



Increasing Fire Risk

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What makes the Mediterranean fire-prone?

Amazingly, the Mediterranean ranks third in world-wide fire risk assessment. Why is this? The Mediterranean is a brittle landscape, and as such the tools of land management are different. Unfortunately, the implications of this on environmental management are little known.

As the pivotal role of holistically managed grazing animals is ignored, so there is the ongoing build up of dead plant material. This

material provides fuel for fires.

With the loss of the grazing animals that evolved with these landscapes, it clears debris that is suffocating new plant growth. But unfortunately, fire also



Spring re-growth after a summer fire

comes with a cost.

Feeding chickens sustainably

Although our chickens are free-range for six hours a day, we are not convinced that there is enough food on the farm for their needs.

All chickens are descended from a pheasant, the Red Jungle Fowl (*Gallus gallus*) and originally evolved in a humid, rainy environment. They spent their time scratching through the decaying plant debris on the jungle floor. This debris was host to any number of tasty morsels for the free-ranging ancestors of the modern chicken.

Currently, we buy 28 sacks of grain a year to feed a flock of 24 birds. There is

no organic feed in Spain, and this is a concern to us.

We have been exploring the potential to generate our own feed. The grain that seems most appropriate is millet. It is a dryland plant, which matures well in our short-season climate. It is also highly nutritious, and the perfect size for new-born chicks.

After our harvest of millet this year, we made the following calculations. Based on feed requirements and the weight of a millet head, we would need 1,700 sq.m., say a field 42 m.sq, to generate enough feed for our chickens on a year-round basis, if this is all they eat.

This is certainly beyond the abil-



Chickens enjoying an evening grain feed before roosting for the night

ity of the land to deliver at the moment, but we will continue to work towards increasing our capacity to feed the chickens from our own land.

Special points of Interest:

- Feeding Chickens Sustainably
- Managing rodent infestations
- Financial planning for a sustainable future



A nine year old Mahonia in spring flower

Mahonia aquifolium

Our eight year old Mahonia aquifolium plants, otherwise known as the Oregon Grape, produced a significant amount of fruit for the first time this year. The plants were grown from seed in our nursery.

A shrub, currently some 33 cms high, it has been grown successfully in dappled shade under a Walnut tree (*Juglans regia*), with competition from a Viburnum (*Viburnum tinus*) and a Willow (*Salix sepulcralis*).

The resident Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) enjoyed the fruit before we did. The remaining clusters tasted sharp,

which accounts for them usually being cooked with sugar and used as a preserve. However, eating the fruit raw meant that we now have seed to grow more plants.

Although a temperate shrub, the Mahonia lasts through the summer drought with no more than 8 litres a week.



Impact of weather on flower scent

The roses had little of the perfume for which they are famous



We have a collection of ancient varieties of rose, dating back as far as the eleventh century:

Rosa Mundi, Quatre Saison, Duchesse de Rohan and Rosselliana, all known for their exquisite perfume.

Each year, we collect the petals when they are at

their most fragrant and dry them to use as scented gifts.

However, this year we believe due

to the wetter spring, the roses had little of the perfume for which they are famous.

The dry climate at this altitude is usually perfect for concentrating natural fragrances, but this year there will be no *pot pourri*.

By contrast, the honeysuckle flowered profusely for the first time in nine years and was highly scented.

Life begets life



This year was the Chinese year of the rat, and it has certainly seemed to favour all the rodents at Semilla Besada.

As we have mentioned in previous issues, we are reluctant to introduce a predator, when there are natural ones to be had, more specifically snakes

and raptors.

Our resolve has been challenged again this year through crop losses. But life begets life, and we have seen more snakes on the landscape, nesting Little Owls (*Athene noctua*) and we have even had a visit from a Western Polecat (*Mustela putorius*). All of whom prey on rodents.



David holding a Little Owl that had fallen down our chimney

Chickhood disease

The early success of this year was affected by an unidentifiable disease amongst all of the chicks, which reduced our population from 22 to 12.

The chicks first showed symptoms of listlessness, which developed into a crouched posture. The eyes were clear and there was no discharge from the nostrils. There was also no diarrhoea or blood in the droppings. The first casualty died within 3 days.

