

Land for Life

Fundación Refugio

Circular No. 17 October 2012

A depressing climate

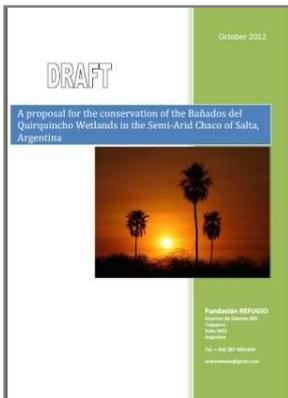
During August, one of the driest months of the year in the Chaco, a freak hail storm hit La Union, one of the towns we visit regularly as part of our work. The hail was so strong that in some places it stripped trees of their leaves and bark and killed domestic animals. During September, hot gusts of winds in excess of 100 kilometer/hour roared down from the Andes and crashed into Salta causing damage to infrastructure and spreading fires across the hills that surround the city. These displays of extreme weather remind us that we live in a fragile and changing world, and of the increasingly urgent need to care for creation. It was therefore somewhat depressing to learn this month that our attempt earlier in the year to convince the authorities to put the brakes on the destruction of a further 30 000 acres of forests had absolutely no effect.



Forest fires burn on the outskirts of Salta city

We will continue to monitor deforestation, but will need to revise our strategy and tactics when it comes to challenging deforestation projects. A step in that direction will be the development of a Geographic Information System (GIS) database that will help us to monitor and report deforestation in a more timely and accurate fashion (see below).

Land search – urgent prayer needed.



We have completed a proposal aimed at raising funds for the purchase of *El Saladillo*, a strategically located plot that extends over 24 000 acres of the Quirquincho (armadillo) Wetlands (see previous newsletter). We are grateful to Felicity Hall, our UK-based communications manager, for her help in drafting and editing the document whilst she visited Argentina during August. The proposal will be presented to the WLT later this month. In the meantime, we continue to search for other plots that may be of interest

As we write these we lines have just heard that other parties have become interested in buying *El Saladillo* so we are now in a race against time. We are obviously not competing on equal terms here as we do not have any capital, so we would therefore ask that you pray for this initiative, as it is very much a step of faith for us.

Our ongoing search for land reveals time and again that there are people out there who are seeking to grab lands off local criollo families and indigenous communities. This is worrying, yet not altogether unexpected, as the expansion of agriculture has driven up land prices. This is leading to an increase in conflict, which in turn makes conservation work all the more challenging.

Research

Following an analysis of the results of the pilot bird survey work we have come to realize that contrary to initial expectations, the presence or absence of bird species on its own will not serve as a good and robust indicator of environmental quality in the Chaco. The bird species in the Chaco are highly adaptable to changes in ground cover and climate and we are, therefore, adapting the method based on consultation with local wildlife specialists.

We have submitted a funding proposal to the Diocese of Texas (USA) for support for developing our technical ability to monitor deforestation across the Chaco. This will enable us to keep tabs on an ever more complex scenario and, very importantly, to provide information that will help local communities and organizations as they struggle to protect the forests within their respective localities. Please pray for this initiative, especially that we will be able to find the right people to help us deal with the technical aspects of the project.

Other work



Felicity meeting Tobas en route to Churcal

Andrew travelled with Felicity to visit the Toba Indians that his father grew up with. The 1200 km round-trip from Salta to the small village of El Churcal (equivalent to London - Edinburgh and back) gave Felicity (a translator herself) the chance to meet Indians who have been faithfully supported by her home Church (Christ Church in St Albans) as they worked on translating the bible into their mother tongue.

Andrew and Marcelo will be travelling shortly to the Chaco, this time to a place called El Manantial, close to the Los Palmares Reserve. They will be attending a meeting convened by the Protected Areas Authority to share their proposed management plans for the area surrounding the reserve. The recognition of Land for Life as an emergent player on the scene is encouraging, and largely due to Marcelo's links.

Andrew has now been formally appointed to represent the Diocese of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay) on the Anglican Communion Environmental Network (ACEN). He also travels to Jamaica on the 28th October to participate in the Lausanne Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel, to be held in Jamaica at the end of October.

Family news



We are grateful for the fact that Tomas' health continues to improve and that he seems a lot happier these days than he has over the previous months. Cecilia has travelled to Cordoba where she is participating in an international dance competition (last year her group came first in their category). She is continuing with the process of applying to UK Universities, a task that is not so straightforward when done from Argentina.

Please see our blog <http://www.leake.blogspot.com.ar/> for more news on the family.

*Andrew meeting Nano'ole, his father's
Toba nanny, now close on a 100 years old.*

Prayer Pointers

- Please continue to pray for success in raising the funds required to acquire *El Saladillo*.
- Pray for guidance as we adapt the bird survey, so we can continue with the study.
- Pray for courage and wisdom as we speak out against the destruction of the Chaco's environment.
- Pray for Andrew and his trip to Jamaica, and for Maria who will be holding the fort while he is away.

Contact: andrewleake@gmail.com