

Eco-Consciousness

Going Green: The “in” thing

I grew up with a farmer who believed in regeneration of life. The banana plant grows to give the banana fruit and before it dies, it gives away all her accumulated flesh and blood (nutrients) to its descendent. Nothing goes to waste; all is recycled from within for a new life. The banana tree taught my dad the concept of recycling, conservation, and of a “green” way of life. He used the grass under the banana plants as fertilizer, watered the plantation from the river fed by rain and snow melt, prepared his breakfast from fresh vegetables, olives and wheat bread, wrapped leftovers in banana leaves and cooled his fresh fruits in the water stream. He walked all day, and when tired, rested in the shadow of a tree.

All other plantations have a similar philosophy of life, and most of our parents and grandparents learned this simple yet sage life from their immediate surroundings. How and where did we go wrong? How did we lose our communication with nature, and when did we become a wasteful society detached from our roots? Nowadays, we eat processed food, we drive to work, freeze our fruits, live in a preconditioned and constant indoor temperature all year long, and in consequence, we generate tons of waste and emit tons of pollutants in the air.

The world is now competing over green designs, ideas and services. The search is on for innovative ways of life, from buying recycled materials to reducing use of pesticides and



Trees – the ultimate embodiment of a green way of life.

chemicals, promoting power conservation in every way possible, and prolonging the life of consumer products. The list goes on and on.

Where are we from the “green” “in” thinking and its application? The challenges are enormous, but if we start to look back, observe and contemplate our immediate past, we realize that “green” life is not a strange concept to our society and that our parents and grandparents are much more creative than we think. If we just copy some of the past habits and paste them (with minor modifications) into our lives and those of our children, we could make models that will introduce small increments of lifestyle changes into our offices and homes and would offer a tremendous service to our community. Collectively, our bunch of small green changes will create a very big difference in our surroundings.

NAJAT SALIBA

Power of Planting Initiative

ARBI SARKISSIAN

Ibsar holds its 2nd annual Mother's Day celebrating Mother Earth



As part of its “Seeds of Hope, Trees for Tomorrow” campaign, Ibsar marked its second annual Mother Earth Seed Planting Event at AREC on 20 March 2009. This year, the Center teamed up with Michelle's Earth Foundation (MEF), a US-based conservation charity, and coordinated AUB students volunteering with CCECS. Participants from AUB and friends of MEF coordinator Catherine Salzinger arrived to AREC for an overnight event that even included campfire folk music and storytelling. Early the next morning, the participants were given a brief tour of AREC. Workshops on soil preparation, transplanting, and seed planting were held. Volunteers also assisted in assembling an overhead sprinkler unit for the new tunnel house for this year's production. Altogether, the participants helped to plant nearly 3,000 seeds in just a few hours; a fantastic accomplishment indeed!



AUB students and Michelle Earth Foundation volunteers celebrating Mother's Day by planting tree seeds to honor Mother Earth.

Ibsar's “Plant a Heritage” tree auction helps reforest Lebanese villages



Auctioneer Nada Boulos presenting “products and services” offered to society by trees.

Taking on an original approach to environmental fundraising and awareness, Ibsar held a tree auction titled “Plant a Heritage” on April 22 at Clemenceau's Gruen Eatery in Beirut. The auction aimed at raising funds for planting trees in villages throughout Lebanon through Ibsar's “Power of Planting” program. It was based on the idea of bidding on what nature gives back to us.

Auctioneer Nada Boulos al-Assaad presented 25 “products and services” offered to society by trees. Services such as cleaning the air, reducing stress, protecting rivers, lowering ground temperature and beautifying neighborhoods were a few of the abstract concepts pitched to the eager crowd, with each concept being packaged into a bid to sponsor anywhere from five to a hundred trees.

In its coverage of the event, Lebanon's leading English daily, *The Daily Star*, wrote: “Instead of relying on sympathetic donors to supply the funds for planting new trees, the center decided to auction the trees off in what turned into a lively competitive event that made learning about the importance of Lebanon's biodiversity a fun and engaging experience.”

