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PRESS RELEASE

2016 Sustainability report from Denbies Wine Estate

Denbies Wine Estate, England's largest vineyard is located on the outskirts of Dorking, in the heart of the Surrey Hills. The vineyard is spread over 265 acres (with the estate totalling over 600 acres) in this area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB). Certain parts of the estate have also been designated SSSI (sites of special scientific interest) and offer great spots for wildlife watching.

As custodians of this outstanding estate, Denbies is committed to an ongoing sustainability programme. This has included working alongside Natural England to cultivate the woodland areas on the estate. Last year following the successful reintroduction of bee hives onto the estate, Denbies have been working closely with the Bat Conservation Trust and are now the first vineyard in the UK to be members of the BCT.

Denbies are now pleased to announce the completion of the final stages of its bat box installation. The 'rocket' boxes have been positioned at the top of the vineyard close to the densely wooded areas. It is believed that bats can work as a natural form of pest control, recent studies in the US have demonstrated how bats can be of benefit to agriculture.

"It is very exciting to see that Denbies Wine Estate are encouraging more bats onto their vineyard by putting up Habitat 'rocket boxes'. In the US, the benefits to agriculture, including vineyards, of bats as a natural form of pest control has been estimated to be in the billions. Having bat boxes at Denbies will hopefully help to improve our understanding of how bats use this habitat in the UK. We are all very excited to working with partners such as Denbies and others who have a good understanding of the benefits of wildlife for all of us." commented Jo Ferguson, Built Environment Officer, Bat Conservation Trust.

The boxes will be monitored closely by the Vineyard Manager who has been given advice by the BCT on what to look for leading up to the population of the bat boxes. Wildlife and birds are in abundance in the vineyard and recent sightings of red kites have been reported.

Research and development, headed by Duncan McNeill, Denbies Viticulturist, plays a major role in the conservation and upkeep of the vineyard, measures have been introduced to ensure that both agriculture and wildlife successfully complement each other.

Recent plantings of grape varieties are carefully selected for their natural resistance to fungal diseases. Composted animal manure replace chemical fertilisers applied to the soil. This manure contains nutrients, but in a form which does not kill off the beneficial organisms in the soil. It also builds up the organic matter levels in the soil, which increases the level of biological activity in the soil. This results in more organisms living in the vine rooting zone, where they 'trade' nutrients with the vine in return for feeding on the secretions given out through the vines roots. The result is far better nutrient uptake in soils which do not use synthetic chemical fertilisers.

Denbies is one of the first vineyards to trial weed control using alternative methods. Instead of spraying herbicides to kill off weeds, the soil is cultivated in the undervine strip so as to keep it weed free. The chemical ingredients in most herbicides do significant harm to the naturally occurring organisms which live in the soil – (see above). By cultivating the soil with implements instead of spraying chemicals, the Denbies team maintains the biodiversity in the soil, whilst keeping weeds out at the same time.

Denbies are in the second year of a major trial of natural non chemical foliar sprays which helps prevent autumn bunch rot. Bunch rot is the biggest challenge to growing high quality grapes in the UK, and many growers apply large amounts of pesticides aimed at killing the fungi which causes these rots. In a wet autumn harvest period, these chemicals are not effective at controlling bunch rot – and forward thinking producers are looking at alternative ways of protecting against bunch rots. The product we are trialling is a blend of seaweed extract and amino acids which causes the bunch stems to elongate by 2cm – resulting in a looser grape bunch which is far less prone to rot, due to the speed with which the inner part of the bunch dries out after rainfall. Independent tests on treated grapes and wines have shown that there is no difference in fruit composition or organoleptical quality of the wine – simply a change in the length of the bunch stem. Following a successful trial period, Denbies will make three specifically timed applications of the new natural product.

Celebrating its 30th year, Denbies Wine Estate, England's largest vineyard, was delighted to be the recipient of two major South-East business awards. Denbies received the Gatwick Diamond Green Business of the Year and the Business of the Year Award 2016.

Since the vineyard was established in 1986, the English wine industry has been transformed irrevocably. Denbies is proud to have been part of this evolution and continues to be at the forefront of development and innovation in the UK.

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Editors notes:

Awards

1. The Green Business Award required finalists to demonstrate best overall environmental management, including carbon and sustainability performance; deliver real improvements in client environmental and sustainability performance; and produce the best eco-product contributing to environmental protection, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions or sustainable development.
2. Within the Gatwick Diamond area there are over 45,000 companies, it stretches from the edge of London and the North Downs in the North to the edge of Brighton and the South Downs in the South, from Horsham in the West to East Grinstead in the East. It is an area covering 400 square miles which benefits from two 'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty' - the Surrey Hills and the South Downs National Park.

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