

Bustan Qaraaqa Permaculture
Farm,
Wadi Hanna Saad,
Beit Sahour,
West Bank
May 4th, 2009



Dear friends,

As spring turns to summer here in the occupied West Bank and the vegetation turns from a carpet of luscious green herbs to a thicket of spiky thorns, Bustan Qaraaqa has just passed its first anniversary (May 1st). So we thought it time to share with you our jubilation at still being here, and our thanks too all of you who have helped make this possible.

It is four months since our last (quarterly!!) newsletter, which left us struggling to continue our work in the midst of the horror of the Gaza invasion, waking up daily to the sound of fighter jets in the sky and going to sleep to the distant echoes of explosions that left over 1300 Palestinians dead.

Even during this difficult time and in spite of the feelings of despair and powerlessness that seemed to hang over everything like a miasma, we continued to move our project forward. We were able to raise enough money from Christmas guesthouse revenues to begin work on our rainwater cistern, pouring the cement base on New Year's day in a clear statement of our commitment to take practical and positive measures to tackle humanitarian and environmental problems even in the midst of tragedy.



During January we also tightened our ties with Abed, a farmer from the village of Al Wallaja who is resisting land confiscation by Israeli authorities; living permanently in a cave on his threatened land, without running water, electricity or sewage infrastructure. You can find out more about Abed's situation by visiting his new website: www.abedland.com.

Together with Israeli permaculture activists, we are supporting Abed in developing his site into a model for sustainable living, demonstrating that with a little imagination Palestinians can

take care of their own needs, such that access to infrastructure and resources need not be a potential weapon against them.



We felt particularly privileged to be able to come together with Israelis and Palestinians in this way during the Gaza crisis, working together to tend the land, planting trees and building, supporting Abed in his struggle for justice and demonstrating our commitment to working for a better future.

As winter turned to spring, we were relieved to see the end of a two month drought which had lasted through December and January (normally the wettest months), as the rain began to fall again. Wildflowers began to run colourful riot across the land, the almond trees came into flower, tortoises awoke from hibernation and began to wander in the valley once more, migrant birds began to appear, and seeds that had been lying dormant over the winter in our tree nursery began to germinate. Almost every species we planted (over 100) came up and we now have representatives growing up in the nursery to be used in agroforestry experiments on this site or future projects with the local community. This is the only tree nursery of its sort in the Palestinian Territories, and we are very excited to see it develop.



We worked hard to plant vegetable crops through the late winter to early spring season, developing companion planting systems and growing lettuces, cabbages, onions, potatoes, radishes, cauliflowers, broccoli, beetroot, spinach, strawberries, broadbeans, sunflowers, tomatoes, aubergines, peppers, melons, pumpkins and courgettes. Fortunately we also discovered (thanks to our landlady, Im Samir) that our land is awash with edible weeds during the spring, and we were rich in delicious greens (Hubeze, Ahwera, Lofetta and Jarjiya).



In February, work began in earnest to finish the rainwater cistern: building the walls, backfilling behind them with soil and rendering them with cement and waterproof paint to prevent leakage. This entire process took somewhat longer than we had anticipated, and we only finished building at the end of March (not quite in time for the majority of the rain!). However, we now have a 90 cubic meter cistern all ready to be filled, which we hope will allow us to both irrigate trees that we intend to plant this year as part of our agroforestry system, and also to farm fish (tilapia) to supplement our diets.



Meanwhile, on another part of the site, work on the illustrious 'Chicken Palace' (a partially collapsed cave that we have converted into a bird house) was finished and we were able to visit the livestock market and acquire residents. The Chicken Palace is now home to a collection of guinea fowl, pigeons and chickens which we will integrate into our system to provide us with food, manure for our crops, pest control and preparation of soil for planting.

And that just about brings us up to date. Of course, throughout all of our time we

have hosted many visiting groups and individuals on our site, including Palestinian students, youth counsellors, womens' groups and farmers and many international visitors and journalists; leading tours of the site and talking about environmental issues in the Palestinian Territories and grassroots environmental activism. You can hear a radio broadcast of interviews with Bustan Qaraaqa staff and volunteers by visiting this site: <http://flashpoints.net/index.html#2009-04-23> (it is the broadcast on the 23rd of April).

We are looking forward very much to the summer, when we expect to have many volunteers coming to work with us. Major projects we hope to get off the ground include Aquaculture (farming fish in our cistern), Green building (we were lucky enough to have an architecture student as a volunteer for a while who has drawn up extensive plans for an eco-building on our site built almost exclusively with recycled materials), setting up simple mushroom growing systems in caves, and expanding and strengthening our Green Intifada campaign (find out more by visiting www.bustanqaraaqa.org/al2/web/page/display/id/15.html).

We are also proud to announce that we have a new website now: www.bustanqaraaqa.org, where you can find detailed information about our projects and partners, as well as permaculture resources to help you set up your own initiatives if you feel so inclined. We are still developing this site, so if some of the links don't work right now or there are pages missing, please be patient with us!

As ever we are deeply indebted to our supporters and volunteers for their generosity and hard work. We have been blessed with many helpers this year, hosting over 60 people at the farm in addition to our regular Friday and Sunday volunteers (thank you so much to all of you and sorry that you are too numerous to be named!).

We are also very grateful to Ed Hill and Bristol Computers4Palestine for the donation of 2 computers, Davy Jones and Meg Ryan for the reams of compost matting, Mel and Roman Gawel for the beautiful pair of guinea fowl and the solar lights, Adam Haunch for setting up our website, Erika Benson for designing us an amazing building, Mazen Qumsieh, Imogen Bright and the Sydney Family Trust for generous financial contributions, our major sponsors the Allan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Foundation, and to Phil and Mary Gray for keeping things ticking over on the UK side.

Of course, it would not be a newsletter if we did not pathetically rattle our begging bowl at some point and say that all contributions, large or small, are needed and deeply appreciated. All the achievements of our first year (April 2008 until present) were managed on a total expenditure of £25,000 including all project expenses and staff salaries (4 full-time staff employed all year). Be assured that your money will not be wasted if you

donate to us, but will be used directly for project expenses or to support the living costs of the people who make Bustan Qaraaqa work.

If you would like to become a regular contributor, please write to us at info@bustanqaraaqa.org and we will forward you our bank details. If you would like to send a cheque, please make it out to Bustan Qaraaqa and post it to The Old School, Lydfords Lane, Gillingham, Dorset, SP8 4NJ, UK. If you would like your money to be used for something specific, you can find a 'wish list' of things we need on our website, on the Get Involved page.

That is enough begging for now! We wish joy and light to all of you wherever you may be, and hope to see you (again!) in Bethlehem – please do come and visit us if you are in the area.

With love,

Alice, Nick, Rania, Roman, Steve and Tom

x

the Bustan Qaraaqa team

