

Title of Project: Restore Peace with nature
Country: Bolivia, Plurinational State of
International Students House
Paola Nogales-Ascarrunz/ Senda Verde
https://sendaverde.org/thecall_projects/butterfly-sky/

Summary

The 'Restore Peace with Nature' project contributes to peace by bringing together community members to restore their forest, through the promotion of breeding stingless bees and releasing a main pollinator such as butterflies. Therefore, the community will improve its economy through the sale of honey and promoting ecotourism, but also helping the forest and native trees to continue with its ecological functions. Furthermore, the community will be a model in the region of sustainable and peaceful growth with nature.

Project Description

How did you decide what issue(s) you wanted to address and what approach(es) or strategies

Deforestation has had an impact on the daily lives of local communities and has destroyed the relationship between people and nature. People are now exploring for options that will reestablish this connectivity. In this regard, reintroducing native pollinators is the first step. We advocated boosting the number of butterflies and stingless bees in the forest to restore its ecological function. Furthermore, honey from stingless-bees helps to strengthen people's economics, making this endeavour a win-win situation for everyone. We are looking for that once the local indigenous will have a closer relationship with the butterflies, because they participated or were more involved in the rise and growth of these.

Why did you choose your host site? In what ways did local relationships support you or contribute to the project?

Since 2019, I have been a volunteer with the Senda Verde wildlife refuge. Vicky Ossio started the concept of rewilding at the animal shelter. As a biologist, I was drawn to this project on conservation at a wildlife shelter. But then we realised that we could expand this approach to include the indigenous communities surrounding the refuge, and to promote forest restoration as well. The local people of the Aymara indigenous group "Santa Rosa del Vagante" were eager to get involved and start pollinator farming in their community. However, they did not have any experience with beekeeping, and this activity required materials (such as bee boxes) that are expensive in local currency. As a result, when we became aware of the Davis Project for Peace, we did not hesitate to involve this wonderful community that is determined in restoring their forest.

What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and why?

Due to health concerns, I was unable to travel to Bolivia. However, I maintained the lead of the project with everyday online meetings. We had excellent collaboration with the Bolivian team, which helped keep the project to be on schedule. On the other hand, money intended for the trip to Bolivia was transferred to the acquisition of equipment to monitor the presence of Wildlife in the Santa Rosa de Vagante forest. This will be followed with presentations to young people of the community.

Did other fundraising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?

This project did not receive other fundraising efforts. This constituted a pioneer conservation project in the zone that brings together people with nature. More than fundraising efforts, I am really grateful for their time, effort and talent that people invested in this project. For example, Mayra Medrano and Martin Apaza put all their effort into growing and taking care of butterflies for this event. Also, Javier Amaya, Odell Kittelson and Raul Navi worked with the establishment of bee's colonies and taught the community about bee breeding. Last but not least, Kristi Odom gave her talent to take pictures.

Are there opportunities for continuing your work on this issue? If so, please describe.

People in Santa Rosa del Vagante were so pleased with all the lessons and learned during this project that they want to continue raising their own butterflies. They are really motivated by rescuing eggs from plants growing in the side of the roads that are frequently cut. Furthermore, they recognised the worth and the importance of native bee honey for the forest and they would like to establish more colonies as well as begin selling this organic honey. Therefore, we considered that is an important and unique opportunity to continue with the project, therefore we planned to set a monitoring system for wildlife, accompanied by diffusion and environmental education to young people, and of course, keeping and improving the raise of butterflies and bees. We hope that in the future this could be replicated.

Reflection

How do you define peace?

Peace means being kind to oneself, one's community, and all the beings around one, realising that plants, animals, and humans can all coexist harmoniously.

In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-term? Long-term?

This initiative reinforced the bonds between the community and nature. In the short term, we hope they will begin to produce honey as another economic source for the community (instead of deforesting the forest for coca crops). The butterfly rescue is currently beautifying the community while also playing an ecological function as pollinators. During the release of the butterflies, people of the communities have a nice time, laughing, and creating good relationships with their neighbours. In the long term, Santa Rosa de Vangate will be a model for other communities. The forest will begin to be recovered, and wildlife will approach the village, providing opportunities for ecotourism. All the activities will reduce conflicts and forest loss.

What did you learn about the dilemmas, challenges, or conflicts that underlie the targeted issues or utilized approaches/strategies?

I've learned that working with teams is vital for achieving a goal. Indigenous peoples have few opportunities to reconnect with nature. Our strategy of cooperation, working with a recognized wildlife rescue centre, local people and committed professionals were a key component of the success of the project.

Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you?

I have learnt that there are people who want to make a difference in the world, that many people disagree with the way we damage nature, and that community members have a wealth of knowledge from which we can benefit and learn. Now I want to continue bringing about change in communities that wish to restore their peace with nature in order to live a happy life.

Personal statement

A brief statement, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing the value of this project and what you have learned. Indicate the student's name (yours or your teammates') for quote attribution.

We need to restore our peace with nature, all in this world are important starting from the little stingless bee.

Paola Nogales-Ascarrunz