



# A Cooler Summer

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## *Contrary to Predictions*

Contrary to predictions the summer did not turn out to be the hottest on record. After a very slow start, the temperatures peaked at about 30C in the shade during the day.

We had a bad year for tree fruit, with cherries producing about a third of last year's yield. There were virtually no plums or pears.

The strawberries were star performers cropping into July. The apples too, look as though they should pro-

duce a good crop in the Autumn.

Results such as these underscore the real value of mixed crops. If we put 'all our eggs in one basket' we would be very vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather.

It also emphasises, the necessity of 'saving' in



years of plenty in order to cover us in years of lack.

## *And Then There Were None*



The geese completed their third season this year, with the gullies (female geese) laying and sitting as before. However, despite the best conditions we could provide, they failed again to produce any young.

Using our Holistic Management® framework, we

tested a variety of options to determine the way forward.

Given our remit of sustainability and the fact that the geese compete with the rabbits and sheep for the same food, we

decided to find them a new home.

After a week with an English farmer in the valley, we brought them back! The location and the temperatures were such that their wellbeing was being compromised.

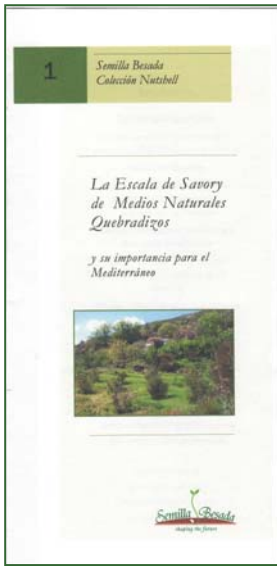
In the process, we learnt that the Spanish would sometimes keep geese, to provide them with eggs when the chickens had gone off the lay. In the summer, though, they would keep them in barns because of the heat.

Although our original decision still holds, we want to ensure that any home they go to is going to be one in which they can thrive, rather than just survive.

*Detailed information on our management of the geese is part of the membership [on-line Library](#).*

### Special points of interest:

- And Then There Were None
- Nutshell Series in Spanish
- Lucky Thirteen
- Atamai Eco-village Project



## Nutshell Series in Spanish

As environmental issues become evermore grave in this area, so government agencies are keen to support initiatives which create more positive outcomes for the people of Andalucía.

As a foundation for our planned approach to these agencies, we have now had translated a number of the Nutshell series into Spanish.

It has been an interesting exercise, particularly in attempting to

convey the concept of the Savory Brittleness Scale. In Spanish there is a word for brittle, *quebradizo*, but not for brittleness!

We have already had an informal meeting with a member of LEADER who expressed an interest in receiving the Nutshells once we have them on-line.

*If you are interested in receiving an on-line link to the Spanish versions of the Nutshells please [contact us](#).*



*REDR (Red Española de desarrollo rural) who disseminate information on LEADER projects in Spain.*

*[www.redr.es/acciones/leader.htm](http://www.redr.es/acciones/leader.htm)*

**The apple harvest will be a testament to the success of this process**

Consistently since our custodianship of Semilla Besada, our apple trees have been defoliated each year by Apple Ermine Moth (*Yponomeuta malinellus*) resulting in very poor crops of apples.

For two consecutive years, we have used a solution made from the plant Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) at the time the eggs were laid. However, this had no effect. It might be that this was not the weakest link in the reproduction cycle of the moth, but we did not have sufficient access of Horsetail to continue

experimenting.

In the Spring of last year, using volunteer help, we hand picked the caterpillar cocoons from the trees. The result was less defoliation, and an improved crop.

This year, instead of the apple trees being completely defoliated in the Spring, there was minimal damage, and the apple harvest will be a testament to the



success of this process.

## Lucky Thirteen



This year saw three Andalusian Blue hens go broody in May. Almost exactly 21 days later, the standard incubation time, thirteen chicks arrived!

One of the hens was

one of last year's brood, and unfortunately seemed long on enthusiasm and short on skill. She was very protective but out of the 6 eggs she was incubating only two survived. Two were found dead in the coop, one failed to hatch although it was emerging, one failed completely and two

simply disappeared!

What this experiences teaches us is that these kind of loses can be accommodated by subsistence farmers, but are completely unacceptable to production farmers attempting to meet consumer demand.

