



# A Dry Winter

Inside this issue:

<i>The lowest rainfall yet?</i>	1
<i>The launch of the Library</i>	1
<i>New arrivals</i>	2
<i>Fruit Rats</i>	2
<i>Unexpected bonus</i>	2
<i>New grape varieties</i>	3
<i>Events and workshops</i>	3
<i>Brassica growth pattern</i>	3
<i>Chestnut husks composted</i>	4

## *The lowest rainfall yet?*

The supply of summer irrigation water is dependent upon snow melt. This picture was taken in January, showing no snow on the high mountains in the Lanjarón valley.

By the middle of February, we were already on summer rationing of irrigation water.

Looking back over our records we saw that there was more Autumn rain this year than in the previous two. However there was

less winter rain. Making this the second lowest annual rainfall in eight years.

This season's winter temperatures have also been higher than the previous three years. This has resulted in the snow melting in be-



tween snowfalls. Previously there would be a build up of snow which would melt slowly over the months until June, providing prolonged moisture.

## *The launch of the Library*

February saw the launch of the Semilla Besada on-line Library.

This is an encyclopaedic resource for those seeking to create sustainable lives, landscapes and livelihoods.

Based on an holistic perspective it provides information across the social, economic and environmental board.

For the first time there is specific information for those facing the challenges of managing small-scale farms in brittle environments.

The current content of over 35,000 words is only a start.



We hope to have at least doubled the content by the end of the year. We will continue to up-date and expand this information so that it will become the most comprehensive resource of its kind.

Access is through an annual subscription membership of €20 per annum, which as always, is supported by our complete money-back guarantee.

To provide a taster of the content, there are currently four articles which can be viewed absolutely free. These will be expanded to fifteen by the end of the year.

To subscribe to the Library please go to this address:

[http://www.holisticdecision.com/sb\\_library.html](http://www.holisticdecision.com/sb_library.html)

### Special points of interest:

- Launch of Semilla Besada Library
- Milking sheep arrival
- New grape varieties
- Events and Workshops for 2007

## New arrivals



Our experience of using sheep to restore perennial grasses, has confirmed their value at Semilla Besada. In order to further work towards sustainability we have decided to invest in a milking breed.

In January David and Sam travelled to Murtas, east of Lanjarón, to a production farm for sheep's cheese.

As part of the production process the lambs are removed from the

mothers and placed on a mechanical feeder of proprietary milk, so that all the milk can go to the cheese factory.

Here they bought three six-week old lambs: two ewes and a ram.

In recognition of their German origins they have

been named Heidi, Helga and Rolf!



## Fruit Rats

Fruit rats, or *Rattus rattus frugivorus* Rofinesque, have trebled in numbers over the past eight years.

With the increase in domestic animals and their grain feed, the introduction of vegetable gardens and the creation of compost heaps, we have provided rats with an abundant year-round food source.

The greatest damage they have caused was to eat our entire crop of maize, amounting to 600 plants. That was until this winter, when they ate our crop of

cauliflowers. They completely ate the heart out of each plant.

We have avoided using cats because of the additional impact on indigenous wild life such as lizards. So too with using poison.

It is possible that snakes and raptors feed on the rats during the various stages of their growth.

However, the rats are active mainly at dusk and the only night raptor is the Little Owl *Athene noctua* and a

full-grown rat would probably be too big a prey.

Unfortunately, the presence of our dogs would also discourage snakes.



We have provided rats with an abundant year-round food source

## Unexpected bonus



Duncan Ross and his partner Mureka of Poyntzfield Nursery in Scotland took a winter break with us. We established our stock of herbs at Semilla Besada with plants from Poyntzfield when we first arrived.

Duncan's stay meant that we had access to his thirty years' experience as a herb nurseryman, and we took advantage of this by

learning about taking cuttings from herbs.

Growing from seed can mean long time frames, for example *Myrtus communis* can take up to two years to germinate. Taking cuttings means that new plants can be produced in as little as three months.

