

Bustan Qaraaqa
Permaculture Farm and Guesthouse
Wadi Hanna Saad
Beit Sahour
Bethlehem
West Bank
Palestine



November 3rd 2010

Dear Friends,

With nights now dropping under thirty degrees celsius, it's time to unplug the fan, throw some blankets over the bed, and sweep the roof tops to collect the precious rain in cisterns. As winter approaches, scarcely a green leaf remains on the sun baked hills of Bethlehem. Defeated, life has surrendered to summer's brutal reign. Sweating under the relentless sun still burning as it slides low to the horizon, I climb the steep path from the wadi floor. Spring's withered blooms crunch underfoot as I weave between huge pale boulders and tumbled rock walls of the terraced hillside.

Today is different. Last night as we slept, the signal was given and the landscape transformed by the awakening of millions. There, thrusting from every crack in the rock, erupting from the thin dry soil, are the tall and slender spires of sweet white flowered sea squil, *Urginea maritima*. Earth's tendrils, delicate and erect, haloed in golden evening light, their pointed tips straining skyward in silent supplication. The plea of the living multitude, each bravely offering itself as a conduit, a lightning rod for the life-giving mercy of the cruel sky, a conductor to direct the flux of life energy to the dry earth.



The blooming of the *Urginea* heralds the first rain, and with it, the migratory birds return from across the Palaeartic en route to their southern breeding grounds in Africa. The Sea quill flowers in the land that has forgotten its genesis under the sea, has lost its shores and whose people are losing those old enough to have memories of the sea. The bright sunlight shafts through heavy clouds amassing on the mountain's ridge where cool winds blow. A roll of thunder breaks over the desert. Could this mean deliverance at last? Thirstily, we hope for rain, but this evening the

sky above is empty. Nearing the house I pass under the dusty dome of a big old pine. Maybe tonight it will rain, or maybe tomorrow.

Now, at the turning of the season I'll try to account for the summer months before my memories fade into a haze of heat and light. Come with me now back to the beginning of the month of June where I resume when last Spring's newsletter left us.

The season commenced with a jolt to the system by an act of shocking violence. A perhaps unnecessary reminder to those not living here of Israel's unchecked capacity for violence and immunity to criticism. A flotilla of vessels attempting to deliver aid to Gaza now four years besieged was attacked in international waters leaving nine dead. The survivors were detained for weeks before being deported. Unusually, news of this attack received international coverage, presumably because the victims were not Palestinian. Although summer has seen sporadic liftings of the siege, allowing a few specific commodities into the Gaza Strip and temporarily alleviating some needs, air strikes, home demolitions, abductions, and assassinations continue to be a common occurrence.

In colloquial Arabic the summer sunshine is referred to as 'nar,' literally meaning 'fire,' and fire is the thread with runs through this narrative. Wildfire both deliberate and accidental destroyed swathes of land, consuming crops and orchards across the West Bank over the past few months.



On June 2nd settlers torched the olives groves near Nablus. On the June 6th Al Fat'ata village's (near Qalqiliya) land was burnt by settlers who prevented the fire crew from fighting the blaze. June 21st hundreds of hectares of fruit orchards were burnt by fires deliberately set by settlers in villages around Qalqiliya. On July 26th more settler riots resulted in burning agricultural land becoming widespread wildfires by the 27th. By July 13th wildfires blazed unchecked across the West Bank. On the 30th of July settlers broke into a home and began to demolish it before burning the village's crops. On the 6th of August settlers burned more crops and orchards near Nablus. August 16th saw more fires, which became widespread by the 24th. Fires notwithstanding, during the second half of the month of August peak temperatures remained between 40 and 50 degrees Celsius, which is well above the monthly average even for the Palestinian summer. These days of blistering heat coincided with the holy month of Ramadan, a month of fasting, during which mounting antagonism stretched tolerance to its breaking point.

Meanwhile, the situation for residents of occupied East Jerusalem continued to deteriorate as settlers pursued a vigorous campaign to colonise the neighbourhoods of Silwan and Sheikh Jerrah. Closures, evictions, demolitions, beatings, abductions and assassinations regularly provoked clashes and street riots.



A round-up of just a few events from the [Ma'an News Agency](#) archive makes dismal reading:

02/6: A pregnant Palestinian woman miscarried after choking on tear gas during clashes in the streets of Silwan.

11/6: A man was shot dead at a checkpoint as he was driving an ill man to hospital.

16/6: 1,600 new settler homes were approved to be built in occupied East Jerusalem.

