

BOOK REVIEW

Green Phoenix: Restoring the Tropical Forests of Guanacaste, Costa Rica

William Allen. 2001. Oxford University Press, New York, 286 pages, \$35.00, ISBN 0-19-510893-0 (hardcover).

Approximately 15 years since Daniel Janzen published a restoration plan for the dry forest landscape of Guanacaste province in Costa Rica (Janzen 1986, 1988), and more than 30 years since the Costa Rican government established Santa Rosa National Park, the seed from which this restoration effort has grown, it is time to evaluate the accomplishments of this wide-ranging restoration program and to apply the understanding gained to restoration efforts all over the world. Janzen's (1988) proposal is one of very few large-scale restoration plans published in academia-oriented literature. As it sketches the components of a restoration program it provides significant ecological background, articulates clear goals, and integrates the regional socioeconomic situation and local residents into the restoration plan. On the negative side, its approach to restoration is cast at a large scale and lacks detail. Of greater concern to restoration ecologists and practitioners is that there is nothing in the ecological literature documenting the implementation of this plan or its outcomes. Although it does not fill this gap, *Green Phoenix* provides a narrative history describing the genesis and development of this remarkable collaborative effort to restore tropical dry forest. It offers scholars and practitioners of restoration ecology, frequently under-experienced in the social, political, and commercial sec-

tors, key lessons on the human ecology of restoration.

Allen, embarking on a career as a science journalist, set out "in search of a unique, important story in the conservation wars," and in *Green Phoenix* he tells the story of the development of what is now the Area de Conservación Guanacaste (ACG) [Guanacaste Conservation Area]. The book is divided into three main sections presented in loose chronological order, bracketed with a stage-setting Prologue and an evaluative Epilogue. In addition to culling information from the news media, the scientific literature, agency and government publications, and unpublished lectures, letters, and fact sheets, Allen conducted formal and informal interviews with people most intimately involved with the establishment and development of the ACG. Vignettes of Allen's own experiences exploring the Guanacaste landscape in the company of ecologists introduce many of the chapters, effectively imparting his awe for tropical nature and the people who are working to understand, conserve, and restore it. He also includes a bibliography citing the written documents he employed for each chapter, which will be of interest to those wishing to learn more about the natural history and political history of the Guanacaste region.

One of the primary strengths of this book is its integration of the history, politics, and economics involved in this conservation and restoration effort with the natural history and ecological setting that motivated these efforts. The broad scope of Allen's story is refreshing. Accounts of conservation and restoration projects too often ignore the human context, or they rely on demographic information to convey this part of the setting. Although I have spent many weeks working in the ACG over the past several years, Allen's brief history of the Guanacaste region from European colonial

campaigns through the end of the twentieth century, which he links to changes in land-use history and regional biota, filled many gaps in my knowledge. Allen's description of international, national, regional, inter-agency, and inter-personal politics is essential reading for anyone planning or engaged in restoration activities. Similarly, his observations on the culture of international non-governmental conservation organizations are informatively amusing, and his detailed explanation of exchanges involved in "debt for nature swaps" clarifies this key contemporary funding instrument for most of us not well versed in international economics.

Through excerpts from and reflections on his many interviews, combined with observations of his subjects in action, Allen focuses the reader's attention on the people involved in generating, sustaining, and developing the ACG. He emphasizes the point that specific individuals, with their unique talents and expertise, have brought this reserve and its restoration program to life and have fought for its survival. Allen casts Dan Janzen as the focal hero in his story, presenting him as a man driven by his beliefs to serve the world through his insightful understanding of ecology and human nature. Although this war-hero image may inspire the lay reader, its lack of dimension and tendency to ignore (and occasionally misattribute) the contributions of Janzen's contemporaries has the potential to alienate an ecologically informed audience. Without a doubt Janzen deserves recognition for his numerous contributions to ecological understanding and for his persistent campaign to conserve and restore forest landscape in Guanacaste. He also merits profound respect for taking the professional risk of engaging his vocation in a passionate way, of being a charismatic representative of the natural world, a trait that likely

inspired Allen's identification of Janzen as a hero. Unlike many journalists and ecologists, Allen recognizes the vitality of the collaborative partnership between Winnie Hallwachs and Janzen, and he affirms the importance of Hallwachs' role in furthering the development of the ACG. Although their efforts and contributions are not described in proportion to those of Janzen, Allen also introduces the reader to the astute group of Costa Rican biologists, resource managers, and public servants, whose work laid the foundation for the creation of the ACG. I wish he had balanced his attention to these individuals with his hyperbolic characterization of Janzen. Similarly, Allen gives short shrift to the people meeting the managerial, economic, and political challenges required for the contemporary maintenance of

the ACG and for manifesting its education and restoration programs.

Green Phoenix's appeal to lay audiences is likely to be substantial: Allen's storytelling style, strong character development, and a plot that places the campaign to restore the Guanacaste forested landscape in the context of human interactions (ranging from individual vocations to international intrigue) make for an entertaining read.

Although I would include *Green Phoenix* on a list of optional supplemental readings for a Restoration Ecology course, its utility for students, researchers, and practitioners of restoration is limited by its focus on individual characters. In addition to this narrow scope and its accompanying lack of comparative analysis, Allen engages the restoration program itself in only the broadest terms. We still await a critical eval-

uation of the accomplishments of the ACG-based restoration program that will help us design effective biocultural conservation and restoration programs elsewhere and will illuminate the path for the ACG itself.

Julie Whitbeck, *Biology Department, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA, U.S.A. Email julie_whitbeck@alum.swarthmore.edu*

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