PASSION

A celebration of lifelong learning
**ADOPT A BUFFALO!**

At our farm, we have one male and four female buffaloes: Boon Mee, Big Mama, Jan Pen and Gluay and Jean Genie. Whilst they are certainly the biggest, most hard-working animals on the farm, they are also the most calm-natured! Their typical day consists of grazing the fields, ploughing the rice paddies and bathing in the ponds. They’re also known to love a good mud-massage!

If you’re interested, scan the QR code or contact us at farm@threegeneration.org

**RENT A FAMILY PLOT**

Visit us at the farm anytime!

THB 750 per month

You will get a 20 x 2m size plot where you can plant anything you want.

Grow your own food! We will provide you with water, organic compost, natural pesticides and tools from the farm.

**ADOPT A GOAT!**

We have several goats and kids in our farm who all love to spend their day in the open fields around the farm, grazing alongside our buffaloes.

Our goats like to snack on young bamboo leaves and love to be petted by our students. But beware; they love to chew on your clothes as well!

If you’re interested, scan the QR code or contact us at farm@threegeneration.org

**ADOPT A TORTOISE!**

Stella is our only reptile friend at the farm. She is a 10 year old African Spurred Tortoise, and is now a major part of our farm family.

She loves to meet new people and play and interact with them - she is very responsive and friendly, and really has a personality of her own!

She is a herbivore and loves to be fed flowers, cucumbers, watermelon, long beans, and lettuces.

If you’re interested, scan the QR code or contact us at farm@threegeneration.org
The Three-Generation Community is a unique educational centre. It offers Prem Tinsulanonda International School (an IB World day and boarding school), a dynamic Visiting Schools Program, the exciting Traidhos Camps, an artists’ residency program, an educational farm and a converted rice barge used for educational environmental studies on the Chao Phraya River in and around Bangkok.

Editorial
The English novelist E. M. Forster once wrote, “One person with passion is better than forty people merely interested.” This highlights the power of passion; its unique essence that drives us to action almost without consent. Passion brings an endless supply of motivation making tasks easier and the results more fruitful. Best of all, passion gives us a joie de vivre and provides us with meaning. Our passions matter because they can remain with us across a lifetime, always pushing us forward and shaping who we become.

The start of a new academic year brings new opportunities and the possibility of discovering new passions. At Traidhos, the experiential learning methods we practice offer participants complete immersion in a range of adventurous activities. Each student is sure to find something that they can take back home and build into their everyday lives. It’s a joy to work in a field that you’re passionate about, but working to inspire passion in others is even better.

Many passionate writers have contributed to this issue. It is said that you write best when you are passionate about a subject and that has certainly proved true here. We have articles about discovering new passions for birdwatching and cooking under unusual circumstances; about unusual subjects of passion, like spiders; and a passionate argument for the need to slow down and simply observe. There is also an article introducing an eco-friendly solution to non-recyclable plastics, Karen and Hmong writers tell us about their Hill Tribes, and there’s a report on September’s Climate Strike in Chiang Mai.

I hope our readers can feed off the tremendous energy held within this issue of Traidhos Quarterly.

Editor
Jacob Smith
A little bird told me

Birdwatching is an increasingly popular pastime, though ironically birds are disappearing from our landscapes. Sompong tells us about his unusual path to becoming a birdwatcher and about the birdwatching possibilities here on the Traidhos campus.

Ever since I was a young boy growing up in a Karen mountain village I have had many opportunities to see birds, whether perched on a branch or flying high in the sky. I remember that my friends and I had a close connection to birds. We would always be hunting bulbuls with slingshots as they were the most abundant birds in our village. At that time we saw birds as food. At my high school, which was attended by a large community and not just children from my own village, some of my friends were named after birds, for example “jor tho lee” (“pigeon” in my native Karen language), “jor tho gi” (“parrot”), “nor tho moo” (“sky bird”) and many others. “Jor” would be used for boys and “nor” for girls. Many people believe that birds are important for life and so giving your child the name of a bird is meaningful and may have an impact on the life they will live.

I feel like I used to do so many things in my life that were unnecessary. For example, at school my friends and I saw mobile phones as modern, cool and important, even though the nearest phone mast was five kilometers from the village and so the signal didn’t reach us – rendering the phones completely useless. However, when I was studying at university I started to read Mom Luang Prinyagon Worawon’s books. He is a wildlife photographer whose writing provided me with a perspective on wildlife that I had never previously considered. I then read other books about wildlife which, along with Worawon’s, inspired me to take an interest in birds and animals.

