

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EARTH SANGHA

THE ACORN

AUGUST 2013



Our special thanks to the Shared Earth Foundation for supporting the Tree Bank.

OUR FIRST NATURE RESERVE!

Thanks to your very generous donations, our Tree Bank “Next Hundred Acres Campaign” is within reach of its goal of protecting our second hundred acres of threatened tropical forest along the Dominican Republic / Haiti border. In April, we took a huge step forwards with the purchase of an important property, which has become our first park. It took months to strike this deal because we needed to work through all sorts of issues with our Dominican partners. The results in brief: our partner organization, the Asociación de Productores de Bosque, Los Cerezos, holds the land under an agreement with the Sangha; the agreement stipulates, among other things, that the land will be managed solely for conservation. So much for the formalities; I’ll explain below the most exciting aspects of this development.

Our park is about 45 acres in total, with roughly 24 acres under existing forest cover. The rest of the land is disused pasture or

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CATALOGUE FOR PHILANTHROPY HONORS THE SANGHA

The Earth Sangha has been chosen for inclusion in the 2013-2014 Catalogue for Philanthropy: Greater Washington!

The Catalogue works to boost the visibility of the best small nonprofits in the greater Washington area. The objective is to help those organizations raise money for their work, and to promote more strategic giving in our region.

To get into the Catalogue, an organization undergoes extensive review by a range of experts drawn from foundations, corporate giving programs, the philanthropic advisory community, the accounting profession, and other nonprofits. Reviewers look for “distinction, merit, and impact.” A site visit is also required.

This year’s class of 72 nonprofits was chosen, by 115 reviewers, from a very competitive field of over 210 applicants.

This is will be the Sangha’s third time in the print Catalogue. (We were first included in 2005; we are required to reapply every four years in order to maintain our presence on the Catalogue website.)

We are very grateful to the Catalogue for its most recent “Seal of Approval.” But we’re not surprised at the honor, because we know how much our donors and volunteers deserve this distinction. This is really an award to them.

Photos: Thanks to you, the forest above is now protected! This is the edge of the forest that has now been incorporated into our first nature reserve, along the Dominican Republic / Haiti border. That’s Gaspar Pérez Aquino, our Tree Bank Project Director, surveying the area in March 2012. At left, in June of this year, students from the Stone Ridge School’s summer camp cleared a huge patch of invasive periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) out of a forest in Virginia: the Marie Butler Leven Preserve, in Fairfax County.

Diagram: Gaspar says that he's not much of an artist but his sketch of the park property is very thorough. The dotted area is established forest. The clear area in the center is old pasture; most or all of that will be restored to forest. There are narrow dirt roads on two sides of the property (right side and bottom of the drawing). Four perennial or seasonal streams pass through or originate on the property. In the channel on the left side of the drawing, the black mark is the dam that creates the main water supply to Los Cerezos. Last year, we cleaned the reservoir behind that dam. (See the May 2012 Acorn.)

THE TREE BANK IS PARKED

... continued from the front page:

cropland. To take the forest first: the ecological value of this chunk of tropical forest is immense. That's partly because this forest type (a transitional mixed broadleaf and conifer biome) is in decline everywhere it still occurs. It's also because many of its plant and animal species simply can't exist in little forest fragments. Conserving large patches is the only way to save them. Our purchase guarantees them refuge in perpetuity. The forest is also the source of the two streams that supply water to Los Cerezos, the little village where the Tree Bank is based. The purchase guarantees that this crucial water supply won't be subject to sale outside the community.

