



A Late Spring

Inside this issue:

Yo Yo Weather

<i>Yo Yo Weather</i>	1
<i>The Farm Open Day</i>	1
<i>Post Bushfire</i>	2
<i>Construction with Local Materials</i>	2
<i>Spring Lambs</i>	2
<i>Residential Seminars</i>	3
<i>Goose Trial Third Year</i>	3
<i>Bee Swarms</i>	3
<i>Nutshell Series</i>	4

This Spring brought with it what we now call 'yo yo weather'! Over March and April we oscillated between the lowest night time temperature of -1C to a day-time high of 28C. Coupled with that was low early rainfall.

This resulted in poor pasture performance for our neighbour, who annually sows oats for his goats. We were also put a month behind for vegetable seed germination in the nursery

for planting out after the last frost.

However, April and May brought 127.5mm of rain, 46mm of that falling over three days.

This brought with it a magnificent flush of annual wild flowers and improved performance in our perennial grasses.



A tangle of Malva sylvestris, Anacyclus clavatus, Rumex scutatus, Fumaria officinalis, with a honeysuckle and a rose.

The Farm Open Day



There were Semilla Besada products and information for sale as well as a book stall of second-hand and new books on the environment.

There were also displays on grassland flowers, the production of honey and the implications of *brittleness* on the management of a Mediterranean environment. Although the strong winds experienced that day taught us that they were ill-suited for outdoor use!

The focus of the farm tour was brittleness and the implication of leaving things to nature, and 'closing loops' - ensuring that the output of one process was the input of another.

The guest feedback was unanimous in that everyone had an enjoyable day. They also confirmed that they went away with an appreciation of the necessity of sustainable land management.

Semilla Besada held its first Farm Open Day on the 27th May and was booked out.

The programme included a farm tour, refreshments, a light lunch and a showing of *The Power of Community .. how Cuba survived peak oil.*

Special points of interest:

- The Farm Open Day
- Spring Lambs
- Residential Seminars
- Goose Trial Third Year

Post Bushfire

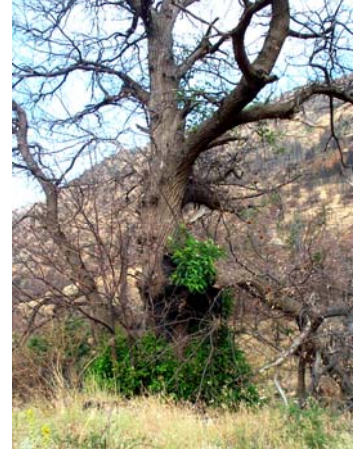


This year we were able to see the benefits of the fire that burnt out 2,500 hectares in 2005. As this area is no longer managed with grazing animals, large amounts of dead plant material build up.

Due to low ambient year-round moisture, this material does not break-down as it would in a northern temperate environment. The result is a suffocating build-up of material that kills the soil-stabilising undergrowth and provides fuel for fire.

The fire had removed much of the dead material, resulting in a greater flush of annual flowers and invigorated perennial grasses.

Although most of the planted Pine trees had been killed, many of the Chestnuts were re-sprouting at the base of the trunk, as can be seen in the photo to the right.



Construction with Local Materials

Newcomers to this area are often enthusiastic about building with straw-bales. This area produces very little straw and of such a quality that it makes poor material for construction.

For us, the principle behind sustainable construction is using materials that are naturally available in the area. Here it is stone. Although locals say that La Chaparra—the area of the mountains in which we live—provides poor stone for construction, we have found enough to meet our needs.

Earlier this year the collapse of a wall saw David and a volunteer walking the mountainside in search of stone. It was constructed as a dry-stone wall, and was back-filled with the soil that was dug out of the area. No other resources were used.

The result is a pleasing and sustainable construction that fits seamlessly into the local natural environment.



A pleasing and sustainable construction that sits seamlessly into the local natural environment

Spring Lambs



This year saw the arrival of five healthy lambs. Two of them were to first time mothers—last year's lambs.