Donors receive an official certificate from Ibsar and information about: the name of village and site where their trees will be planted; the kinds and numbers of trees; the volunteers that will participate in the planting of the trees; and the local contact person (municipality representative). Donors will also be acknowledged by AUB and listed in the University's Donor Report as well as receive a regular newsletter of tree planting activities.



Guest at Ibsar's “Plant A Heritage” auction.

Wrote Ibsar Director Dr. Salma Talhouk in the event catalogue: “Our aim is to instill in the hearts and minds of the people of Lebanon that we all have a role

and responsibility in preserving nature in all its diversity. The program, Power of Planting, is tree planting in villages as the driving force to conserve the country's native tree species portfolio and encourage people to become guardians of their natural heritage...We have organized this auction to raise awareness about the importance of nature in our lives and about the importance of planting all of Lebanon's native tree species as they contribute to the diversity of our forests."

The auction, by acquiring new sponsors, brings Ibsar closer to its goal of planting 50,000 native trees and shrubs throughout villages in Lebanon by the year 2010.

HANIA JURDAK

Biokids



Ibsar organizes excursion in nature reserves for Palestinian refugee camps' children

In an effort to promote the value of nature among the fraction of our society farthest from its natural environment and mostly in need of experiencing nature in its life, Ibsar organized two nature excursions for Palestinian children of the refugee camps. These excursions were organized by Ibsar as part of its Biokids program, which aims at promoting biodiversity awareness and eco-responsibility among young people. The Palestinian children aged 9-13 were assembled in coordination with Al Majmoua - Lebanese Association for development - an independent, nonprofit Lebanese NGO from the camps of Bourj al Barajne in Beirut and Ain el Helwe in Saida.

On the 3rd of July, an average of 30 children from Bourj el Barajne rode on the first bus heading to Animal Encounter Reserve in Aley, where Mounir Bou Said talked to them about the importance of native animals to our ecosystem and these animals' participation in the preservation of local biodiversity. The children then had the chance to visit the site and have a close encounter with the native wild cat, pelican, bears, deer and native hyena. The children also had the opportunity to play with the sheep and goats and take pictures alongside them. After the exciting animal encounter, the kids all gathered in the shade for a traditional healthy lunch prepared by women from an NGO in Hermel. Finally, after playing educational games inspired by our environment, the kids gathered to paint a banner and take a souvenir photo under it.

On the 10th of July, children from Ain el Helwe camp rode the bus heading towards the Cedar Reserve in Ain Zhalta, Al Shouf. Within the reserve, the group was guided into a hike organized by local guides who had also prepared an educational program including lectures and games. Finally, the kids gathered in a shady area



Souvenir shot from the nature reserves excursion organized by Ibsar for Palestinian refugee camp children.

of the reserve to have lunch and paint a banner expressing their concern towards nature. The banner was hung on the bus heading back to Beirut.



Another souvenir shot from the excursion.

"We have aimed through these nature excursions for the children to start developing a taste of nature by discovering how essential it is to their health and happiness, hoping that as they grow older they would embrace it, cherish it and protect it, just like our ancestors have done to preserve this natural heritage for us," commented Samer Toutoungy, coordinator of the Biokids program.

These trips would not have been possible without a kind donation by AUB alumni who wished to remain anonymous.

SAMER TOUTOUNGY

Exhibitions

An evolution-themed exhibition celebrates Darwin Year and International Museum Day

To celebrate International Museum Day, and on the occasion of the year 2009 designated as Darwin Year, an evolution-themed exhibition titled "From Darwin's Days" was held at SLH garden, AUB, on May 18-19. The exhibition was organized by the Biology Department's Natural History Museum, in collaboration with the Biology Department and Biology Student Society. Students of the "Evolution" course exhibited posters illustrating their projects, which focused on Darwin's life and travels and on evolutionary ideas proceeding from Darwin up to current advances in molecular evolution.