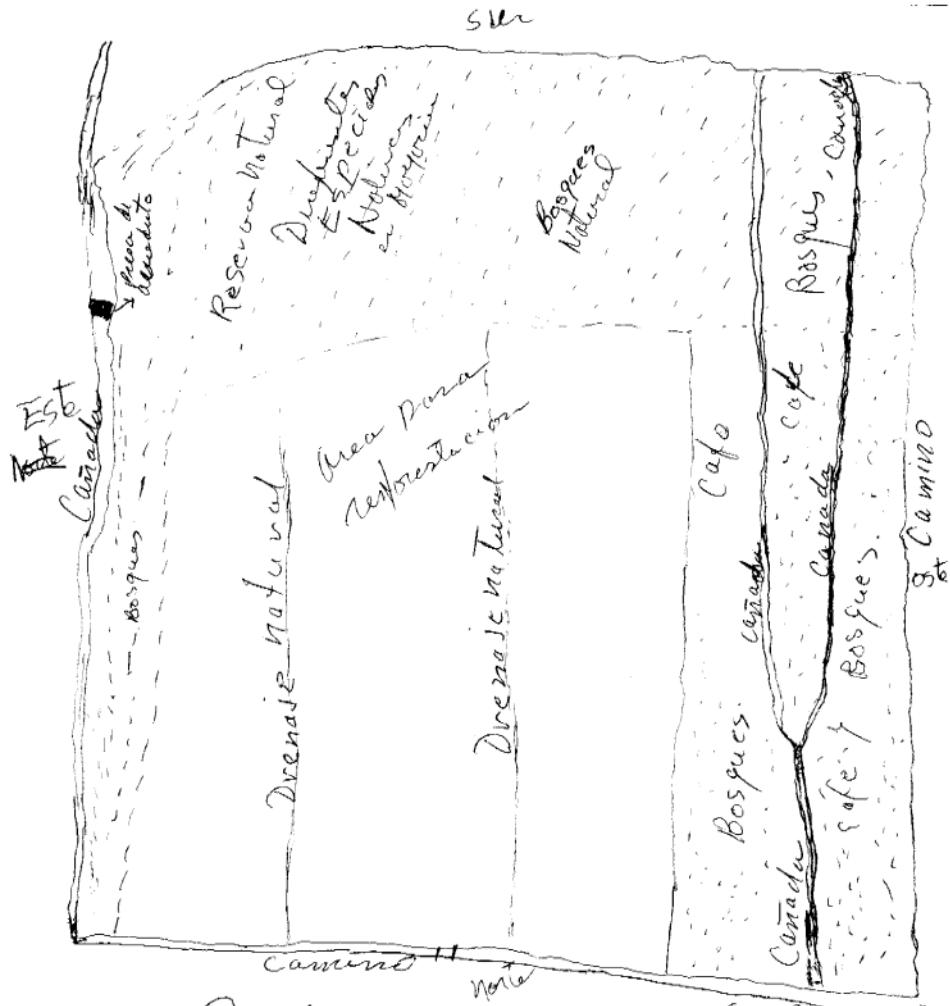
In developing the park, our first priority will be to protect the forest and those streams. We'll plant a forest buffer along any sections of stream not already adequately buffered, and we'll encourage neighboring landowners to do the same. (Our Tree Bank has a native tree nursery, so we have plenty of planting stock.) We'll also work with neighboring farmers to plant a buffer-forest around the established forest to protect it from grass fires set nearby, damage from loose cattle, and so on.

Most of the remaining land will likely also be restored to forest, but Chris, Gaspar, and I plan to use some parts as an agroforestry laboratory, to test some ideas that we are working on. It's hard to find places to experiment. Farmers who depend on their land to pay their bills and feed their family don't want farming ideas from a sunburnt 20-something suburbanite in a silly hat. I'm going to keep wearing the hat, and offering ideas in my broken Spanish, but we'll also use our own land to show what can be done without risking anyone's livelihood.

The park is the Tree Bank's biggest advance since we started the forest credit program in 2011. In terms of cost per unit area conserved, it's more expensive than forest credit, but it offers environmental protections beyond what the credit system can offer. Of course, we'll continue to grow our credit-easement system; the new park is a complementary method of conservation, not a replacement.

I'm very grateful to everyone who contributed to this achievement —there's no way we could have done this without you! More details are forthcoming on my blog, risingforests.com.

— Matt Bright, Tree Bank Coordinator



Para Cristobal
Cerro del Término. RD. 6 Junio 2013

Saludos Para todos,
Gaspar.

