

Sacred Earth CBS
Sep 2017 to Feb 2018

Welcome to the latest bi-annual Sacred Earth progress report. The aim of this report is to inform all stakeholders about developments over the last six months, on-going site activities and plans for the upcoming quarter. It also includes short summaries of our various projects and outreach programmes, our achievements and the challenges we face.

Timetable highlights

September

4th: CBS AGM, held at the Cart Lodge in Horam

8th-10th: Sacred Fire Quest – around 50 people with over 20 questers, both teen and adults, going out on a 24 hour quest

18th-22nd: Michael Hall School Camp (36 students and 8 staff) with a focus on building social and emotional intelligence

23rd: Community Equinox gathering

October

12th: interview day for new member of leadership staff

21st-25th: ESA teen quest week

26th: ESA parent witness and celebration day

November

27th-1st Dec: Schumacher College – Phil undertook training on ‘designing for peace’ with 8 Shields

December

8th-11th: Deepening Nature workshop – tracking Intensive: 25 different people, mixed age and gender, building relationships and tracking experience through intergenerational learning

February 2018

Conservation project starts, with implementation of pond dipping deck, new shallow pond and boardwalks

4th Feb: Seedy Saturday (Sacred Earth stall)

5th Feb: Seedy Sunday (Sacred Earth stall)

9th Feb: CBS Envisioning Day

10th Feb: Tunbridge Wells farmers market (Sacred Earth stall)

17th Feb: Heathfield farmers market (Sacred Earth stall)

Community land project - management and administration

Over the last 6 months we have:

- bid successfully for a conservation grant from the Sussex Lund Fund
- put in a successful planning application with Wealden District Council for a new storage hut
- completed our monitoring and evaluation process with Coventry University (CAWR) and Just Growth
- completed our second year for the Demeter certification process with the Biodynamic Association
- welcomed Caroline White onto the team, as our new part-time communications manger
- completed annual tax returns
- changed to a new form of accounting software called Xero
- worked with a design company in Lewes to create designs for Sacred Earth and the ESA program (with some great bird designs for hoodies and t-shirts).

Biochar project

The biochar project is now firmly established, with an upgraded production system in place, new storage for different fuel and feedstocks, compost areas, and stockpiles. Our ability and understanding of how to make, process and ultimately sell has improved and is constantly being refined. In November, we welcomed Melissa McClements on to the team as biochar project support, working alongside Phil as project manager. We have undertaken market research and developed a new marketing plan. We are currently working on a new sales and delivery system and we plan to develop a university-led biochar and Ash dieback research project on-site (watch this space).

We now have three different biochar products in our Earth Elixirs range (see website shop for more details) consisting of:

- Biochar Compost Accelerator and Soil Conditioner
- Biochar Seed Compost Activator
- Activated Biochar Tree compost.

Melissa will soon be updating the biochar section of our website.

Hathor Farm

Our apprentice, Charlie, has completed one year as a farm trainee and has also been learning the charcoal and composting processes. At the end of January he is due to complete a three-day chainsaw course at Plumpton College, which will increase our capacity for woodland management on-site. From February onwards he will start his own farming tenancy with us.

Emile has now come to the end of his year's Just Growth funding but will stay with us a tenant farmer. We have been able to purchase him a tractor to make his job easier. Most of the arable and livestock fields are now securely fenced, he has bought some sheep and has a secure market for his Large Black pigs. We hope his business will continue to grow and we will do everything we can to support his sustainable and ethical farming enterprise on our site.

Land care, woodland management and stewardship

We have had various set backs on the land this winter as December and January have been very wet. As a result the earth is saturated, making it impossible to do any hard labour without destroying the soil structure that we work so hard to enhance. It has also affected partner contractors, who have not been able to get on to the land to extract the chestnut we need for our pond conservation project. No heavy machinery will be allowed until the soil is harder and it seems everyone is about a month behind their schedules.

We expect everything to get going again during February - with a concerted effort in time for the spring and the beginning of camp season in March. One thing, however, that will remain behind schedule is the building of the foundations for our new Nissan hut.

We hosted several visits from the Sussex High Weald conservation team in the autumn, and completed our annual winter land preparations with some strimming, cutting back and hedge trimming.

Conservation Project

This project starts in February with the construction of a pond dipping deck and boardwalk in the clay pit area. The new 25m boardwalk will run along the narrow

end of the lake, and a new shallow plant/insect habitat pond will be created in between our two streams.

As mentioned earlier, we are also seeking funding for a three-year partnership project to study the effects of biochar in fighting against Ash dieback. There is evidence to suggest that using biochar around the tree roots can protect against the disease. We're very excited by this and want to investigate further, as we have many Ash trees on-site and we're already seeing signs of dieback.

Education programmes

Phil and Victoria continue to lead and co-direct the educational and workshop programmes we run on-site, bringing in a variety of different teachers and facilitators to give a holistic approach to our delivery and participant experience.

ESA: Earth Steward Apprenticeship (teens – age 13-17yrs)

Our final quest week in October and the subsequent parent and celebration day saw 17 students complete the year-long course. We have started to take bookings for both 1st and 2nd year students on the 2018 course and possibly even a couple of third years who wish to support the newer students and continue learning.

ESA Junior

With last year's ESA junior fully booked, we are hosting another junior programme (10-13yrs) and this is filling up so fast we are adding additional staff so we can take larger numbers (around 20 students maximum).

Michael Hall School Camp

During autumn 2017 the education team successfully delivered our 8th year with a five-day camp for Michael Hall Steiner School in Forest Row, consisting of 36 students, two teachers, six facilitating staff and two support camp crew. It is a great source of income and our relationship with the school continues to strengthen. They asked for support around student maturity and engagement so together we focused the course on building emotional and social intelligence.

Farm Buddies

Our autumn season saw us deliver another set of day sessions over ten weeks for this smaller group. We had some wonderful experiences with the students, working on the farmland, feeding the animals, playing games and even doing some artwork - with one student painting a picture of the lake. This programme is due to resume in April 2018.

Adult courses and workshops

We delivered a wonderful intergenerational learning environment with our deepening nature series. We focused on the mysteries and art of tracking, hosting 25 people from ages 10 to 65 and everything in between. Mark Gilbert and Phil also delivered a living history day with a theme of the dark ages, fun play with swords and games. New courses and workshops all start again in March - see the website for more information.

Summary

Overall it's been another full and successful year - not without challenges, but all good learning. Personally I am really excited to see our conservation and biochar aims move rapidly forward. I feel the urgency now is greater than ever, with climate change, food security and Ash dieback – which sadly, we now know we have on our site. It's been a pleasure to see our young apprentice grow and learn about farming, woodland management and also the help he's given us during our nature camps. We plan to collaborate with various folks during 2018, with the possibility of hosting children parties, a home school farming group and a new conservation volunteer group. Looking forward to the unfolding of 2018, with our research plans and our Deepening Nature, Village Builders and Awakening the Senses courses.

With thanks to all our supporters, members and volunteers, For All Our Relations, Phil Greenwood.