The year 2009 was designated internationally as the Darwin Year because it commemorates the bicentennial of Darwin's birthday. It also marks the 150th year since the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. Thus the exhibition was also a tribute to AUB's plant and



School children visiting the exhibition.

animal collections. The founders of the AUB (the Syrian Protestant College in those days) were making their first scientific collections of plants and animals of this region at the same time when Darwin was examining his collections and publishing his work on these and on evolution. The history of the exhibited collections, currently being looked after by the Biology Department's Natural History Museum curators, is perhaps the one most closely linked to the history of AUB. These collections are as scientifically (and probably more) valuable today as they were when the collections were started.

The exhibition included preserved animal and plant specimens from the 19th century as well as more recent ones. Live animals from Lebanon were also exhibited. The exhibition was visited by several hundred students from AUB and from Lebanese schools. Some visitors enjoyed some "hands-on" experiences with some of the live animals. Some posters highlighted the role of some of AUB's founders, including Post, Bliss, Dodge and van Dyck, in the Natural History Museum Collections.

RIAD SADEK



School children visiting the exhibition organized by the Biology Department and Biology Student Society to celebrate International Museum Day.

Projects

Ibsar organizes IDRC launching workshop

As an initial step for the three-year multidisciplinary academic research and rural development project "Food and Health in Rural Lebanon: Options to Improve Dietary Diversity, Food Security, Livelihoods and Ecosystem Management" (held in collaboration with AUB and University of Ottawa), Ibsar held a three-day retreat and a launching workshop on 16 June 2009 at AREC in the Beqaa. The workshop brought together investigators from University of Ottawa and from AUB, as well as a representative from IDRC (International Development Research Centre).



Views from the launching workshop of the IDRC "Food and Health" funded project.

In addition to the academic aspect of the workshop, where methodologies for the three-year project's activities were mapped out, the workshop was a stepping stone for the researchers to reach out, contact and communicate with members of the local target communities through several occasions of interactions. Traditional appetizing foods and recipes specific to each community were prepared for lunch, dinner and coffee breaks by the women working in the respective "Healthy Kitchen" of each of the three communities: Kwakh, Aarsal and Batloun.

The last activity, the launching workshop, was organized in the form of an open poster forum. This allowed for one-to-one interaction between community members and investigators and offered a remarkable opportunity for members of the three local target communities, municipalities and NGOs who attended the forum to communicate and interact.

DIMA OUSTA

Ibsar's IDRC project launching workshop brings Canadian team to Lebanon

To attend Ibsar's IDRC project launching workshop, the project's Canadian team visited AREC (Agricultural Research and Educational Center) in the Beqaa for 3 days in June 2009. Back in January 2008, Dr. Malek Batal had joined the University of Ottawa in Canada and helped establish what is now referred to as the Indigenous Health Group. Our multidisciplinary group has for the most part studied local food strategies in northern Aboriginal communities in Canada, but with the addition of



Wheat harvesting in Aarsal (Beqaa): the Canadian team's first visit to the community and encounter with local farmers.

Dr. Batal, our group has been able to expand internationally. In 2009, our group formed a partnership with scholars from Ibsar and was successful in securing a major 3-year grant from IDRC studying the benefits, risks and viability of local food strategies in rural Lebanon.

At AREC, the Canadian contingent, made up of Dr. François Haman, Bernard Pinet (Ph.D. candidate), Dr. Malak Batal and I were warmly received, and after some ice-breaking exercises, felt right at home with our wonderful colleagues from AUB (Dr. Salma Talhouk, Dr. Zeina Kassaify, Dr. Omar Obeid, Dr. Jad Chaaban, Rasha Al Jundi and Dima Ousta) and our colleague from IDRC Dr. Lamia El Fattal.

The workshop exercises were critical in concretizing research objectives, methods and desired outcomes. Each researcher was given an opportunity to discuss what s/he was hoping to achieve in the study, which was followed by an interactive discussion with the group to align what was being proposed with overall project objectives. While there are challenges working in larger teams, especially teams spread out over three continents, immediate synergies emerged from the discussions, giving way to clear and manageable research goals. Central to all research discussions were the tangible effects our work would have on the populations with whom we are working, and the need to ensure measurable impact of our work.