When I met Sandeep – wildlife enthusiast and my manager at the Traidhos Three-Generation Farm – he helped me to learn how to properly identify birds and encouraged me to start with the birds that I see around me every day. For example, at Traidhos we have common myna birds, black-collared starlings, greater racket-tailed drongos, white-breasted waterhens, oriental magpie robins, greater coucals and many more. The more I learned, the more my fascination grew.

Soon I was trying to identify less common birds. With these it is useful to have a bird guide and binoculars so that you do not have to go so close and bother the birds, causing them to fly away. There are some species at Traidhos that look similar to each other, for example, racket-tailed treepies and male koels, sooty-headed bulbul and red-whiskered bulbul, and some species of bee-eaters.

Now that I have more experience with identifying birds by sight, my next target is to learn and recognise bird calls. This is difficult but very fun and satisfying. I believe that if you are doing something you love then nothing is too difficult.

Apart from getting joy from the appealing aesthetics and charming voices of birds, I have also learned many new names for beautiful shades of colour, in both Thai and English, that non-birdwatchers may never have heard of. I have learned many things from birdwatching: different birds have different diets and so I have learned about tree species; some birds are seasonal and so you can predict the changing of the seasons by watching birds; and I have learned about the various amazing survival strategies of birds such as courtship, building nests, laying eggs, incubating, rearing young and hunting.

By opening your mind and your eyes and allowing birds into your life you might see changes in yourself that you were never expecting. Now, instead of seeing the bulbuls that I used to hunt as a food source, I understand that they are more proficient tree planters than humans, and in doing this they help to provide us with whole forests full of food.
Birdwatching at Traidhos

At Traidhos we have found over fifty species of birds. We have rare birds like the Eurasian Wryneck and others that are difficult to spot like the Hoopoe and Common Iora. Our most recent new species sighting was the Greater Painted Snipe.

Equipment:
- Binoculars
- Hat
- Sunscreen
- Camouflage/dark clothing (dark green, brown, black)
- Bird Book
- Covered shoes (jungle)
- Water bottle (jungle)
- Snack (jungle)

Tips:
- Be Quiet
- No sudden movements
- Ensure the sun is behind you
- Study habitats to find specific birds
- Be patient

Sompong Naruemonnapakorn is a Facilitator at Traidhos Three-Generation Farm. Along with birdwatching, his other interests include nature, history and literature.

Translated by Mike Horrocks
Watercolour paintings by Haaniah Akhtar
The Hmong people started as nomadic tribes in the mountains of China, Laos and Thailand. They have their own unique culture, language and clothing. In Thailand, there are White, Black and Green Hmong sub-groups. These each speak Hmong with differing accents but generally share similar lifestyles, although Green Hmong are known to practice polygamy. Most Hmong work as farmers and live close to nature. All Hmong come together at New Year and travel to celebrate in each other’s villages.

"Nar pra jao" or Hmong New Year Celebration starts on the morning of the first day of each New Year. This comes after the harvest season and in the twelfth lunar calendar month. It is a very special time and festivities usually take place over three or more days. Initially, certain rituals are performed to honour the spirits of ancestors, give thanks for the success of the harvest, and to provide health and safety for the family in the coming year. After the initial days of ritual, people celebrate for several more days with outdoor sports, games, music, dancing and feasting. Every Hmong who stays far away from home comes back to their hometown to celebrate with their family at this time.

Hmong traditional costume is one thing that shows Hmong identity. Of course, today most Hmong do not wear their traditional outfits every day. Instead, most wear simple Western clothing for their everyday look and only wear ceremonial outfits on special occasions. The Hmong people still make their traditional outfits, sewing them completely by hand. It can take an entire year to prepare ceremonial outfits for a whole family. They also hand-make silver bracelets, necklaces and headdresses. However, nowadays most don’t need to sew their own clothing because there are stores selling Hmong costumes. Most prefer to buy their clothing because of the time this saves and the variety of patterns and colours available to choose from in the stores.

Sports Day is one important part of New Year celebrations. As well as being great fun for all, this day helps to strengthen community relations. One game that is played is “Chupod” or ball tossing. The round ball (pob) is made from remnants of cloth and can be held in one hand. Ball tossing is a game that is played between women and men who must choose each other before playing. They throw the ball back and forth while making conversation to get to know each other.

