

The Miramichi Naturalist - Trees *by Leonel Richard*

Little things can often make a big difference where nature is involved. If a huge tree can grow from a tiny seed; then we have to believe in nature's potential. Such as it is in nature, we sometimes see this in people as well. Someone comes up with an idea and it's pushed along by a commitment until time and effort transform it into a movement.

In the early 1950s a French author by the name of Jean Giono wrote a short story about a shepherd who lived alone in the lower Alps of Provence in Southern France. The shepherd's name was Elzéar Bouffier and he lived with his faithful dog in a small stone house in the dry windy mountains of Provence. He believed that this barren land could be given life again if he replanted it with oak trees.

Year after year he planted acorns while he and his dog watched over his flock of sheep. Over many decades the trees grew tall and the forest returned. With the soil protected from the wind and the hot sun, a transformation began. The streams started to flow again where water had not been seen for centuries.

In 1987 a Canadian animator Frédéric Back made a short film of the story and it won an Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film. It was that film which inspired many people worldwide to plant trees. In India, in China, in Kenya and South America, forests were planted to reduce erosion and to feed people and this, not by governments but by individuals or organizations.

The short story inspired many of us and even though the author admitted that it was a work of fiction, we all want to believe that Elzéar Bouffier and his great oak forest really existed. The story was called "L'Homme qui plantait des arbres" or "The Man who Planted Trees".



Oak Leaves

In many parts of the world people forget how important trees are. Our forests continue to give us new medicines to cure us when we are sick. They give us pure water, clean our air and supply us with more natural resources than they can afford but we still have not learned to give them the respect they deserve.

There is still a little time left to transplant trees before winter. Trees are dormant now but their roots are still alive and will continue to grow until the ground freezes solid.

Tree seeds such as acorns, butternuts, ashes and some maples can be planted directly in the ground. They should not be planted too deeply and to be given a chance to grow, they should be sown on disturbed ground which means exposed mineral soil.

This is the time of the year when the Black Bear puts on the pounds to prepare for hibernation. Other animals that sleep out the winter are Eastern Chipmunks, frogs, turtles, snakes and most species of mice.



Black-capped Chickadee

Some birds that visit us during the winter have already arrived among which are the Bohemian Waxwings. Others will follow later such as Pine Grosbeaks, redpolls, Northern Shrikes and crossbills. There is always a chance to spot a Snowy Owl also.

Bird feeding is a good way to enjoy nature during the long coming winter. It's a great way to learn and stay active. Observing nature has fascinated humans since thousands of years. The pre-historic cave paintings of animals were the very first works of art in the known

universe. Even today, nature remains one of the most common subjects of painters and photographers. "The Man who Planted Trees" is available from the National Film Board of Canada or can be viewed on the internet.



Squirrel-proof Bird Feeder!

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