The workshop culminated in an open forum with participating community members and stakeholders from Batloun, Aarsal and Kwakh. The forum was well attended. After brief introductions, community members were invited to meet the researchers and discuss the project. From my own participation in the discussions, it was evident that community members were proud partners in this initiative and openly expressed how important local culture and food practices are to their communities. For us, who were visiting Lebanon for the first time, we were

thrilled by the interest the communities had in the work, giving more meaning and purpose to our involvement in the study.

The excitement generated from the workshop only grew, as our Canadian group then had the opportunity to visit two of three communities at the end of the workshop. Along with our fabulous Research Coordinator, Ms. Dima Ousta, and equally fabulous local coordinators, Halimeh Hojeiri and Mahmoud (Sayyed) Fleiti, we did two one-day trips to Aarsal and Kwakh. We were simply overwhelmed by the amazing hospitality, the geographic and cultural diversity, and of course, the food. We felt privileged to share in such wonderful culinary traditions and honored to be part of this research program. Fieldwork, which involves two months documenting local food harvesting, preparation and consumption in the communities, will commence next spring. I can't wait to begin.

MICHAEL ROBIDOUX



Nawf – the brand name of textiles produced by Bedouin women from the Abu Eid clan.

An action-research project makes a difference in Lebanese Bedouins' lives

Within the context of projects designed to make a difference in marginal groups' survival is a recent action-research project titled "Livelihood of Lebanese Bedouins". The project's purpose was to determine recent livelihood changes of a marginal rural group in Lebanon and relate these changes to socioeconomic, political and ecological tensions. An important objective was to document changes in food consumption and relate these to the 2007-2008 food crisis and to the continuing rise in food prices. The project's main outcome is to identify interventions which can facilitate

Bedouins' integration into the modern food system with minimal disturbance, and which can facilitate the diversification of their livelihoods. The project is funded by the Henrich Boell Foundation.

The project methodology relied on a combination of field observation and interviews aimed at the collection of primary data, and on the review of secondary data such as historical references as well as scientific documentation. We investigated the general status of the Bekaa Bedouin in a cursory research, and we studied in-depth the livelihood status of two Bedouin communities, both belonging to the Abu Eid clan.



Bedouin woman showcasing textiles.

The findings of the research phase indicated that as Lebanon's agricultural economy shrinks, the Bedouins, whose life is traditionally associated with sheep herding, are becoming increasingly food insecure. Their transition to an off-farm livelihood is hampered by very high rates of illiteracy in the adult workforce. There are also few alternative sources of income available to Bedouin women.

To address these issues and facilitate Abu Eid Bedouins' economic transition, three sets of actions were taken. First, we organized a literacy training program for 20 women to help them enhance their social status and assets in the community. Second, we arranged for scholarships to attend English language training organized by AUB's continuing education center at AREC. And third, we facilitated the initiation of the women-led cooperative "Nawf" for the manufacture of traditional textiles using the Abu Eid clan's Bedouin designs. The cooperative is now fully functional and self-funded. Its products have been sold in London, New York, Paris and Beirut.

RAMI ZURAYK

Publications

PhD candidate Nisrine Hourì undertakes a study of local orchid species in Lebanon

It is estimated that Lebanon has more than 2600 species of wild flowers. Like most Lebanese, I didn't know or appreciate the beautiful nature we have in our country. Before 1996, I knew nothing about our flora. After we came back from the US in 1996, my husband, Dr. Ahmad Hourì (associate professor at the Lebanese American University Department of Natural Sciences) and I went hiking all over Lebanon. I started growing a passion for nature, especially flowers. My husband began taking photos of flowers we never knew we had. Our photo collection reached around 400 photos.

To learn these flowers' names and properties, we searched for field guides but did not find any. Thus the idea of publishing a field guide ourselves was born. Without



Photographic Guide to Wild Flowers of Lebanon (Volume I and II).

NISRINE HOURI

having a background in the field, I started learning how to identify plants and flowers. We published our first field guide, which contains 240 color photographs of different plants, in 2001. This guide was meant to be a companion to all those interested in nature-walking and a useful pocket guide for students of ecology and botany. By 2006, I graduated from the University of London with a Post Graduate Diploma in Biodiversity Conservation and Management. Our work did not stop there. In 2008, we published the second volume of the "Photographic Guide to Wild Flowers of Lebanon" which features another 400 photographs of wild plants from Lebanon.