“Tao to Lot” or spinning top is another popular game. To play you need a wooden stick with a rope tied to it and a wooden spinning top. The rope is curled around the spinning top and finally released by pulling away hard with the wooden stick. The top will fall to the ground and (hopefully) spin.
Last, Hmong wooden cars are raced by children and adults. In the past, the Hmong had no cars or vehicles for travelling and also no toys for children to play with and so they created a three-wheeled vehicle which children could play with but which also doubled as a vehicle for moving things around. However, everyone now has a car or motorcycle, so today wooden car racing is a special event during Hmong New Year. There are contests to judge whose car is the most beautiful and whose car can travel the furthest.

There are also performances during the celebration like Hmong song and dance contests, folk music performances and pageants.

Hmong New Year is truly one of the most special times of the year for my people. A year’s hard work culminates in the whole community coming together to share food, relax and have fun.

If you interested in attending the 2020 Hmong New Year many villages hold New Year’s events such as Doi Pui Village, Khun Chang Khian Village, Mae Sa Village, Nong Hoi Mai Village. For exact dates of the celebrations, ask any Hmong person you know or search online.

Happy New Year everyone!

Achara (Olin) Manasmanotham works at Traidhos Visiting Schools Program. She grew up in a White Hmong village in Chiang Rai and a Green Hmong village in Chiang Mai, before moving to the city as a teenager.

Photos: Uab lag, Mrs Vagabond, Green Trails, Kamonwan Kawinsaksakul
Cutting Tomatoes

Learning can happen when we least expect it. Head of Community at Traidhos, Lynda, provides an example of an unexpected learning experience she witnessed on a recent Traidhos Barge Program trip.

Golden bubbling. A thin film of oil appearing. The top and the edges becoming just a little bit crispy; the kitchen filling with the distinct aroma of melting cheese.

Then the satisfaction of teeth sinking through the melted layer and meeting lightly toasted bread, the tangy layer of marmite blending seamlessly with the strong saltiness of cheddar cheese. It’s always a good day when cheese on toast is on the menu.

Such a simple pleasure, but one that brings satisfaction, even pleasure.

For my colleagues, it is som tam. The perfect blend of sweet and sour, spicy and salty. The satisfaction of mixing and turning the grated papaya, long beans and tomato; the physical dynamic of pestle and mortar making contact then that characteristic sound. The tasting, the nods, the ritual of eating papaya salad, the comfort it brings.

Our passion for food is evident today. If it is not a beautifully presented dish attracting comments on Instagram, it is television competitions and food programs. Our connection with food is often deep rooted, conjuring up childhood memories of summer holidays, family celebrations and seasonal traditions.

As an educator I was somewhat taken aback when in the final reflection of a three day learning journey on the Chao Phraya River, a journey that had taken us along the River of Kings to the former capital of Ayutthaya, had seen us laughing during games, throwing clay pots with potters on Ko Kret and making traditional bricks with a local brickmaker, a nine-year-old participant shared that his favourite part of the trip had been cutting a tomato. Cutting a tomato? I checked that I had heard it correctly, almost wanting to dismiss that this could have been the highlight of our whole adventure. Cutting a tomato! My mind flashed back to making breakfast with this child.

On office days, breakfast is shaken from a cereal box or popped into the toaster between responding to texts, but on field trip days on the Barge, breakfast is a major operation. Six willing cooks in the tiny space of the Barge’s floating kitchen, seriously studying the recipe card and potentially developing the life skills that will prevent starvation in future years when they head to university. The tasks are shared out into many small steps allowing each cook the chance to mix or stir, wash or chop, flip or pound. In a culture of housekeepers, being responsible for cooking a meal is new to most of the children so that even the smallest contact with a tomato can become memorable!

A simple pleasure, but one that brings satisfaction, even pleasure.

This particular tomato champion had at first been a reluctant cook. She had eyed the knife as though it was a weapon of war, hanging back as other students vied for the exciting tasks of garlic smashing and egg cracking. She had watched wide-eyed as I demonstrated how to hold her fingers to avoid additional ingredients ending up in our breakfast.

Timidly, she had pierced the firm skin of the tomato and then became totally absorbed in act of slicing as she prepared the tomatoes for the omelette.

The shard of shell in the bowl of cracked eggs did not matter, nor did the fact that the full box of eggs never even made it into the cooking bowl, the total concentration that resulted in our fried omelette was something to truly be admired.

Experiential learning is like that, a bit messy; little steps; a process. The shape of the final omelette is unimportant, it is the learning that leads to the breakfast that makes the spill egg and time taken worth the effort. The independence each child feels, the new skills, being part of the cooking team all combine and contribute to the new experience and learning. It is a reminder for all of us working with children that learning is taking place all the time, from both the planned activities as well as during the almost incidental interactions we provide. It’s always a good day when we are reminded of this.