As these symptoms did not correspond to any of the usual chickhood diseases, we resorted to homeopathy.

In the first instance we administered Aconite 30c as a liquid using a dropper, three times a day. We then moved onto Arsenicum Album 30c. Although these remedies certainly prolonged the life of those chicks affected, only two chicks actually recovered once having contracted the disease.

However, every cloud has a silver lining! We have had three more hens raise 14 chicks over the summer.

This has been a bumper year for willing mothers, ten out of a flock of 17. Two of the early spring mothers went 'broody' again at the beginning of August.



Holistic Management Seminar



Breakfast in the farmhouse

Ulf Ullring from Norway, Antonio Scotti from Italy (resident in Spain) and Richard Wade from the States (resident in Spain) were

the participants in the second Holistic Management seminar this year.

They came from a diverse background, including

Permaculture design, ecology and sheep farming.

This provided a range of insightful experiences from which to

draw when considering the application of Holistic Management.

Two additional sessions were offered: one covered the use of Holistic Management in creating clarity and consistency in a Permaculture Consultancy and Design business, the other an introduction to the Project Planning process conceived at Semilla Besada to draw together the various strands of a multi-faceted project.

"This has been a very rewarding experience in a wonderful place"

Semilla Besada Blog



As Holistic Management is little known in Europe, despite the increasing need for its' environmental insights, it is important for us to use what tools are available to raise our profile.

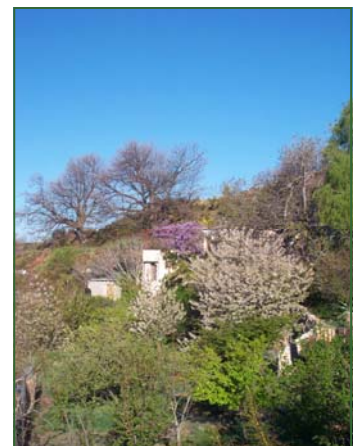
As we already keep a daily diary of all the activities on the farm, it has been easy to create an electronic version and so we have launched the Semilla Besada

blog.

Within 48 hours our entry appears on the first page of Google under the topic title!

It will also provide valuable current information on sustainable farming in a dryland context.

The blog address is: <http://semillabesada.wordpress.com>



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NEWS FLASH

Semilla Besada Powerpoint Presentation

Our management over the past nine years has begun to throw the surrounding landscape into stark relief. This presentation shows that although the location, climate and season is the same, the difference is management, and it shows! If you would like to have a copy of this presentation, please contact:

aspen@holisticdecisions.com

Ahora en Español

La revista de Semilla Besada es ahora en Español, comenzando del Primavera 2008. Para ver:

[2008_01_Spring_es.pdf](#)

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 'triple bottom line' health, where all decisions are tested for long-term social, environmental and economic sustainability. These decisions are then monitored to ensure that we take timely remedial action when we go off course.

We provide the only working model of Holistic Management in mainland Europe, and offer educational services to the local and international community in Holistic Management and Dryland Permaculture.

Holistic Financial Planning



Unfortunately most environmental design frameworks are long on land-based skills and short on economic and social ones.

Although when we came to Semilla Besada in 1999, we had arranged our finances so that we could buy ourselves 10 years of time, we soon lost ground.

Moving to another culture produced some financial surprises. The result was that we lost three years of the time we had bought ourselves.

That is, until we began to practice Holistic Management. Within a year, we had recouped those

three years, and within four years, we had bought ourselves another two years of time! And all this from the simple expedient of capping expenses.

This has profound implications for those who wish to eliminate debt dependency or save for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

At the end of each year, we review both our expenses and income. We refer back to our *holisticgoal* and determine our objectives for the next year. We then assess our potential income and expenses, brainstorming any other possibilities.

Once we are satisfied with our projections, we create a plan

for the entire year. At the end of each month the actual income and expenditure is entered and any differences noted.

This immediately puts us on notice to act! We need to either increase income or decrease expenses.

If you would like to know more about holistic financial planning please [contact us](#):