With the help of Dr. Talhouk, my local advisor, I joined the PhD program in the University of Reading, which is working on the orchids of Lebanon. I started my field trips in January and kept going until the end of the orchid flowering season in July. I conducted 33 field trips in different locations from South to North, from sea level to 1700m of altitude. During these field trips, I collected more than 70 specimens for Post Herbarium, in addition to tens of live samples from which we were able to collect seeds for later propagation. In addition to the 25 identified orchid species in my previous trips, I located 12 new species this year. To make my work accessible to people from all over the world, I decided to build a website (www.wildflowersofLebanon.com). This way, I can share the beauty of our country's nature and wildlife with people outside Lebanon.

Tribute

Pharmacognosy and Botany: A tribute to Professor Emeritus Charles Abou Chaar (1915-2009)



Professor Emeritus Charles Abou Chaar.

Professor Abou Chaar joined the Biology Department in 1977 following the closure of the School of Pharmacy at AUB, where he taught for 40 years. At the time, he had taught most of the pharmacists in the Arab World. He was an international expert in medicinal plant chemistry, and he contributed to the development of pharmaceutical science.

Professor Abou Chaar was a founding member of the Lebanese Association for the Advancement of Science and the Order of Pharmacists, where he sat on the editorial board of the Lebanese Pharmaceutical Journal. In 1986, the Lebanese Ministry of Education awarded him the Education Gold Medal, First Rank; in 1993, he received the Bronze Medal of the World Food Day of the Rome-based FAO; and in 1994, he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Order of Lebanese Pharmacists and the United Nations FAO Memorial Medal on natural diversity.

We had the privilege to be his students and later worked with him as graduate assistants in many of his courses. Like most of our students nowadays, we did not appreciate plants then, but with the rich experience we had with Professor Abou Char, we learned to understand the importance of plants in our lives. We are trying to share this experience with our students, generation after generation.

He honored us by accepting to be an advisor and a member of the graduate committee for our Master's thesis. Professor Abou Char was not only an advisor; he was a mentor and a furtherer. He was exemplary as a scientist: meticulous, dedicated and highly organized. Nada Sinno Saoud, Lecturer in the Biology Department, Post Herbarium curator at AUB, recalls the following: "After his retirement, I asked him to correct my Ph.D. manuscript. I always felt that something will be missing if Professor Abou Char did not read my Ph.D. dissertation."

For those who knew Professor Abou Char, we are certain they remember how humble he was. He addressed everyone with great respect. Rasha Daouk, assistant to the director, and IBDP coordinator at IC, recalls: "I will never forget a piece of advice from Professor Abou Char explaining the type of relationship between a teacher and his students: be friendly but not familiar."

Dr. Abou Char stopped teaching at the Biology Department in 1985, but he never actually considered himself as a retiree. He used to visit the science library on a weekly basis and order new books that the library should have. He continued writing and publishing even after his "retirement". One of his latest publications was *The Woody Plants of AUB Campus*, which is a valuable documentation of all the woody trees and their location on AUB campus.

Professor Abou Char was for many years the curator of the Post Herbarium. During the most difficult years of the civil war in Lebanon, the Post Herbarium was under his supervision. We owe it to him that the very valuable plant specimens from Lebanon and the Middle East are preserved. When Nada assumed responsibility of the herbarium, Professor Abou Char would sit for hours stressing the value of the herbarium and that he is entrusting her with what he feels is one of the treasures of AUB. Professor Abou Char was right; preserving the Post Herbarium is basically preserving biodiversity in Lebanon.

Professor Abou Char, you were, and always will be, an inspiration to all your students and colleagues. You were one of a kind and you will always be dearly missed.

RASHA DAOUK AND
NADA SINNO SAOUD

Send your news, articles, and editorial comments to
ibsar@aub.edu.lb.

Visit the IBSAR website at www.ibsar.org.

Edited by Hania Jurdak

Designed and produced by the Office of Communications