Lynda Rolph is Head of Community at Traidhos ThreeGeneration Community for learning and has been working with the company for over fifteen years. She is a highly respected environmental educator, with teaching experience in the United Kingdom and Thailand. She is the former director of the Three-Generation Barge Program.

Photos: Markus Spiske, Hannah Tasker
“There is scarcely any passion without struggle.”

–Albert Camu, The Myth of Sisyphus
Spiders: Your fear, my passion

Arachnophobia affects three to six per cent of the world’s population, while many more dislike spiders. There is disagreement over whether this fear has cultural or evolutionary roots. However, if Emma Shaw spots a spider she is more likely to run towards it than away. She tells us about her unusual passion.

When people get to know me they quickly discover my greatest passion. I use them in class, find them in bushes, have a tattoo of them on my leg, and I have a toy attached to my backpack. It is spiders, or anything eight-legged really, that are my passion and have been for many years. Spiders are so often misunderstood, so this seems like the ideal opportunity to show the side of spiders that others may not know about.

Spiders can be found in many places, not only real spiders but their depictions, throughout art, literature, film and even local legends. Most of these references come in the form of scary tales of a frightening beast that scares little girls and eats hobbits. However, this is a very skewed view of the spider and their role in the world.

These origins include the Egyptian goddess Neith, the Greek legend of Arachne and the African myth of Anansi. Books have been dedicated to them for hundreds of years, but again all depict battles, wars and spiders.

For myself, these were not influential in my love of spiders, which developed later on in my spider story. My passion started at university. I was living at a nature reserve for six weeks while volunteering for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. This was the summer before the final year of my undergraduate Environmental Science course and it seemed like the ideal place to begin work on my dissertation project. I integrated the two by looking at the changes in the invertebrate population during the annual flooding of the reserve. This required many hours of wading through waist-deep water to my collection sites. I was sampling two populations: those in the vegetation and those on the ground (which did not exist during the flooding periods).

In my data collection, I began to come across a lot of different spider species that ranged from tiny money spiders floating past on air currents to great big web-building and ground-running spiders. They were all different in some way, different patterns, colours, shapes, numbers of eyes and ways of living. I rapidly found myself actively seeking out spiders wherever I went to see what other weird and wonderful things they were doing.

Following this, I attended a residential trip with my course and spent two weeks in southern Spain designing and carrying out a real experiment related to the environment. On this course was Dr David Penney, a well-known arachnologist due to his work on spiders found in amber which got him into the Guinness Book of Records for finding the oldest spider in amber in the world. He fuelled my budding passion and fed me more information than I could possibly digest. I was hooked and I wanted to know more. Upon returning from the trip I approached a member of the faculty who taught on my course about doing a PhD in spiders. After meetings, proposals and many other official things, the stage was set for me to start a PhD looking at the role of spiders in agriculture as part of pest control programs.

During my PhD, I was able to travel a lot for conferences and to teach on expeditions in Belize, Ecuador and Spain.
saw my first ladder spider. This ingenious spider only eats moths, the problem is the moths are covered in scales which stick to the spider when it tries to overpower it, making the sticky part of the web useless in capturing them. To overcome this, the spiders have designed a ladder web that leads down to the regular round spider’s web you are probably most familiar with. Why the ladder? Well, as the moth hits the top of the ladder the spider (who is sat at the bottom of the ladder) shakes the ladder to make the moth fall. As the moth falls and hits each part of the ladder on the way down, all the scales on the moth are removed. This way once it reaches the main part of the web the sticky silk attaches to the descaled body of the moth and traps it so the spider can wrap it up and eat it later. I also got to watch my first net casting spider which holds a net of web and throws it as prey passes by.

Every year the trips were the same but the spiders were not. There were always new species of spiders to see and new behaviours to observe and ponder. During the annual trip to Las Cuevas, Belize I had the opportunity to work on a large (over one hundred individual) population of Brachypelma vagans, also known as the Mexican Red-rumped tarantula. These beautiful specimens were found in burrow clusters all over the clearing in which our research station was situated. Little is known about the ecology of these spiders but, due to their beautiful colouration and relaxed temperament, they had been subjected to serious over-harvesting for sale in the pet trade. This had resulted in them being placed on a protective list for endangered species (the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List).