21/6: Construction commenced on 600 new settler homes.

13/7: Palestinian homes in occupied East Jerusalem were demolished.

26/8: Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem's Silwan neighborhood said settlers attempted to enter the Al-Ein Mosque early Thursday morning, sparking skirmishes that lasted until after sunrise. Israeli forces arrived as locals said they were attempting to drive the settlers out of the mosque area. Two settler cars were torched and several windshields smashed in the violence.

Outside Jerusalem, land continued to be appropriated, villages razed and homes demolished to make way for the construction of the separation wall and illegal settlement expansion. Foreigners and Palestinians protesting these actions (including Professor Mazen Qumsieh, a close friend and long-term supporter of Bustan Qaraaqa) were arrested and detained by Israeli forces. Almost every night in the first week of June, Israeli forces trundled into towns and villages in the Bethlehem district, conducting arrest campaigns with alarming frequency. After midnight, the streets of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, and the Duhaisheh, Azza, and Aida refugee camps rumbled with the wheels of military jeeps, trucks, bulldozers, and personnel carriers. Attacks on Palestinians by the Israeli military and settlers were commonplace throughout the summer months resulting in multiple hospitalisations. Heightened settler aggression was answered at the end of August with a terrible counter attack, as four settlers including a pregnant woman were shot dead by Palestinian militants near Hebron.

As the summer heat fades away, it seems we may expect more of the same and worse, as Israeli authorities refuse to extend a moratorium on settlement construction, and peace talks collapse amidst a welter of recrimination and lies. In the meantime, amidst this shimmering miasma of heat and violence, Bustan Qaraaqa has seen an extremely productive summer season.

Back in early June, the farm blazed in the glory of a thousand sunflowers nodding in the breeze as Alice and Tom left to attend a ten day Permaculture Design Course taught by Brad Lancaster and David Spicer and hosted by Murad Al Khuffash on his farm in the village of Marda. We used this opportunity to consolidate our knowledge of permaculture techniques and design processes, and to extend our network of fellow permaculturalists in the region. We learnt a great deal and enjoyed hosting our new friends at Bustan Qaraaqa after the course ended. Immediately upon our return, we overhauled and simplified the house's grey water irrigation system.

In mid June we visited the Bedouin tribes of the Judean Desert in the region most familiar to us from our regular walks across the desert. The sheikhs expressed the wish to grow sidr trees (*Zizyphus spina-christi*) for honey production by recently restored wadi cisterns. We spoke to several families and promised to return in the autumn when temperature would allow for tree planting.

In the last week of June, we were delighted to welcome Phil and Lorena back to the farm, after an epic cycle journey [byspokes](#) all the way from North Yorkshire (England). As two arrived, two departed as Lyra and Alice set out on their summer adventures, to return in early September. We are extremely grateful to Danna and Sarah, who took over the running of the guesthouse until Lyra's return. With the guesthouse in such competent hands, we were able to make great progress with existing project work as well as push our activities into new areas, including fish farming, tomato drying, wine making and earth building.



First we completed the new dormitory in a cool and spacious cave. The bedsteads were constructed of rubbish-stuffed tyres encased in cob and then plastered smooth and flat. Thus we sequestered the non-reusable rubbish we had been collecting (as a point of principle we deal with all our own waste in the farm), and created additional accommodation.



Next we built a beautiful compost toilet from scavenged materials suspended over the humanure composters. We gathered timber for the frame from building sites, scoured the dumps for palm fronds for the thatch, and collected bottles from the bars to fill the walls. Windows were constructed from plastic bags ironed into coloured sheets, cut and ironed again into designs which glow like stained glass in the evening sun. Moreover, the true beauty of this new toilet is that now we can we make our contributions directly: so no more buckets of humanure to carry and dump daily!



The Bustan Qaraaqa cistern was constructed to collect the winter rain and serve as a water storage reservoir to enable irrigation of the newly planted trees throughout the dry months. As such, it conveniently doubled as a refreshing spot for a swim throughout the scorching summer, and an as yet unrealized opportunity to make a foray into the world of aquaculture. After their triumphant pedal-powered arrival, Lorena and Phil set about making the necessary modifications to the cistern to enable future free fishy feasts.

The first important modification was a system to keep solid wastes out of the expensive and extensive drip irrigation network. The original design, a sealed swirl separator (constructed from a 1m³ water tank) located between the pump and the irrigation system, repeatedly failed with top-popping explosions as the pumping power was far more than even the most exotic and toxic adhesives could hold. In the end, a simple switchable siphoning suction system saved the situation: when irrigating, water can be drawn off mid-depth; alternatively, solids can be removed by drawing water from the cistern floor, through the separator and returned to the cistern. All was well, until... a flash of blue.... the only kingfisher in the desert had found us, and in the course of an afternoon relieved us of several hundred goldfish. The next important modification therefore was to bird proof the whole cistern with shade cloth.

