



# Wealden Apiarist

Newsletter of the High Weald Division of the Sussex Beekeeping Association

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**November - December 2015**

## Features



**Beekeeping in France. A report from Michael Moss**

## High Weald Beekeepers Events Diary

Date	Event	Address
Wed 4 <sup>th</sup> November 7.15 pm	A talk by Michael Moss	Greyhound Inn Wadhurst
Thursday 12th Nov	Bee Banter	Crow and Gate Crowborough
Saturday 21 <sup>st</sup> Nov	AGM & Honey Show Doors open 13.30	Five Ashes Village Hall Five Ashes
Tuesday 24 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Bee Banter	Rose and Crown Mayfield
Wed 9 <sup>th</sup> December	Chistmas Dinner	Crow and Gate Crowborough

## **EDITORS BUZZ....**

This strangely warm Autumn weather is certainly benefitting my bees. Still flying vigorously and bringing in loads of what must be Ivy pollen. For once they hives are heavy with stores and only one colony has required feeding with syrup. However, all things can change and with rumours of a severe winter approaching it's best to take precautions. Putting an insulating layer of something like Celotex under the roof helps enormously in reducing heat loss. Bees expend a lot of energy maintaining the core temperature within the hive, so helping to reduce heat loss is invaluable. We do this in our houses, so why not the bees.

***John Lyte***

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## **The Apiarist**

This will be my last Apiarist, as I'm standing down as editor at the coming AGM. Therefore, for any of you who fancy being creative, here's your chance. It's been great fun compiling the newsletter, adapting the layout and trying different composition ideas. Nothing is locked in stone, so there's plenty of scope to develop the format if you wish. It's important that we continue the Apiarist and although we've discussed putting it on the website, the general feeling is that the membership prefer to receive it as an attachment that they can download and file, or print off.

So for anyone wishing to take on the editorship, please either contact me, or John Preston direct, or put yourself forward at the forthcoming AGM and honey show.

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## **2015 AGM and Honey Show**

**Words and pictures by John Lyte**

It's that time again, the AGM and Honey Show. This is a great time to get together and use your vote, but above all it's an opportunity to show off the fruits of your (or should I say your bees) labour.

It's always fascinating to see the extraordinary range of honeys that are gathered in a relatively small area; the varying colours, viscosity and flavour. So don't be shy, you may well have a winner.



And for those that feel an AGM will be a tedious set of reports and discussion, don't worry. This year the process is very streamlined, with reports emailed in advance so that all that will be required will be any questions and a vote.

Then it's down to awarding prizes, tea, coffee and, as always, a wonderful selection of cakes.

Which brings me to the last point. As the Great British Bakeoff has inspired such an enthusiasm in men and women alike for baking, now's the chance to shine. Get baking (honey inspired) and bring your cake, bread, whatever along. It's not just honey that gets awards.



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## **Beekeeping in France**

**Words and pictures by Michael Moss**

### **MY BEES AND BEE FRIENDLY GARDEN - so far**



Question: What is it like living in SW France with your bees and bee friendly garden?

Answer: Not a bed of roses, but I think it has more going for it than against it!

**Bees** My 2<sup>nd</sup> full year. My first colony averaged 150 lbs plus and a super of comb honey (not counted); the other one a surplus of 250 lbs was extracted, so 400 lbs (200 Kgs) altogether. This was better than last year when my only colony gave me 135 lbs (64 Kgs).

In Groombridge, SE England, where I kept my bees in 25 National and Modified Commercial hives, my average per year was 125 lbs (63 Kgs), with

one bad year, 1971, with an average of 65 lbs (33 Kgs) over 44 years. I started off in Chelmsford, Essex, with 4 hives for 5 years.

### Comparing England to SW France.

Groombridge is a small village between Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough. My bees worked the willows and dandelions, followed by the sycamore which always yielded late March to early May. In the years I lived there I only twice had a heavy flow from the hawthorn, other years not a bee on it. A lot more fruit trees were grown, but have disappeared in the later years. As with farming the dairy cows and sheep have gone, now replaced with cattle or the foelds ploughed up to grow oilseed rape and barley. I noticed in the early years there were a lot more wild flowers along the hedgerows, but when I left in 2011 it was coarse grass and no flowers. Leaching from the fertilizer put on the fields, so the wild flowers were pushed out. So dandelions and white clover became extinct.