In the first year at the site, a small group of interested students and I mapped the locations of each of the spider burrows in the clearing to look at their distribution. The following year it became very clear that several things had happened over the year. The population had expanded significantly and the location of the burrows had changed since the previous year. This resulted in spending the subsequent time before the next trip finding ways to microchip the tarantulas to track their location. This is not as simple as it sounds as a tarantula sheds its skin every year, so it’s not possible to use an external tracker. This resulted in me devising a crude way of putting the spider to sleep and inserting the tracker into them (this had previously been tried in a spider lab in the US and the spiders showed no issues after the minor surgery). We tagged around one hundred individuals and had a map of their burrow locations. Upon returning the following year I was shocked to discover that the population had boomed, yet all but two of my tagged individuals had left their old burrows, which were now populated by new individuals. It was unclear what had happened. Sure, some may have died, but not all of them and not during a population boom.

After much head-scratching, I returned in the next season and widened my search to include the jungle connected to the clearing. Here, more than one hundred metres into the forest, I found one tagged mature female. She had travelled a long way away from the clearing, maybe the rest had too. I also found some other tagged individuals back in the clearing, but not the two I had found the previous year. Each year I returned and left with more questions. Sadly, as is often the way in field ecology, I was unable to fully unravel the mystery of this species.

Several years of research later and I left my post as a lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University to start a new life in Chiang Mai, Thailand. As hard as it was to leave, the prospect of moving to a location full of spiders, moths, beetles and more that I had yet to discover was very exciting. Over nine years later I am still finding new species and I am now even more passionate about spiders. I can often be found staring into a bush looking for spiders or enthusing about them to my students.

The biggest question I get about my passion is, "Why? Why do you love spiders?” I find this so hard to answer as the reasons are numerous, some of which I don’t even understand myself. All I know is that spiders fascinate me and will continue to do so, they are my life-long passion. If you want to know more, stop me and ask away. I am always happy to talk spiders with anyone.

Emma Shaw is a Senior School Science teacher at Prem. She has a PhD and her work has been internationally published. She has previously worked at universities in the UK and Thailand.

Photos: Professor Geller, Aubrey Beardsley, David Nelson, David Hilmy, Jacob Smith
Eco-bricks

Inspired by a service trip, The Barge Program’s Syuan Yu provides an in-depth guide to making eco-bricks, an eco-friendly solution to the problem of non-recyclable plastics.

The topics of ecology and sustainability are now popular issues worldwide.

There are so many shops selling eco-friendly products, like metal straws with cleaning brushes, bamboo toothbrushes, natural shampoo bars, etc.

Why are these eco-friendly products so attractive to people?

Yes, the purpose of these alternatives is to save the world, our beautiful planet, by using eco-friendly products instead of products made from plastic and other harmful materials. But, what if we don’t have enough money to purchase products that are good for the environment? From my observations, eco-friendly products normally carry a higher price than standard products. What can we do instead to help? There is a way: making eco-bricks.

So what are eco-bricks? They are building blocks created by packing – as tightly as possible – clean, dry, non-recyclable used materials (mainly plastic) into a plastic bottle. This is a way to reduce the amount of rubbish that ends up in landfill sites. Of course, there is never an excuse for using single-use plastic and we can’t say eco-bricks are an eco-friendly product because of the plastic materials we put into them, but they are a way to help save the planet.

Now, I guess you are starting to wonder how to make an eco-brick and exactly what we can put in the bottle? Here’s everything you need to know:

What you need:
Plastic bottle and a hard stick

The process:

Step 1: Prepare your materials
Recycling is the most important process, so before making an eco-brick try to separate the rubbish into recyclable and non-recyclable piles (only non-recyclable materials should go inside an eco brick).

This is a list of the materials you can put in: cellophane, styrofoam, plastic bags, plastic packaging and straws.

This is what you can’t put in: food waste, glass, paper and metal.

Step 2: Clean your materials
Wash the non-recyclable materials (it doesn’t need to be washed with dishwashing liquid but there should be no food or seasoning left) and leave them to dry.

Step 3: Cutting
Cut the materials into pieces small enough to fit into the bottle. Once inside, the aim is to have no gaps between the pieces of material. The smaller the pieces, the more compact and therefore stronger your bottle will be.
Step 4: Filling the bottle
Fill your bottle until it is one-third full of materials, then use your hard stick to push it down as tightly as possible. Continue filling your bottle in this way until no more can fit inside. You can then replace the lid and begin building with your new brick.

What can you do with your finished eco brick? Well, if you are feeling creative you can make furniture from your eco-bricks such as tables, chairs and garden planters. If not, there is a place in Kanchanaburi province called Bamboo School. They use eco-bricks for buildings, decoration and fencing. They are looking for eco-bricks now, so please send yours to Trash Hero Bangkok. They collect and check the eco-bricks for Bamboo school. Please make sure you follow the rules above to ensure your eco-bricks are tight enough for use in construction.

