



A SUMMER ODE TO THE COOL SEASON

The DC area doesn't really do winter. We don't celebrate it. It's not something that we want more of, any more than you would want more ice water in your boot. And here at the Sangha — we understand all that. No question: some winter days are best spent indoors. But even January and February have much to offer visitors who are willing to meet the outdoors on its own terms. Examine, for example, the intricate, barren stalks of a dormant meadow. Touch the brilliant green mosses that prefer the cold. Listen to the rain spattering on the leaves of a forest floor. And as our volunteers can readily explain, our cool season is also a wonderful time for field work. In some respects, it's a more comfortable venue than summer. For example, it's easier to see what you're doing when the leaves are down. Venomous insects are not going to ambush you. And sometimes, the invasives seem to slide right out of the soil. Seriously. (But maybe not all the time.) So from the warmth of June and July,

which take us as far from winter as we're going to get, this *Acorn* offers you a sampler of our activities during the last cool season. And we invite you to join us for the next one. Actually, there's no need to wait for the first frost. Join us any time!

Above, in March at Deerlick Park, a little "pocket park" along Braddock Road in Fairfax, students from the Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, in Bethesda, Maryland, pulled invasive ground-layer and stocked a deer enclosure with a variety of native trees and shrubs. Below, in April, at the Marie Butler Leven Preserve in McLean, kids from a "nature-based" group learned the joys of spring break at home: quality time with skunk cabbage, meeting some spring ephemerals, and pulling garlic mustard. These kids are developing serious field skills. One little boy even checked on a stem by asking "is this exotic?" Sign him up! We need more of these budding naturalists.



POOR COWS



From one extreme to the other! In our Tree Bank program area, last year was a hard one for tree-planting. Unusually heavy rains kept soils too wet to work, and a farm-labor shortage stymied us repeatedly, whenever things dried out. (The Tree Bank works along the Dominican Republic / Haiti border, on the Dominican side, to preserve native forest and improve smallholder farm incomes.) When winter arrived and the usual dry season emerged, we welcomed a break from the rains, only to discover, by December, that we were headed into a drought. Spring offered little relief; the drought didn't break until early June. (This photo was taken in March.)

Look how skinny those cows are. This is Cosme's herd. Cosme is a local farmer and an in-country Co-director of the Tree Bank. He doesn't own all these cows himself — most of them belong to his brothers — but he takes care of them all. During the winter he was afraid that some of his charges would starve to death. (Hay is far too expensive for small-holders and the family's alternative pastures are just as degraded as this one.) We're pleased to report that all cows pulled through.

In many rural Latin societies, cattle are a kind of equity and a sign of prosperity. But signs can be deceptive. These are supposed to be beef cattle (our project area has no dairy production) but it will take a lengthy stay in much greener pastures before they're worth their keep.

Cosme is fond of the cows but he knows that their situation is not "sustainable" — as we now say about nearly everything. Assuming that he could get his brothers' consent, is there a better use for this little parcela of toasted straw? Well, yes, there is, and to see it all you have to do is look upslope.

That little ribbon of green is part of Cosme's remnant native forest. (The forest is greener in the summer. It's semideciduous; some of these tree species lose most of their foliage during the dry season and leaf out again when the rains arrive.) Cosme is very proud of his native woodland, as he should be. This stand is riparian; the forest is protecting a spring. Or you could also say that the spring is protecting the forest! Of course, neither forest nor spring is wholly drought-proof but they're both in much better shape than the pasture.

As you can see, that forest directly abuts the pasture, but it might as well be on another planet. And what's true ecologically is also true financially. In its current form, that pasture is probably more of a liability than an asset. The forest, on the other hand, has been enrolled in the Tree Bank's Forest Credit program, which gives Cosme low-cost credit for his other farm projects. He also has some coffee growing in an area shaded by native trees, as part of our Rising Forests (R) coffee and cocoa program. So there's clearly a way forward here. And on Cosme's farm, as on many others, it starts with fewer cows and more trees.



At Rutherford Park, above, along Long Branch stream in February, it was business as usual. Our staff and volunteers paid several visits to this section of Rutherford, with the results that you see here. That's a lot of biomass! You might well ask: is this what success looks like when pulling invasives, or is this a kind of failure, since we have to keep coming back? We admit the ambiguities but would argue that we are succeeding here over the long term, at least when it comes to canopy and understory. The groundlayer is another matter. Below, at Dewey's Creek, in Prince William County, we are hosting a series of plantings and invasives control efforts this year. The event shown here took place back in April, and involved a set of very dense

plantings – Matt is calling them “habitat refuges” (at least until he finds a term he likes better). Dewey's Creek is important to us, not only in its own right, but also because it has provided an opportunity to test an unusual type of restoration planting. The idea is to plant the natives very densely, and plant a broad selection of different ones. Many species, little space. We're planting into deer exclosures. So far we have 10 exclosures, each about 14 feet in diameter and holding about 20 woody species and 35 forbs. Once the plants adjust to their surroundings, they should begin to colonize the spaces nearby, a process that can be helped by weeding. We're going to try to get Matt to write about all this in the next *Acorn*.

Our cool-season sites: Clare's Garden at Walter Reed, Deerlick Park, Dewey's Creek (2 events of which 1 is shown below), Dora Kelley / Holmes Run, Hidden Pond / Pohick Valley (EDRR search for incised fumewort), Laurel Hill (4 events), Marie Butler Leven Preserve (many events), Poplar Ford (1 big event), Rutherford Park (many events of which 1 is shown above).





Back in April, members of Girl Scout Troop 50258 did a “mixed mint” planting in the big meadow at the Marie Butler Leven Preserve, in McLean. The girls put in two widespread members of the mint family (Lamiaceae): common dittany (*Cunila origanoides*) and short-toothed mountainmint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*). Both species are said to attract butterflies. This was the Troop’s second tour of the Preserve. They did a planting there last fall, and for this summer they’re planning an attack on some of the Preserve’s invasives.



Below, also in April, Matt and Maeve inspected a handsome hazelnut at the Preserve. It’s part of a planting that we put in several years ago. As the daughter of Matt and Katherine, Maeve is our youngest staff member. She’s still in training – as are we all!



The Earth Sangha is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity based in the Washington, DC, area and devoted to ecological restoration. We work in the spirit of Buddhist practice, but our members and volunteers come from a wide variety of religious and secular backgrounds.

Want to contact us or make a donation? You can support our work by becoming a member. Membership starts at \$35 per year. Donations are tax-deductible. You can mail us a check (made out to “Earth Sangha”) or donate on our website. We will send you a receipt and include you in our mailings. (If your name and address are correct on your check, there is no need to send us anything else.) To donate specifically to our DC-Area programs, write “DC- Area” on the check memo line; to donate specifically to the Tree Bank, write “Tree Bank” on the memo line. [Contact us at: Earth Sangha, 5101 I Backlick Road, Annandale, VA 22003 | \(703\) 333-3022 | earthsangha.org](mailto:info@earthsangha.org). Complete program information is available on our website. Want to volunteer with us? We work with volunteers at our Wild Plant Nursery and our field sites in northern Virginia. For more information see our website or call Matt Bright at (703) 333-3022.

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