After these myriad preparations, we were ready to stock the pool with tilapia fingerlings as a pilot project for raising edible fish on 'green-water' systems. Roy, a friendly Israeli fish-farmer living close to the River Jordan, agreed to supply us with several hundred young tilapia to get our project off the ground. The only problem we then faced was to devise a way of transporting this bounty through the oven-like heat of the Jordan Valley in August. Fortunately, Magda and Andrea, some friends of ours who travelled overland to Palestine this spring by Renault van,

generously agreed to be a party to this venture; thus saving us from the dubious pleasure of attempting to hitchhike in fifty degree heat with a box full of live fish.

After an entertaining diversion in which Phil, Tom and Lorena almost cooked themselves climbing a mountain in a (sadly unsuccessful) search for the seeds of the *Faidherbia albida* tree (an incredibly useful species that is almost locally extinct), the fish were packed into a water filled plastic bag that was then pumped full of oxygen and sealed. It then fell to Magda and Andrea to transport them back to Bustan Qaraaqa with all possible speed, stopping at every service station along the way to add ice to the water. Incredibly, the majority survived this adventure, and we can progress to the next stage in this project: establishing breeding populations of food fish in existing water storage infrastructure in West Bank communities. We are currently working with farmers in the nearby village of Artas to this end.



In early September, we were delighted to welcome Alice and Lyra back to Palestine in time to help bring in the olive harvest at Bustan Qaraaqa and prepare for the approaching tree-planting season. As we wait for the rain to fall, we are working on restocking the tree nursery and designing projects with community partners so that we can spring into action when the climate allows. If all goes well, we hope to plant at least 2000 trees this year. As ever, we are fairly short on funds to make this work easier to implement, and would appreciate any help anyone could give us. The annual report for May 2009 to April 2010 is now complete and available upon request for anyone who would like to see it. This report contains sample proposals for our tree-planting and fish-farming projects, so if anyone has any ideas on potential sources of funding, please be in touch.

As ever we are extremely grateful to the many people who have made our work possible this season: volunteers, financial contributors, logistical supporters, fund-raisers and friends! Special thanks to Sarah and Danna for doing such a great job looking after the guesthouse over the summer, to Steve, Roman and the Bangor and Anglesey Peace and Justice group for their fundraising efforts, and to Magda and Andrea for running our errands and filling their car with our fish.

Wishing you all joy and light wheresoever you may be, and hoping to see you again at Bustan Qaraaqa. Merry may we meet!

With love from

Tom, Phil, Lorena, Alice and Lyra
the Bustan Qaraaqa team

Support Bustan Qaraaqa:

As a small and recently founded organisation, we rely heavily on grassroots fundraising for much of our income. Small donations can go a long way in our low budget project. Things we are currently saving up for include:

- A roof for our soon-to-be-built greenhouse (about £500);
- Materials to rebuild and expand the tree nursery for next year (about £250)
- Funding to pay for transport of fish and trees to our community partners (lots!)
- Computers and cameras since most of ours have been stolen at this point! :)

Our PayPal account (info@bustanqaraaqa.org) is now functional, so if you would like to support us financially, you can now do it online; or send a cheque to The Old School, Lydfords Lane, Gillingham, Dorset, SP8 4NJ.

Have you considered becoming a regular contributor to Bustan Qaraaqa? Our monthly running costs amount to approximately £1500, broken up as follows:

Expense	Cost (NIS)	Cost (£)
Site rent	3000	500
Utility bills	450	75
Water	600	100
Transport	600	100
Staff stipends (3 people)	1800	300
Materials	2550	425
Total	9000	1500

We can raise £500-£750 in the guesthouse, so if 100-200 people gave us £5 per month, all the project expenses would be covered and we would not have to worry about writing grant applications, instead being able to turn our full attention to the real work of creating grassroots environmental change in Palestine.

If you would like to contribute in this way, please ask your bank to set up a direct debit to our UK account:

Bank name: Lloyds TSB
Account name: Bustan Qaraaqa
Account number: 00052001
Sort code: 30-93-45

For international transfers:
SWIFT code: LOYDGB2L
IBAN: GB30LOYD30934500052001

All contributions, however small, are gratefully received.