Trash Hero Bangkok
Eco Team, Starboard 175/5 Moo.12 Soi Suksawai 2, Bangna-Trad, KM.13 Rd., Bangplee Yai, Bangplee, Samutprakarn 10540

If you live outside Thailand you can look for other drop off points around the world on the website: ecobricks.org. This website was built by people who love to share ideas about eco-bricks.

From my experience, one 0.6L water bottle takes only a few days to finish. During this process, you will be surprised by how much plastic you actually use per day. That is a big reason why this activity is so good, it helps us understand and be more aware of all the single-use plastic we use.

I hope this article inspires more people to get involved in making eco-bricks, as well as motivating them to make a change in their lifestyle to reduce their reliance on single-use plastic. Eco bricks are a really easy way to help the planet and only require a little passion and patience. Why not start yours today?

Syuan Yu Chen works at Traidhos Barge Program and loves to share great ideas. She has made over eighty eco-bricks so far.

Photos: Bamboo School, Josephine Chan and Ian Christie, Jo Stodgel, Aquarium.co.za
Who are the Karen Hill Tribe?

Northern Thailand has many Hill Tribe residents. These groups add greatly to the richness and variety of the culture of the region. Narudee (Star) Sereedaungjai tells us more about her Hill Tribe, the Karen.

When we are talking about the Karen Hill Tribe, most people have heard the name before but don’t know who they are where they come from or how they live. This article will answer these questions and more.

The Karen are an ethnic minority group who migrated to Thailand from Myanmar because of discrimination and war, though they originate from Tibet. They are the largest ethnic group in Thailand, numbering around one million. They call themselves Pagerger-Yor or Karieng. Sometimes they are called Yang but this name is considered derogatory. Four major groups fall under the Karen: Sgaw (White Karen), Po (Red Karen), Pa-O and the Kayah. Each sub-group has its own distinct language, customs and dress. The languages are very different from each other and each has various distinct dialects. Unmarried Karen women generally only wear white or bright colours and then only black or dark colours once they’re married. Traditionally, the Karen are subsistence farmers who grow rice and other crops, as well as hunting and foraging in the forest.

The Karen people live a simple, peaceful life in the mountains of Northern Thailand, particularly in the provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Kanchanaburi, Mae Hong Son and other border regions of Thailand. Their houses are usually made from bamboo and are raised off the ground to accommodate livestock beneath. The Karen have historically held animist beliefs, meaning they believe that spirits inhabit creatures, objects and places. Ancestors are thought to be watching over and protecting the land. The customs and rites around these beliefs are strict as it is believed that if the spirits are not appeased then bad things will happen, perhaps even death. These rites are increasingly difficult to practice in the modern world. Some require the whole family to travel home for a ceremony while others involve regularly moving homes, an expensive practice in the age of bricks and mortar. Buddhism and Christianity have therefore become...
increasingly popular among the Karen. In 1567, the first Christian missionaries came to Thailand and have been arriving in greater numbers ever since. As hill tribes have been keen to accept the financial help and free education offered to them, missionaries have been particularly successful in converting these groups to Christianity. Although many Animist rituals have disappeared over time, other aspects of Karen culture such as clothing, language and lifestyle remain distinct and important.

Historically, the Karen are the only hill tribe in Thailand to own and work with elephants. This long-standing relationship with Thailand’s elephants began when the Karen used them for manual work in the jungle. They are now famous for being highly skilled mahouts, and in fact, most of the mahouts employed in the elephant camps around Chiang Mai are Karen. They also have a deep knowledge of herbal medicines and other natural remedies that can be found in the forest. Hill tribe villages are often far from the city with poor road networks and infrastructure, meaning that if someone becomes sick or has an accident they must be treated, at least initially, at the village. Isolation has bred unmatched resourcefulness.

However, in pursuit of economic opportunities, the younger Karen generations now aspire to move away from their villages and into the city to study and work. A popular career is a tour guide, where the Karen can present their traditional lifestyle to others and also use the knowledge they have of the local land to lead trekking and biking tours in the mountains. Though younger Karen are now integrating with the rest of Thailand, their culture is still present and remains a strong part of their identity.

Narudee (Star) Sereedaungjai works as a Facilitator at Traidhos Visiting Schools Program. She is Sgaw Karen and grew up in Sompoi village in Jomethong district.