Duncan's catalogue is on-line at

[www.poyntzfieldherbs.co.uk](http://www.poyntzfieldherbs.co.uk)

## Events and Workshops

At Semilla Besada we are as committed as ever to finding real solutions to environmental degradation.

Unfortunately, in order to keep pace with tourist developments and expanding greenhouse food production, local response to water shortages tends to be symptomatic. The result is more reservoirs, dams and silt dams.

Little attention is paid to the health of the ecosystem processes

which is the foundation for building natural and economic wealth.

As part of a programme to raise awareness we are hosting fortnightly film events and skill-building workshops.

The year began by a free showing of David Suzuki's film *The Silent Forest*, followed by a discussion. Attending was a retired scientist who had been part of the early years of Greenpeace.

His insights into Climate Change provided us all with food for thought.

The first skill-building workshop was lead by David on the subject of grape-pruning. Something that is traditionally done according to the phase of the moon.

For the year's diary please go to this address: [http://www.holisticdecisions.com/sb\\_events.html](http://www.holisticdecisions.com/sb_events.html)



## New grape varieties



The Alpujarras is known for the locally produced young table wine known as Costa.

The vineyard of 50 vines we inherited were of an unknown variety, but since then we have planted additional vines of locally sourced Cabernet Sauvignon, Tempranillo and Granache varieties.

On advice from the Agroforestry Research Trust, we recently obtained three Seibel varieties, known as Chancellor, de Chaucnac and Sieyre Villard.

The latter are hybrids of a French/American cross. The French parentage for its quality of fruit and the American for its hardiness.

Our wish to produce a consistently palatable organic table wine, capable of being stored, continues to fuel our explorations of various production methods.

**Our wish to produce a consistently palatable organic table wine continues to fuel our explorations**

## Brassica growth pattern

Over an eight year period we have been surprised to see that brassicas, more particularly cabbage and kale, will continue to mature over a two and even three year period.

This picture of kale shows a plant that was sown over 4 years ago, and which is still cropping throughout the year.



Holland Winter cabbage struggled in its first year, but those plants that remained at the end of the year continued to grow and produce small, compact heads. In fact these were the best cabbages we have ever tasted!



## Semilla Besada Companions *shaping the future*

Aspen, David and Samuel Edge

Apto. de Correos 19

18420 Lanjarón

Granada

Spain

Phone: (0034) 958 347 053

Fax: (0034) 958 347 117

E-mail: [semillabesada@holisticdecisions.com](mailto:semillabesada@holisticdecisions.com)

### We're on the Web!

[www.holisticdecisions.com/semillabesada](http://www.holisticdecisions.com/semillabesada)

#### News Flash

For the first time we are having a Farm Open Day, which will be hosted on the 1st May. The theme will be *from the garden to the home* and will focus on raising awareness of our reliance on natural resources for our quality of life. There will be organic produce and products for sale, a farm tour, home-baked refreshments, and more. The entry fee is €5, children free.

Please book ahead as places are limited.

*Semilla Besada is a 16 hectare research conservation farm set in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains in southern Spain.*



*The focus of the farm is the improvement of this ecosystem's capacity to cycle water and nutrients, support complex and stable biodiversity and provide year-round cover for bare soil. Attendant to this is the development of sustainable land and livelihood practices for small-scale farmers.*

*Every decision we make is :*

- *Tested for environmental, social and environmental sustainability.*
- *Carefully monitored to ensure that we can take remedial action as soon as we detect a deviation from long-term sustainability.*

## *Composted chestnut husks*



Castanea sativa (Sweet Chestnut) provides a wealth of food for both ourselves and the animals. The leaves provide fodder for the animals in the height of summer, the nuts provide food for both animals and ourselves in the autumn. But what to do with the dried husks?.

Once the chestnut husk has split open to discharge the nuts, it dries, leaving a sea-urchin like husk of no known value other than to be used as fire fuel. The Spanish actually called them hedgehogs, *erizos*.

This year, we collected the husks and layered them with animal manure in our special Semilla Besada compost heaps. This activity requires the use of a good pair of gloves!

The result was a spectacular compost which will be used on the vegetable growing areas in the spring.