Mid-May. I did my queen rearing. I requeen every year, Miller Method. Any hives that were behind were requeened as soon as possible, then in September the rest were done.

Mid-June. After extracting my first lot of honey it was time for the lime-tree flow. In every 8-10 years it was a very heavy flow, usually after an early wet June, followed by hot sunshine. But it varied even 5 miles away where I had an apiary at Hammerwood, towards East Grinstead. After extracting Groombridge surplus which was average, I returned to extract this honey to find 5 Mod-Com supers solid with lime-tree honey, with metal stands bending inwards – 2 hives each stand, average about 200 lbs (100 Kgs); that was the year 2000.

The blackberry always gave a surplus after the lime trees, sometimes the white clover. End of July it was the Himalayan balsam and ending the season with the ivy.

### Le Passage, near Agen, SW France.

The soil is silt, not Wealden Clay as in Groombridge, so with quick-draining soil we need the rain, not the sunshine as in England.

The last two seasons we have had a good flow from the fruit blossoms in early April, after which I do my queen rearing, choosing a hive which is gentle, i.e. lifting the cover board without hardly any smoke, seeing the reaction and of course the brood pattern. I always have one or two Nucs as a standby. The main hives are requeened in late September.

This year we had the False Acacia (Robinia) flow for 10 days after some rain and it was a good flow.

After mid-May it was very dry with a dry northerly wind and nothing much happened. No bees on the clover. Early a shower of rain brought the lime trees into flower (many growing nearby), followed by the sunflowers in the second week in July, three large fields; but it was very hot and dry with temperatures up to 40 degC.

The Asian Hornets were early this year, so the metal guards were put on in the third week of July. I was killing 80 a day. With high temperatures day

and night, the bees restrict their flying, clustering on the front of the hive, so I was glad my hives are shaded by a tree and a hedge. From August to September I do not look at my bees unless I have to.

Early October, all hives are weighed and requeened if needed, plus varroa treatment. In the meantime, beesuit is washed and the bee shed cleaned out. All honey boxes cleaned and sorted out, the frames stored wet. I don't wear gloves, as I think it is cleaner without them!  
I feed about 6 Kgs sugar syrup to bring the hives up to a weight that they will not need feeding in the spring.

Early March off we go again, 14 day inspection plus comb renewal and complete change of brood combs every 2 years. The foundation is drawn out in the supers first, then placed into the brood box. This year I rendered 15 lbs (7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> kgs) beeswax, so now I make my own foundation. The colour of the wax from the cappings was very light primrose yellow, a better colour than I have obtained since the mid-1960s, very good for the show bench.

#### Things I like about my bees.

The honey is very thick and does not granulate within the first year. The bees do not follow me when I finish my inspections. Also when I pass ½ metre whilst killing hornets they leave me alone.

#### Things I should have done or I dislike.

All hives are fitted with castellated spacers. I prefer the frame runners, but I see why. It is because a lot of hives are moved around for pollination and it stops comb slap.

The bees collect propolis more readily, so Porter Bee Escapes are not used, but rhombus escapes are used.

I should have extracted the acacia honey, so three extractions per year instead of two, as they are different types of honey.

The storage area at the bottom of my electric extractor is small. It could be double the size, as it soon fills up after extracting heavy combs; and as the honey is thick it does not run quickly.

I always use a slatted board between the floor and the brood box to give more room for the bees. It helps with ventilation and overcrowding, and also swarm control. (See the book "*Honey in the Comb*" by Eugene E. Killen, a Dabant publication). Remember most English hives are bottom bee space; the drawing is for top bee space.

I have found a friendly beekeeper 6 miles away. He has hives (500) in a local government garden. Most beekeepers here are reserved and there are no clubs, unlike northern France and England, where they are more sociable.

September

2015

**[Don't forget, Michael is giving a talk of his experience as a lifelong beekeeper in the White Hart Inn, Wadhurst, Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30pm](#)**

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**ARTICLES FOR THE NEWSLETTER ARE ALWAYS WELCOMED WITH OPEN ARMS!**  
**Please send them to the Editor [jlyte@btinternet.com](mailto:jlyte@btinternet.com)**  
**Next newsletter out at the end of December**

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