Photos: Samart Srisoda, LookIWasThere, Jacob Smith, Cat Gundry-Beck
Global Climate Strike in Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai residents took to the streets on Friday 27th of September to march in support of action to tackle the climate crisis. This ended a week of global climate strikes which saw six million people across 185 countries walk out of schools and workplaces in protest. This was the biggest climate protest in history.

A year ago, Swedish school striker Greta Thunberg inspired children to follow her lead in strikes all over the world. For the first time, this youth movement was joined by strikers of all ages this week. Protests largely focused on cutting carbon emissions to stabilise our precarious climate, while many also targeted local issues, such as air pollution here in Chiang Mai.

Protestors gathered at Three Kings Monument at 3pm. Signs were made by those who came without one and statements were read which called for greater action by the Thai government. The protestors then began chanting: “What do we want? – Climate justice! When do we want it? – Now!” and “No more coal, no more oil, keep the carbon in the soil.” At 4pm the group began its march to Thapae Gate, led by a band of saxophone and trumpet players. While marching, the protestors continued to chant. Locals and tourists stopped to watch the procession as it went by and some even joined the march. Once at Thapae Gate, protestors lay on the ground to embody the death of the planet and its people through ecological devastation. The atmosphere was positive throughout.

The Chiang Mai protest had three main demands:

1. We don’t need new housing projects, new airports, new coal mining projects to boost economic growth. We demand action now to stop deforestation, protect biodiversity and natural habitats, without harming people’s livelihoods, especially indigenous and marginalised groups. Coal must remain the ground.

2. Big agro businesses should pay for the cost of pollution, not the poor, vulnerable and marginalised communities as they contribute the least to the climate crisis. Burning bans won’t work unless they target the polluters.

3. We need real solutions and policies to solve the environmental problems in Chiang Mai. A higher budget must be allocated to tackling the crisis. More human resources need to be mobilised. Solutions are needed to address the real causes. We must focus on people, not profit.
We asked some of the protestors to tell us why they attended the event:

“We want to raise awareness so that people in Thailand will care more about the environment. We want our children to have a future with good air. Today, we closed our shop early to come here because this is the most important issue we all face.”

–Gee and Jeab from Refill Hub at Jingjai Market

“This week at Varee we have been focusing solely on the climate crisis. Ordinary classes were cancelled and instead, every subject weaved the issue into their lessons. The week started with a trash clean up which was then followed by a clean up along the Ping River. We had a clothing swap, a plant-based potluck and a climate crisis ideas fare. Students undertook solo and group projects across the week and today there was an assembly where our students presented environmental literature, songs, skits, and more. We ended with a minutes silence to consider the cost of the crisis so far.

This week has been massive and was all done to educate the students about their role in the crisis and the action they can take in their own lives. Today I wanted to bring my students to the strike and support them. Greta has inspired everyone to show up and demand change.

–McVandy, a volunteer in Chiang Mai

In the same week, students at Prem took action of their own. This included Grade 2 leading an initiative to collect plastic, a minute silence to reflect on the lives lost due to climate change, a ‘Meat free Friday’ at the cafeteria and a ‘no power hour’ across classes. Students and staff also gave passionate speeches about the need for a more proactive approach to achieving sustainability.

The week saw students really striving to embody the Prem Mission:

“We are a community that challenges its members to act as compassionate, knowledgeable and principled global citizens: working together for a sustainable future and inspired by meaningful relationships, continuous learning and good thinking.”

Jacob Smith, Editor of Traidhos Quarterly.

Photos: Jacob Smith
Introducing Prem’s Round Square Student Committee

RS Chair, Priya-
Round Square is a collection of two hundred schools around the world. These schools often host conferences which allow students from different schools to collaborate. Round Square schools offer exchanges, giving students the chance to experience the culture and education in another country. There are six different Ideals that all Round Square schools follow. These are Internationalism, Democracy, Environmentalism, Adventure, Leadership and Service. Below, our brand new student leaders have written about their passion for the Round Square Ideals. Their role will be to raise awareness of the Round Square Ideals throughout our school and the wider community. They will also help organise our upcoming Round Square student conference in April, which will be run for ten to twelve year old students from all over the world. Let’s hear from our Grade 11 student team...

Internationalism, Jeff -
As a Prem student, I learn about the ideas of Internationalism and experience them first hand every day. I am also fortunate enough to have travelled the world and seen many different places with my own eyes, and really, these are two truly unique experiences that I am lucky to have had. At school, the community brings students of every culture together, while access to the internet is making us more internationally connected than ever. Geographical borders no longer define us. However, I feel that understanding and seeing the world is something unique that can't be achieved by simply reading on the internet. Each country, culture and person that you interact with are distinct from one another. As a Chinese saying goes: "It’s better to travel ten thousand miles than to read ten thousand books." These adventures are about discovering the world and also discovering my true self. Perhaps this is why I am so passionate about Internationalism. When I know how large the world is, I gain the courage to face my challenges head on and then I can understand the improvements I need to make. We must understand each other to understand ourselves.