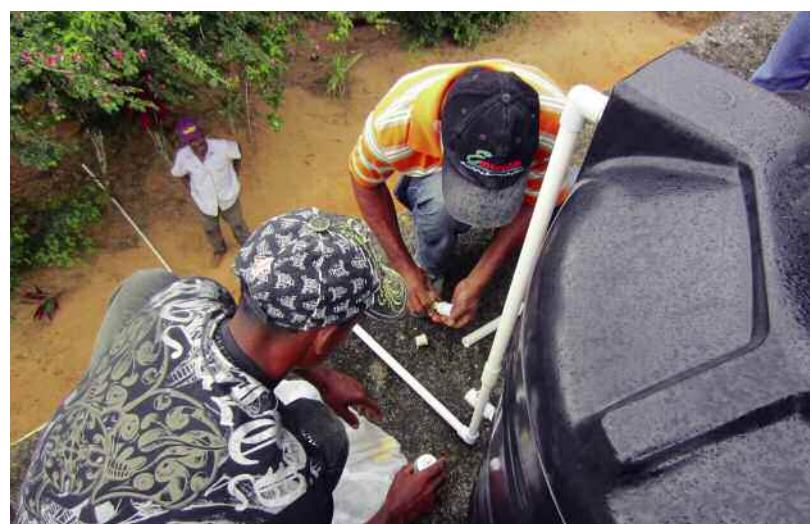


Photo: Last August, we installed a water filter on the roof of the elementary school in the village of Los Cerezos, in the heart of the Tree Bank project area. The filter provides students and staff with a source of parasite-free drinking water. The water itself comes from our new park, which protects the origins of the streams that flow into the village. The park helps guarantee the village water supply.



A MEADOW EMERGES

Slowly and fitfully, something like a native, wild meadow may be emerging at our largest Meadowood site. Finally! (See the top left photo.) These changes are the product of two and a half years of on-again, off-again labor by Sangha staff and volunteers, and by our Meadowood colleagues.

Meadowood is an 800-acre tract of forest and field on the Mason Neck Peninsula, in southeastern Fairfax County, Virginia. Meadowood is a property of the federal Bureau of Land Management. We've been working there, on various sites, since 2008.

When we started on this site, it was just 17 acres of tall fescue, an alien pasture grass. Most of it remains in fescue, but at the far end of the field, against the forest that borders the site, is a four-acre strip that looks about as different from the fescue as it does from the forest.

Instead of a uniform expanse of fescue, numerous plant species are growing on the site. Many of them have conspicuous flowers, which are visited by butterflies, native bees, and other interesting critters. In addition to the species diversity, the area also has structural diversity: some patches are dominated by grasses and some by forbs (herbaceous plants that aren't grasses); some patches are low and some tall. The varied structure provides far better wildlife habitat than fescue.

Here's how we got this far: an initial herbicide treatment, supplied by BLM staff, killed the fescue. It also "released" several native species that the fescue had been suppressing—species that were already present on the site, either as seed in the soil or as a few small plants. The most remarkable of these is butterfly weed, now rare in the wild in northern Virginia. (See the photo at top right.) We then installed thousands of native grass and forb seedlings, all grown from local, wild seed at our Wild Plant Nursery. We also sowed lots of native seed directly into the site. All the species that we planted are native to this part of the coastal plain.

And, of course, we weeded. A lot! Unfortunately but predictably, the herbicide released not just natives but also some invasives, and other invasives found their way in once the fescue was no longer taking up all the space. And this summer, Chris Bright began hand-mowing some of the nastier weeds, on a regular basis, with his scythe. We may also "bake" them with black plastic tarps.

There are still many problems out there, but it's a start!

Photos: At top left, in June, Chris Bright's scythe gear lay in our incipient meadow at the Meadowood Recreation Area. At top right, also in June and at the same site, a wild butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) bloomed amidst horsenettle (*Solanum carolinense*) and various grasses.

EARTH SANGHA

BUDDHIST VALUES IN ACTION

The Earth Sangha is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity based in the Washington, DC, area and devoted to ecological restoration. We work in the spirit of Buddhist practice, but our members and volunteers come from a wide variety of religious and secular backgrounds.

Want to contact us or make a donation? You can support our work by becoming a member. Membership starts at \$35 per year. Donations are tax-deductible. You can mail us a check (made out to "Earth Sangha") or donate on our website. We will send you a receipt and include you in our mailings. (If your name and address are correct on your check, there is no need to send us anything else.) Contact us at: Earth Sangha, 10123 Commonwealth Blvd., Fairfax, VA 22032-2707 | (703) 764-4830 | earthsangha.org. Complete program information is available on our website.

Want to volunteer or meditate with us? We work with volunteers at our Wild Plant Nursery and our field sites in northern Virginia. We meditate in the Del Ray section of Alexandria on Tuesday evenings. For more information see our website or call Lisa Bright at (703) 764-4830.

The Acorn: Our newsletter is produced with "print on demand" technology, which consumes far less energy and materials than does conventional printing. This paper is 100% post-consumer waste recycled, process chlorine-free, and manufactured entirely with wind-generated electricity. This issue © copyright 2013, Earth Sangha.

One of the best: The Earth Sangha is recognized by the *Catalogue for Philanthropy* as "one of the best small charities in the Washington, DC, region."



GREATER WASHINGTON



From the Tree Bank's farmers

To you:

Rising Forests Coffee.

Revive yourself.

Restore the forests.

earthsangha.org/coffee.html

Follow us on Twitter @RForestsCoffee

STILL WITH US. AT LEAST FOR NOW.

It may be just because my eye level is only five feet off the ground, but I've always felt firmly tied to the earth. And indeed, most living things actually are firmly linked to the earth, whether they sense it or not.

For the past ten years or so, I've been collecting seed from wild plants for our Wild Plant Nursery. With 250 species in propagation, there's a lot of collecting to do! Sometimes when I'm out exploring, I feel as if the local plant communities are an expression of the soil—something that is otherwise mute and mostly ignored. Maybe in a sense, the land is speaking through the plants.

If so, I'm afraid that the story the land has to tell is a sad one. Once subtly distinct natural communities are becoming more and more similar, as invasive alien plants continue to spread into them. And many valuable communities have been lost outright to development. It's almost as if the land is losing its memory, or losing the characteristics that have made our region a distinct place, different from other places in the mid-Atlantic.

That's an important story—but it's obvious even to an amateur like me that we're not really hearing it. We need to understand it if we are going to conserve our remaining natural areas, so the Sangha is beginning to organize our species location information on a new "biodiversity mapper" web page. (We'll post a note about this resource soon, on our home page.)

In the meantime, I'd like you to see a list of my favorite, recent discoveries. These species are not very common in our area, but I've been lucky enough to come across them in our local forests and meadows—and to find, not just one or two specimens, but entire colonies of them! Discoveries like these suggest that the land could still tell us another, much more encouraging story.

— Lisa Bright

Virginia snakeroot (*Aristolochia serpentaria*)

Whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*)

New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*)

Curly heads (*Clematis ochroleuca*)

Wild comfrey (*Cynoglossum virginianum*)

Grass-leaved and scaly blazing star (*Liatris graminifolia* and *L. squarrosa*)

Rosepink (*Sabatia angularis*)

Showy skullcap (*Scutellaria serrata*)

White-topped aster (*Sericocarpus linifolius*)

Silverrod or white goldenrod (*Solidago bicolor*)

Crooked-stem aster (*Symphyotrichum prenanthoides*)



Photos: Above, wild comfrey growing in rich, undisturbed woodland soil in Prince William County, Virginia. This species is now uncommon in our region; we hope to help conserve it by propagating it from local populations at our Wild Plant Nursery. Below, Joanna Gibson, a teacher at the Montessori School of Northern Virginia, shows some of her students the nursery's aquatic section. The nursery pursues its conservation agenda through both propagation and environmental education.

