



## Points of Interest

Included in this issue are two topics of importance.

The first is in answer to the question: Are books obsolete (TEAK 21 Bulletin Vol. 1 (2) Sept. 2004)? Mauricio Pineda makes the case for an e-book for teak. This is a concept that TEAK 21 would like to see developed.

The second topic, by Raymond M. Keogh, deals with bringing sustainability into centre stage and the need to grapple with the apparent contradictions that this might entail.

## AN E-BOOK FOR TEAK

Today a major driving force within society is information. Knowledge is the basic resource for development.

However, we live with an "overload of information". The annual rate of growth is around the 10% while the use of this information has been 3-4%. This phenomenon is known by some authors as infoxication.

Computer evolution has revolutionised the traditional concepts about books, libraries, studies and learning methods. Personal computers, access to data bases, compact disks as well as the appearance of the Internet has modified our traditional perception of information use. Electronic technology is clearly the way forward for information management.

In the past, technical books have been produced in order to satisfy the lack of information about teak, often produced in different languages for different countries. Information loss has occurred because books become out-of-print; they become outdated rapidly; they are not available to those of a different language.

Because of the world wide importance of teak, there is an enormous demand for immediate up-dated information from reliable sources.

This situation begs the question: Will it be possible to create a user-friendly international system for compiling, storing, retrieving and processing of information for tree species?

Technically the answer is positive but many things can go wrong. For this reason, the system must be based on a set of sound working principles. As a guide to these principles the following should be considered:

- The oldest references, which contain abundant valuable knowledge, is the basic building blocks of the system;
- Added to old references is new material on a once-off entry basis; information is not repeated;
- The essence of new knowledge from the scientific literature is extracted and stored;
- Additions are continually

reviewed and updated by an expert panel;

• Status of held information is indicated to the user (e.g. controversial, incomplete, under review, etc);

• The e-book depends on many specialists in their fields, not a single writer; in all cases the authors' copyrights is respected.

The development of such a system depends totally on a cooperative effort among the different entities such as universities, NGOs, managers, professionals and producers. The real question is not technical but: Are we capable of this type of co-operation?

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## SUSTAINABILITY CENTRE STAGE

The traditional use of fossil resources as fuel for economic development over the last century has proved to be highly successful. This achievement has created an understandable lethargy - on the part of politicians, business leaders and, indeed, ordinary people - to make a radical and painful change to an alternative sustainable system.

Things seem to work pretty well as they are, despite dire warnings about climate change, loss of species and growing human poverty. These gloomy issues occupy increasing space in the media, but they pass - allowing the world to get on with business-as-usual.

On the other hand, those of us who are already working in conservation or in activities that are closely related to sustainable development sometimes take the view that what we are doing is right and everyone else must follow and will follow sooner or later. Life is not that simple. There is no guarantee that the rest of the world will change just because the messages are based on solid scientific foundations and are pumped out continually. Worse - the world may change its chant but

continue much as before.

To agree to any change, people must want change. Change may arise out of fear. If the Gulf Stream switches course tomorrow and plunges Western Europe into cold winters, many more will take climatic warnings seriously and politicians will feel more powerful to apply unpopular penalties and disincentives against unsustainable approaches. It is preferable to prevent such a climatic catastrophe from happening before even more drastic and painful measures are forced upon us. But change is already proving a hard pill to swallow.

We live in a complex world and must bring our message to the centre of human activities. All our efforts must complement and support wider sustainable development in a balanced system that satisfies the goods and services required by humanity in the long run. Critical voices in the wilderness can be effective but words must be translated into action at some point. Action involves working with apparent contradictions alongside and shoulder to shoulder with those who do not necessarily share our ideas.

Elimination of poverty is a case in point. Success will not be achieved by isolating the poor from the rich and creating separate activities for the marginalised as is happening in current development projects. We must bring the poor to the table on which decisions are made and search for methods that allow rich and poor to gain mutually from the outcome.

We must engage the large scale contaminators in supporting efforts to take care of the environment. We must embrace not marginalise industries like oil, transport, construction, energy and the highly influential motor sports. Together we must seek realistic solutions. In a phrase, the real challenge is to bring sustainability into centre stage.

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