



JUST THE BIG THINGS

If you donated to the Sangha this year, we have some very good news for you: your investment is paying off—and not merely in terms of routine progress, although it's true that this year has seen plenty of that. But the big pay-off is in matters of strategic advance. Here are our three most significant achievements in 2011.

1. We launched our Forest Credit project, as a part of our Tree Bank / Hispaniola program. The Tree Bank works with impoverished farmers along the Dominican Republic – Haiti border to improve farm incomes and restore native forest. Forest Credit extends small lines of credit to our farmers, in exchange for forest easements on their least productive lands. Forest Credit is a strategic advance because it uses small amounts of money in a very efficient way—and because it uses that money to advance both aspects of the Tree Bank's

Continued on the back page.

YOU DID IT!

In September we asked for your help with our Wild Seed collection effort. We needed funding to scale up the amount of wild native-plant seed that we were collecting from natural areas in the Washington, DC, region. (We collect only with permission.)

We have been collecting wild seed for 12 years now, to serve local ecological restoration projects. In years past, nearly all of the seed was grown out at our Wild Plant Nursery. This year, in addition to increasing the nursery's seed supply, we needed to create a fund of seed for direct-sowing onto various restoration sites where we or our public agency partners are working.

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Photos: Above, seed of common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*); photo courtesy of Rodney Olsen. Below, Lisa mixes a batch of wild meadow seed for a National Park Service site in Arlington.



EXPLAIN BRIEFLY WHY YOU NEED THIS LOAN.

“Because I’m poor. I live from farming and I don’t have access to the banks of the state and this loan is going to help me work.”

— *Beato Pérez*

One of our major achievements this year was to open our Tree Bank’s Forest Credit program. The program extends small lines of credit (currently, from \$130 to \$520) to our Tree Bank farmers, who live in a very poor part of the Dominican Republic, along the DR – Haiti border. In exchange for the credit, farmers place some of their least productive land in a forest conservation easement. (Our project area still has ecologically valuable forest—one of the main reasons we’re working there.) At present, we have a little over 50 acres in easements.

There is a little box in the Forest Credit loan form, where the applicant is asked to explain how the credit will be used. In a general sense, of course, we already know why our people need to borrow, so we expected responses like “to buy fertilizer for my bean crop.” But that’s not how our farmers wanted to use that space. Instead, they went big picture.

Since the Tree Bank is a grass-roots to grass-roots effort, we thought that you, the funders of the Forest Credit program, would like to hear what the farmers are saying. A sample of their responses follows.

(A little help decoding the quotations: “Members” means members of our partner organization, the Asociación de Productores de Bosques de los Cerezos; “lenders” refers to local lenders, who typically charge eye-poppingly exorbitant interest rates; “interest,” with reference to our loans, refers to our non-compounding user fee of 5 pesos (13 cents) per month for every 1,000 pesos borrowed. Translation is as slavishly literal as possible. We invite you to read repetition as evidence of consensus.)

“I’m requesting this loan because it’s going to give our members the ability to realize our agricultural efforts without having to turn to lenders, since we don’t have help from the Dominican state.”

— *Fausto Mateo*

“I’m requesting this loan for my agricultural work because we don’t have help or loans from the Dominican state and because I cannot get money from the lenders because that’s so expensive.”

— *Bienvenido Recio*

“I’m requesting this loan so that I don’t have to take loans with interest that is very expensive, and this is a loan that’s going to free us from that.” — *José Aquino*

“... because I don’t have the economic resources to develop my agricultural labors and I don’t want to rely on the lenders.”

— *Sanchez Recio Recio*

“... because this loan has very low interest, which is going to benefit the poor or people of small economic resources to realize the agricultural labors.” — *Pedro Solis*

“... to further my agricultural labors since this loan is going to improve the standard of living for the farmers and their families.”

— *Winston Ricardo Pérez*

“... because I don’t have economic resources for my agricultural labors and with this program I can obtain a greater benefit because it’s practically without interest.” — *Quiterio Aquino*

“... because it is going to help produce more with a lower interest charge, since we don’t have opportunities with either commercial or state banks.” — *Alfonso Sanchez*

“... because I believe that with this loan I’m going to improve my production and so on. It will improve the living standard of our families.” — *Cosme Damián Quezada*

“... because with my agricultural labors this is my economic support for my family and I believe that with this loan I can improve my living standard.” — *Raymundo Pérez*

“... because it’s very good for the farmers; the interest is very low and it’s going to help the poor in this country.” — *Juan Pablo Gomez*

“... because I believe it’s going to improve the standard of living of my family, and because I’m going to obtain a greater benefit from my harvest because the interest is very low.” — *Gregorio Peña*



THE MAN KNOWS HIS BEANS

That's Joel Finkelstein, owner of Qualia Coffee, in Washington, DC, at work with his hi-tech coffee roasting apparatus. Joel built his coffee business from the beans up, so to speak. That's why we have recruited him to advise us on our Rising Forests Coffee—the coffee produced by our Tree Bank farmers, along the Dominican Republic – Haiti border. Rising Forests is meant to help our farmers preserve native forest, and increase their incomes.

