

# INTERNATIONAL Herald Tribune

## French bees find a haven in Paris

### Bloomberg News

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Corinne Moncelli offers guests at her Eiffel Park Hotel more than a view of the Paris landmark. She serves them honey from bees she keeps on the rooftop.

There are more than 300 known colonies in the French capital, up from about 250 five years ago, according to the National Beekeepers' Association. Hives have appeared on the roof of the Opéra Garnier, on balconies and in parks.

Bees are thriving in cities because "flowers and plants are changed constantly and there aren't pesticides," said Moncelli, who co-owns the hotel with her husband, Pascal.

The success of a three-year-old French program to encourage beekeeping in cities, the largest such project in the world, is sparking hope of a revival among their country cousins. Global agriculture, valued at 153 billion, or \$214 billion, relies on pollination by bees, according to the French National Institute of Agricultural Research, or INRA.

As in the United States and in Britain, where bee colonies are dying, about 300,000 to 400,000 French hives have disappeared every year between 1995 and 2007, victims of pesticides, pollution and disease.

"We need bees in the countryside," said Henri Clément, president of the Paris-based National Apiculture Association, which ran the project. "The potential of cities is limited. Our operation in the city is one of creating awareness."

The Eiffel Park Hotel began beekeeping three years ago, when it turned one of its terraces into a site for two to three hives, which produce 150 kilograms, or 331 pounds, of honey a year. The hotel gives honey out as gifts and serves it at breakfast.

"We say 'close the jars when you're done and avoid wearing lots of perfume or the bees may think you're a big flower,'" Moncelli said.

The apiculture association rolled out the French urban program in 2005, and will present its results next year in Montpellier, France, at a conference organized by Apimondia, a global group of beekeepers' associations, based in Rome.

The United States and Britain also have used cities as breeding grounds for bees, although the "French program is very well developed and has huge scale compared to others," said Asger Sogaard Jorgensen, the president of Apimondia. "In many countries, the countryside has become a desert for bees."

The United States saw large hive losses in 2006, 90 percent or more in some cases. Colony Collapse Disorder, the sudden, massive disappearance of bees, was found in 35 states and has harmed hives in Asia, Europe and South America, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. Pesticides, mites and viruses are among leading causes.

In Europe, about 84 percent of crop species depend directly on insect pollinators, especially bees, according to a June report co-authored by Bernard Vaissière, the head of research at the INRA.

France is Europe's biggest agricultural producer.

"There is mounting evidence of pollinator decline all over the world and consequences in many agricultural areas could be significant," the report said.

Jean Paucton, who has kept bees on the roof of Paris's opera house for about 25 years, has seen that rural decline first hand. The retired opera house accessory artist said that the hives, which overlook the Galeries Lafayette department store in central Paris, are healthier than the ones he keeps in the country.

Paucton's city hives produce 450 kilograms of honey a year. He sells little jars of it to the opera house gift shop for about 4, which are resold for 14.50. Paucton, 75, said losses in the countryside can be as much as 50 percent, while the number in the city doesn't even approach 5 percent. Some years, he doesn't lose any in the city, he said.

"The harvest is worse and worse in the countryside," he said. "There aren't farmers anymore. There are only agricultural companies and they use pesticides."

His experience is mirrored by that of Michèle Bonnefond and Armand Malvezin, the beekeepers who maintain the Eiffel Park Hotel's hives. The couple also keeps hives in Corrèze, one of France's most rural regions, and there have been bigger losses there.

On a recent weekday, they sprayed smoke on the hotel terrace to calm the bees before extracting honey. They scraped a layer of wax off the honeycombs, placing it in a centrifuge machine, catching the honey that flew against the sides of the machine, through a faucet into jars. They said they don't obtain such rich supplies from their Corrèze hives.

The apiculture association has called on the French government to block the use in the country of some pesticides, which it says harms bees. Like with its city project, it is also encouraging more people to keep bees in rural areas.

Meanwhile, Olivier Darne, 37, an artist and beekeeper who designed an exhibition at the Parc de la Villette in Paris, that ran through Sept. 28 and included a glass-walled bedroom near a hive to bring people closer to the bee, said he's worried.

"Bees are dying everywhere but in cities," he said. "The bees are speaking to us."

*Correction:*

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Notes: