



AN

AMERICAN



BEEKEEPER IN LONDON

To be a judge at THIS honey show you have to have won 75 prizes and entered in 10 categories, be a good beekeeper, get a certificate, keep good records, help set up shows, know the rules, know about honey, mead, wax, bakery goods, and have been a judge in at least five shows. Good Luck.

Jennifer Berry

The National Honey Show, which is held in England each October, is by far the world's most prestigious honey show. To have one of your entries even place is a major accomplishment, and an honor. Established in 1922, the first "National Show of Bees and Honey" was held in the original Crystal Palace in London the following year. Since then it has been held annually (except during WWII) to award those who pay the upmost attention to detail and quality when it comes to honey bee products.

There are 96 classes that you can enter. There are the traditional classes like extracted light, medium, and dark honey (unlike U.S. color classes, here there are only three colors). There are classes for candles and wax blocks, mead, melomel and honey beer. Artistic classes include encaustic art, photos, videos, needlecrafts, essays or honey labels. For chefs, there are classes for honey cakes, biscuits, cookies, fruit loafs and sweets. They have a junior class for those under 16 who wish to start competing early. There's even a class for new inventions. But the most distinguished class of them all is Class Number One – 24 jars of honey. That's right, 24 jars of honey all displayed as a single display. You can have one, two, three or four kinds of honey but they must all be in the same sized and shaped jars and filled exactly alike. The prize for this class is the Hamlin Cup, a "Silver Medal" and 50 Sterling Pounds. Rather than ribbons to adorn your first class honey the English award these lavish silver engraved cups and plaques.



The judging and display room.

This past October I was honored by being asked to speak at the National Honey Show. The 2009 show was held at St. George's College in Weybridge, a small town in the district of Surrey, which is a commuter suburb of London. I had not been to England before, so from my arrival at Heathrow airport every step was a new adventure. The only problem was getting there. Unfortunately, I had to fly.

Flying ranks up there with other fun and exciting experiences like root canals (*Is it safe?*), being buried alive or hunted down and then slowly devoured by a pack of wild dogs. That's of course when there's no turbulence. Add moderate to severe turbulence for seven hours, 56 minutes and 12 seconds in a torture tube and pretty much all the above "experiences" would be welcomed.

To top things off the flight left Atlanta at 11:00 p.m. arriving in Heathrow the next day at noon, hence an overnight flight. Since there was no way I was ever going to sleep a wink you could say I was a bit groggy when the death tank FINALLY pulled up to the gate. After exiting the plane I followed the masses, turning down this hall and that corridor until finally we came to immigration. I kept imagining long lines of anxious travelers waiting for the next security guard to sternly call them over to the interrogation table. You know the scene; baggage being tossed about and riffled through, questions asked about this item or that, pointing fingers, pieces of clothing tossed into the air, accusing stares, large intimidating dogs running to and fro. Then all of a sudden just behind you there's a skirmish as the un-expectant traveler is pushed to the ground by several dogs, guards rush in from all directions, nightsticks are pulled, a pile of blue polyester and then finally a roughed up, wide-eyed, handcuffed person is hauled away. Everyone in line looks down, not wanting to make eye contact with this poor soul as he's dragged into a nearby room. For a few minutes you hear him plead with the officers that he didn't know bringing *Bee Culture* into the UK was against the law, and then, silence.

But instead I walked right up to a booth where the immigration officer smiled, took my passport, asked in that oh so brilliant English accent the purpose of my visit, and then bang, bang, bang with the stamp, my



A sample of the jars to be judged.

document is returned and off I went to experience the antiquity of England.

As mentioned, the National Honey Show is by far the show of all honey shows. Beekeepers from all over the UK and the world bring their honey bee products to be judged by the best and to compete against the best. While attending the show I realized becoming a British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) honey judge is no small feat. It takes years of hard work and dedication to accomplish this task.

Just to be considered entry into the BBKA Show Judge Assessment Program the candidate must hold a BBKA basic certificate, have been awarded at least 30 prizes (1st, 2nd, or 3rd) from honey shows at a county or national level or where there's been at least 100 entries, and have participated as Steward for a minimum of six BBKA Senior Show Judges. The basic certificate has an oral and practical portion to the exam. Reading over the syllabus you have to have in depth knowledge about how to manipulate a colony, the names and functions of different pieces of equipment, a broad knowledge of natural history and general beekeeping, and be able to describe symptoms of disease, poisoning and pests. Remember this is just to be considered a candidate of entry. Now comes the difficult part.

After you have met the above criteria you have five years to complete the following requirements. First, candidates applying for judge assessment must pass a) the honey bee management, and b) products and foraging examinations, **or**, the general husbandry certificate. To achieve the Honey Bee Management Certificate candidates must give detailed accounts on 32 different aspects of honey bee management. Here are a few examples taken directly from the BBKA website . . .



These are made of beeswax.

