under S.I. 367/2003 as amended: "Honey", net weight, your name and address, country of harvest, best-before date, lot number.
5. **Importing bees** needs health certificates and notice to DAFM. Better still, don't import at all.
6. **Insurance:** join a FIBKA or IBA association for public liability cover.

Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*)

Not established in Ireland, but nests were found and destroyed in Cork in 2025 and 2026. It hunts honey bees, hovering in front of hives.

- Smaller than our native hornet (about 25 mm); very dark body
- One yellow-orange band near the tail
- **Yellow legs** and an orange face

Report it with a photo at invasives.ie, then email beekeeping@agriculture.gov.ie. **Never go near a nest.**

Key contacts

Disease, hornets and bee health: beekeeping@agriculture.gov.ie

Registration: RegisterFBO@agriculture.gov.ie

Asian hornet reports: invasives.ie

Emergency (anaphylaxis): **112 / 999**

Kit list

The hive

- ☐ Firm stand, 400–500 mm high
- ☐ Floor, entrance block, mouse guard
- ☐ 4 boxes with 8 bars each and wax starters
- ☐ Cloth for the bars
- ☐ Quilt with shavings or straw
- ☐ Roof
- ☐ Strap or weights

For you

- ☐ Veil, jacket or full suit
- ☐ Gloves and wellies
- ☐ Smoker and fuel
- ☐ Hive tool
- ☐ Soft bee brush
- ☐ Cheese wire or long thin knife
- ☐ Spirit level
- ☐ Luggage scale for hefting

Feeding & harvest

- ☐ Fondant and sugar
- ☐ Feeder that fits in a Warré box
- ☐ Food-grade buckets, one with a tap
- ☐ Coarse and fine strainers
- ☐ Jars, lids and labels
- ☐ Solar wax melter

Safety & records

- ☐ First aid kit and antihistamine
- ☐ Charged phone
- ☐ Notebook or record sheet
- ☐ DAFM registration number (only if you sell or supply honey)

What to get first: a veil and gloves, a hive tool, a smoker, and one complete hive with two spare boxes. Then a local swarm in May.



Bee plants

N = nectar · P = pollen

Plant	When	Notes
Willow (sally)	Feb–Apr	N P Vital early pollen
Gorse (furze)	All year	P Peak Mar–May
Blackthorn	Mar–Apr	N P Hedges
Dandelion	Apr–May	N P Leave it in lawns
Fruit trees	Apr–May	N P Apple, pear, cherry
Sycamore	Apr–May	N P Good early crop
Hawthorn	May	N P Yields some years
White clover	Jun–Aug	N Main summer flow
Bramble	Jun–Aug	N P Reliable
Lime	Jul	N Big trees
Rosebay willowherb	Jul–Aug	N Bog roads, cutaway
Bell heather	Jul–Aug	N Runny honey
Ling heather	Aug–Sep	N Jelly honey; press it
Himalayan balsam	Aug–Oct	N P Invasive: don't plant
Ivy	Sep–Nov	N P Last flow; leave it for the bees



A bumblebee taking honey · *Plants and Beekeeping* by F. N. Howes, a classic guide.

Plant for bees: see the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan at pollinators.ie.

Glossary

Amm	<i>Apis mellifera mellifera</i> , the native Irish black bee
Bee space	the 6–9 mm gap bees keep as a walkway
Brood	eggs, larvae and pupae
Capped	sealed with wax
Cast	a later, smaller swarm with a young queen
Cluster	the ball of bees that keeps warm in winter
Crush-and-strain	harvesting honey without an extractor
Dearth	a time with no nectar coming in
Drone	a male bee
Flow	a time when plenty of nectar is coming in
Foundation	a printed wax sheet (not used in a Warré)
Heft	to judge stores by lifting the hive
Nadir	to add a box underneath
Nuc	a small colony, usually on frames
Propolis	resin the bees use as glue
Queen cell	a peanut-shaped cell where a queen is raised
Queenright	having a laying queen
Quilt	the box of shavings above the bars
Robbing	bees stealing from another hive
Starter	a wax strip that guides the comb
Stores	the colony's honey and pollen
Swarm	part of a colony leaving with a queen
Thixotropic	jelly-like until stirred (heather honey)
Top bar	the bar the comb hangs from
Varroa	a parasitic mite of honey bees

Notes



Lined writing area with horizontal lines.

Find out more



Read *Bee Natural* online

The full book, free, chapter by chapter, with the cutting list and appendices.

bees.boglands.ie/bee-natural-book



Learn online

Short lessons and quizzes from Boglands Academy.

learn.boglands.ie



Day course dates & booking

bog.ie/book/natural-beekeeping-courses

Books

- Émile Warré, *Beekeeping for All*, translated by P. & D. Heaf (free PDF online)
- David Heaf, *The Bee-friendly Beekeeper* and *Natural Beekeeping with the Warré Hive*

Organisations

- Native Irish Honey Bee Society (NIHBS): nihbs.org
- FIBKA and the Irish Beekeepers Association (IBA): local associations and insurance
- DAFM, Beekeeping and Honey: gov.ie
- Asian hornet reports: invasives.ie

BOGLANDS BEES

Keep learning



Read the full book online

bees.boglands.ie/bee-natural-book

bees.boglands.ie: Boglands Bees

learn.boglands.ie: online lessons

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bees@boglands.ie · Boglands, Daingean, Co. Offaly

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