The oldest of the ewes, Nora, gave birth to three lambs, one of which was stillborn. Although the other two were tiny at birth, they have

thrived, and are now grazing with the others.

The main loss was Betty, an older ewe, who had a prolapse. Veterinary intervention failed to solve the problem. She was eventually sacrificed with the two lambs she was carrying.

The flock now comprises four indeterminate breed ewes, their five lambs, and two ewes and one ram of the newly introduced milking breed.

Residential Seminars

As we put 'fingers to keyboard', Semilla Besada has launched the last phase of its educational services for landscape designers in brittle landscapes.

Knowledge about the Savory Brittleness Scale and its implications for designers in brittle landscapes is more crucial than ever.

To meet this need in Europe we have created the following three residential seminars:

The Four Insights- a weekend

seminar on these pivotal principles for sustainable design in brittle landscapes.

Brittle Landscape Design for Permaculturalists- a week-long programme augmenting the temperate design course with the necessary knowledge for those designing in brittle landscapes.

Holistic Management for Landscape Designers- a week-long programme enabling conventional landscape

designers to create sustainable designs in brittle landscapes.



Full details on the website at www.holisticdecisions.com

Solar Water Heating



As a continued commitment to reducing our use of fossil fuel, we installed a solar water heating system in April.

It services both the family and guests, and since its installation we have not purchased a single gas bottle to heat water.

The normal consumption for our family of three is about one bottle a month at a cost of €12 (double what it was eight years ago).

The system holds 250 litres of water and is heated by copper rods in evacuated chambers. As water pipes freeze here in winter, having copper rods, rather than circulating water, is likely to work better for us.

The system cost €1850 and so would pay for itself in 12 years, but if the cost of gas doubles every 8 years then the pay-back time will be shorter.

Since its installation we have not purchased a single gas bottle to heat water

Bees Swarms

Spring brought the arrival of three gratuitous swarms of bees that took up residence in surplus hive 'supers' stored in an outhouse.

When David was sure that the swarms were here to stay, he made up three new hives, and relocated the swarms.

Bees can only be moved 2m



or 3kms from their original site as they are unable to find their hive again. So David needed to move them to a neighbour's farm for 14 days in order to relocate them with our existing hive.

The hive being transported in the back of the Land Rover to its new temporary home.



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

We're on the Web!

www.holisticdecisions.com/semillabesada

News Flash

As the research work at Semilla Besada is independent, we rely on the generosity of individuals to support its development. With that end in mind we offer a variety of ways in which you can become a Friend of Semilla Besada.

If you would like to contribute to a positive way forward for ourselves and the planet please [click here](#) to see how you can help.

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

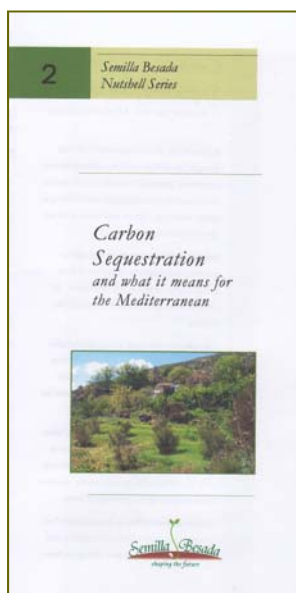


The focus of the farm is the improvement of this ecosystem's capacity to cycle water and nutrients, support complex and stable biodiversity and provide year-round cover for bare soil. Attendant to this is the development of sustainable land and livelihood practices for small-scale farmers.

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.*

Nutshell Series



In line with raising awareness of the pivotal difference between non-brittle and brittle environments, we have launched an ongoing series of Nutshell brochures.

The brochures focus on those insights which are pivotal to sustainable design and land management in brittle landscapes. They also challenge certain pre-conceived ideas about the environment and its custodianship.

For example, popular opinion is that the best way in which to sequester carbon is through planting trees, but when we

find that temperate grasslands sequester 236 tonnes of carbon per hectare per year as against temperate forests which sequester 96 tonnes, we have to think again.



The Nutshell series is available online. Please contact david@holisticdecisions.com