## Bushfire Safety

We have witnessed a bushfire in these mountains every one of the eight years we have been here. The south of France is now second only to Australia in the incidence of bushfires. It seems reasonable to accept that they have now become part of the current Mediterranean landscape.

Although Australian statistics show that 100% of homes are saved when attended by 3-4 people, local government policy is to evacuate residents.

As a result of these factors, we have created a Bushfire Plan with a focus on protection rather prevention. The plan is divided into the following areas of attention:

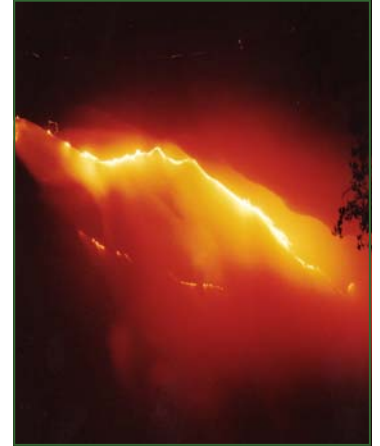
- The landscape
- The animals
- The humans
- The possessions
- The house contents
- The house

In the event of evacuation being impossible we have also

designated a *safe room* together with the protocols of fighting the fire within the house.

We have researched bushfire safety extensively in order to prepare this plan and are also offering the benefit of this knowledge to local residents who live in rural areas.

[Contact us](#) for details of the local *Bushfire Safety Plan Workshop*.



## Millet 'Lime Green'



Millet is the most nutritious of all the grains and will grow well in this environment. It is known to grow where the soil is too poor to grow maize or sorghum.

For the first time, after considerable difficulty in sourcing any seed, we bought a small, but very expensive packet of Millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*), a variety called *Lime Green*..

As there was so little seed, we started them off in modules in the nursery. We had a 48%

germination rate and after the cold weather had cleared we planted our the seedlings. The plants were irrigated once a week once established.

As at the end of August, we have some good heads of seeds, which we will save for planting next year, provided the birds don't beat us to it!

*Details of our plant trials are part on our [on-line subscription Library](#).*

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## Eco-film Night

As a vehicle to raise environmental awareness as well as develop a local network, Semilla Besada has hosted an eco-film night each month in the local town of Lanjarón.

Beginning with *An Inconvenient Truth*, the films have included Tim Flannery's series entitled *The Future Eaters*. Each film

is followed by a discussion focusing on the implications for our lives and what action we can initiate to increase the sustainability of our lives.

In recognition of Live Earth Day we followed the July showing with celebratory drinks and *tapas*. Then we uploaded the photo of our

small but committed group.

*Details of films being shown can be seen by following [this link](#)*



## Semilla Besada Companions *shaping the future*

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### We're on the Web!

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

#### News Flash

#### *Free On-Line Answers to Brittle Landscape Questions*

We have just launched a free on-line question and answer service. Simply complete an on-line form with your question and submit it to us.

[www.holisticdecisions.com/sb\\_questions.html](http://www.holisticdecisions.com/sb_questions.html)

*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 economic sustainability.*
- *Carefully monitored to ensure that we can take remedial action as soon as we detect a deviation from long-term sustainability.*

## *Atamai Eco-village Project*



*Atamai village site, comprising 27 ha of pastureland which is currently being used to graze sheep and cattle.*

[www.atamai.co.nz](http://www.atamai.co.nz)

[www.sustainablesettlements.com](http://www.sustainablesettlements.com)

It was a special treat this summer to have Jocelyn Winters, of the Atamai Village Project, attend a residential seminar.

The Atamai Village site is on the Motueka River in

the Nelson province of New Zealand/Aotearoa. A settlement of 30 to 40 homes is being planned, which will offer residents a community lifestyle with a 'soft footprint'.

There is already a core group

of three families, and interest is being shown by people as far afield as South America and Canada.

Jocelyn came to Semilla Besada because she was looking for additional tools to help create a *holistic* approach to the design of the project.

As a Permaculture designer, she also wanted to interface her knowledge with the environmental insights of Holistic Management.

She left feeling that she had gained valuable insights and said "I realise that previous frameworks were lacking, in



that they isolated things rather than considered the whole."