Candidates must give detailed accounts of:	
1.2	the principles which govern the design of hives and frames, including the concept of bee space, and the main features of their construction
1.12	the year's work in the apiary and how this is dependent upon the annual colony cycle and the timing of local bee forage;
1.18	methods of swarm control used in small-scale beekeeping enterprises;
1.23	robbing by honey bees and wasps and the associated dangers, including prevention and curtailment;
1.31	laying workers and drone laying queens and the conditions leading to their development;

For the section on products and foraging, here are a few examples from the 28 different requirements needed to achieve the certificate . . .

Candidates must give detailed accounts of:	
2.1	the main requirements of the current United Kingdom statutory regulations affecting the handling, preparation for sale, hygiene, composition, labeling and weight of packs of honey;
2.26	an account of the factors affecting nectar secretion and the variations in the composition of nectar in different plant species and differing weather conditions;
2.28	an account of how the worker honey bees process nectar to change it into honey, including the enzymes and chemistry involved (to include a chemical equation).;

If you think that's difficult, looking over the requirements for the General Husbandry Certificate is even more imposing. First, the candidate must have been keeping bees for a minimum of three years and still have an active apiary with the following: three honey production colonies with bees and one nucleus colony with bees, plus sufficient spare equipment for feeding, queen introduction and swarm collection, to name a few. In addition they must have honey and wax processing equipment, plus samples of their honey (6 jars minimum) and wax (25g minimum), which are suitable for sale. They are also observed working colonies to assess their beekeeping skills.

Records of beekeeping activities must be maintained. An apiary layout, plans for work in the apiary and records of the season (i.e., quantity of honey collected during the season) must all be kept. There is also a separate record book which contains information about the condition of each colony every time there was an inspection (i.e., existence of a queen, temperament, brood size, disease, feeding details, swarming, etc). After the above requirements are met there are seven separate sections that they must be able to demonstrate an understanding about: general information about keeping bees, practical beekeeping, natural History and behavior, foraging, disease, pests and poisoning, honey and honey processing and stings.

In addition to the certifications, there are **99** other criteria that need to be satisfied. I can't review them all, but here are some you'll need to consider.

If you want to be a BBKA honey judge you must have been awarded at least 75 prizes of third place or higher in a variety of different classes at a county, or national honey show, **or**, a honey show where there are at least 100 entries. That's 75 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place ribbons. Plus, you must have entered in *at least* 10 different categories.

Next you must be a steward for at least four different BBKA show judges at four different locations. And the honey show must have had at least 100 entries.

If you want to be a BBKA honey judge you also need to have other relevant experience such as helping set up shows or accepting entries. You must also have an understanding of honey show procedures, record keeping, schedules, rules, and legal requirements.

If you want to be a BBKA honey judge you need to know everything there is to know about the different types of honey (liquid, granulated, soft set, Heather, and composite classes), comb, cut comb and section honey. You need to know about the different meads and what is and is not suitable.

You need to know about wax, candles and artistic displays. You need to know about observation hives and nucleus colonies. And don't forget about honey cakes and sweetmeats (a sweet delicacy). You must know about slides, photographs and how to judge them properly.

Then, finally, the candidate must have judged a minimum of at least five separate shows, where five categories were judged per show. After all this hard work and dedication you have finally become a BBKA honey judge. Congratulations!

Back on this side of the pond our honey judges don't go through such a rigorous program but times are changing. In 2001, Michael Young from Ireland was the guest lecturer for our Young Harris/UGA Bee Institute. Michael is a National Honey Judge, a culinary master and professor at Belfast Metropolitan College, artist and executive chef for the Malone Golf Club in Hillsboro, Ireland. From the moment he stepped onto our shores, Michael raised the standard for honey judging and honey shows in the U.S. Because of his influence there has been a new found interest in honey judging and shows, so the Young Harris/UGA Bee Institute has a honey judging certificate program which is modeled after the Welsh Beekeeper's Association honey judging certificate. This certificate is the only partnership of its kind between the U.S. and the U.K. If you get the chance, check out the rules and guidelines used in the U.K. You will most likely learn something about bees, beekeeping, and honey. Cindy Hodges from Atlanta, Georgia entered this year, for the very first time mind you, and placed second in Photography, and third in the International Honey Class. Congratulations Cindy!

But now, let me turn your attention to the south and the problems beekeepers may be facing. Due to the wet, cool, rainy Spring and the wet, warm Summer, oh, and the wet, cool Fall, it seems many colonies did not find enough food to make it through the Winter. You **MUST** inspect your colonies this month. When the temperature allows (upper 50s, lower 60s and that's not uncommon) get into your colonies and check food levels. It's January and if you don't have 30 pounds of honey next to or above the bees then you **MUST** feed. This time of year still use a 2:1 sugar:water solution, especially if you are trying to get some weight on your girls. That's two parts sugar to one part water. It takes boiling water to achieve this mixture. If the weather is too cold to open the colony lift the back of the colony off the ground. If it feels light to

you then feed. Remember during colder temperatures it is difficult for the bees to leave the cluster, hence entrance feeders and division board feeders won't work. Buckets, or jars above the cluster are best. A few dollars investment in sugar now is far better than to lose the colony. And if you give them that little extra they need your bees can produce award winning honey this Spring. See ya at the honey shows!

The next National Honey Show will be October 28-30, 2010 in the same location. For more information check www.honeyshow.co.uk. **BC**

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