But the stuff won't sell if it isn't good, and that brings us back to Joel, who is a font of coffee lore. We have learned, for example, that our coffee has potential, and that single-origin Dominican coffee is unusual in the US. But it's not all good news. We've also learned that our first shipment was too moist, contained too many damaged beans, and the beans were too uneven in size (making it difficult to roast them evenly). So we're passing Joel's advice back to our farmers and they're adjusting their procedures. Improvement is a multi-cultural enterprise! One other lesson: Joel urges us to forget about "perfect." Perfect coffee, he says, is boring. So in coffee, as in all our other projects, we plan to steer clear of perfection.

Qualia Coffee can be found on line at qualiacoffee.com, and in the actual world at 3917 Georgia Avenue, Northwest.



ALL THAT GERMLASM

From the front page:

In our judgment, boosting seed collection was the single most useful thing that we could do for our region during the latter half of 2011. More seed in our system would strengthen several conservation activities at one go. It would increase production at our nursery, which is already a key resource for ecological restoration in this region. It would increase the depth and scale of our own planting activities. It would drive more invasive alien plant control by making it easier to revegetate cleared areas. And it would reach beyond us: more seed would increase—not just our own restoration efforts—but those of our public agency partners.

We wanted to focus the effort on native herbs (nonwoody plants), rather than shrubs and trees. That's partly because our nursery's woody plant accessions are already fairly extensive; it's also because bigger herb accessions would greatly extend our ability to restore meadows. And meadows are among the region's most species-diverse and most threatened plant communities.

So we asked and you gave. And then we collected—and the yield, in terms of both funding and seed, was phenomenal. Including a very generous match from an anonymous donor, about 60 of you gave us \$14,000, well past our \$10,000 target. That funding allowed us to buy supplies, hire interns to collect and clean seed, and spend a good deal of staff time on this effort as well. (Of course, our extremely hard-working and devoted volunteers also played a crucial role.)

As for the seed, you can see some of the results in the cover photo, which shows Lisa sorting and mixing some of our accessions. Thanks to you, we achieved at least a 10-fold increase over our previous year's harvest. That's hundreds of pounds of seed from scores of species. (And for many of those species, a single pound contains thousands of individual seeds.) Next spring, the results will begin to emerge here and there, in parks throughout the greater Washington region—a green and growing legacy of your generosity. We are very grateful to everyone who donated!

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](mailto:EarthSangha@earthsangha.org) | (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 2011, 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

Photos: At left, Americorps and the Arlington Regional Master Naturalist volunteers thresh broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*), a native grass. Above, Joel roasts a batch of beans at Qualia Coffee.



OUT THERE WITH THE WILD VEGETABLES

2011: THREE BIG THINGS

From the front page:

mission: fighting poverty and fighting deforestation. Our first loans helped 16 families and protected a little over 50 acres of forest. (For more on Forest Credit, see page 2.)

2. Another Tree Bank advance: after nearly three years of work, we imported our first shipment of coffee, grown exclusively by our Tree Bank farmers, and we began selling it under its own brand: Rising Forests Coffee. Rising Forests is strategic because, for the first time ever, it puts our farmers in more-or-less direct contact with a huge first-world market. That connection will greatly increase their ability to profit from their own skills as coffee growers, instead of just furnishing a raw, no-name commodity to middlemen who absorb nearly all of the revenue. (An important aside: you're going to buy coffee anyway, right? Buy ours.)

3. At our northern Virginia Wild Plant Nursery, we have increased the volume of wild seed collected by at least a factor of ten. (Our nursery is, by far, the region's most comprehensive effort to propagate native plants directly from local wild populations.) This increase in seed volume is strategic because it will enable major growth in both our own ecological restoration projects, and those of the public agencies who partner with us. (See "You Did It" on page 1.)

If you donated to the Sangha this year, all three of these advances are your doing. They would not have happened without your help, and we hope that you will count them among your own achievements for 2011. You should! We also hope that you'll remember them—as well as the people and the lands that the Sangha serves—when the time comes for your year-end giving. Thank you for investing in our work!

Photos: Above, in October our staff and volunteers collected seed from native meadow plants at Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve in Loudoun County, Virginia. (We collect only with permission.) Descendants of the plants shown here will soon be colonizing areas once covered entirely by invasive alien vegetation. Below, in November we cut invasives along a slope surrounding a baseball field at Fairfax County's Wakefield Park. The slope was bulldozed into its present shape when the ball field was built. It was then sown with an alien fescue grass, which should have doomed it to ecological wasteland status. But broomsedge, an important native grass, displaced the fescue. (Broomsedge is mostly what you see here.) The broomsedge was followed by several goldenrod species, along with various other native herbs, and a kind of native meadow has emerged. And who knows? Maybe the meadow will outlast the ball field.



UNDEVELOPMENT: WHERE WILL IT END?