Democracy, Ugen -
Being given the privilege to be the Ambassador of Democracy was something I never expected. Throughout my time in Prem I have never taken up a leadership role such as this, not because I thought myself not good enough, but because I was never driven enough to put myself forward for something so far outside my comfort zone. I, like so many others, could never find anything that truly drove me, something that I could fall in love with. While others had basketball, music, cooking or dancing to devote themselves to, I had nothing, I didn’t have a passion. I would find myself constantly following a vexing pattern of picking something up, pursuing it for a while, until, eventually, I would lose interest. This continued until I decided to take my chances and begin creating a plan to seize the opportunity to be President. Thus, I began to join different organisations to prepare myself, and with Democracy my ideas have finally come to fruition. I began putting myself forward for important positions that interested me, and along with some encouragement from my friends for the last two terms, I have been brimming with newfound pride and excitement to see this insane goal of mine through to the end. I am so happy to say now, as the Ambassador of Democracy and Water House Captain, that without a shadow of doubt I have found my passion.

Environmentalism, Sophie and Laurence -
Sustainability is something we are both very passionate about. We believe that everyone has a personal responsibility to be aware of their environmental footprint, and must understand that every choice we make, from what we buy at the shop to the food we choose to eat, is an environmental choice. Environmentalism is one of the most important Round Square Ideals concerning our future. Although it is often talked about, campaigns that actually tackle environmental issues often aren't put into action. In this situation regarding our planet that we all find ourselves in, it is obvious that actions speak louder than words. We are the next generation heading into the world of work and politics and if we are passionate about saving the environment and helping combat the climate crisis, changes must be made. We were raised to care about nature and our place in the universe and so we must encourage this spirit as it will help in taking action that benefits the Prem community.
Adventure, Nino and Fin -

Round Square is in around fifty countries, allowing schools to connect and collaborate to offer world-class programmes and experiences which help students develop competence, character and confidence. We decided to become representatives for Round Square for exactly those reasons, to be able to develop our competence, our character and our confidence. This is because we believe these qualities are a gateway to the world and will make us more successful in the future. We are passionate about our role as Ambassadors of Adventure because we are two extremely active people who love doing physical activities. This fits well because as adventurers we are obliged to come up with ideas for group exercises and then lead them. It is important to have a passion for what you do, it makes things more fun and ensures you will put in the effort needed to do the best job possible.

Leadership, Seb -

Initially, before choosing to apply for a Student Ambassador role in Round Square, I thought to myself, what difference could I make to the Prem community given that there are current role models already? This is when I decided to apply to become the Ambassador of Leadership. From what I have noticed these past few years, the Prem community is filled with brilliant, intuitive and creative minds. However, several students still do not completely demonstrate their development through the IB learner profiles or Round Square Ideals, despite being more than capable. I chose to partake in this position as I believe that I have developed the attributes of a leader. I am a confident risk-taker with good communication skills and the willingness to lead and support groups. I’m highly motivated, generally friendly and deeply passionate about supporting the Prem community. I believe that I can stand as a role model. The largest portion of living up to being a leader is to provide support. Round Square is a program that allows me to assist any student or group of students if needed and I am grateful to be a part of this team.

Service, Ryosuke and Kitty -

Service such as charity and volunteering have always been our passion. We are honored to have this opportunity to make our community a better place as the Round Square Service Ambassadors. We have both been a part of the Hand to Paw charity organisation for four consecutive years. We enjoy helping out in Hand to Paw because we know that our little actions can make a huge difference in those animal’s lives. As much as we care for dogs, we care about raising awareness about other people’s lives all around the world. Studying at Prem has helped us understand the privilege we have and the importance of helping others in need. We believe that while helping one person may not change the world, it will change the world for at least one person. That makes it worth it. We also want to raise the spirit of service in our community. We want to inspire our peers to enjoy charity work as much as we do. They shouldn’t do it because they have to but because they want to. Helping out those in need doesn’t have to be limited to one organisation, it can be based around anything they are passionate about. We want to make this community a place filled with kindness and our goal as ambassadors is not only to develop ourselves but also to encourage every student to become their own service leader.

For more information please visit: https://ptis.ac.th/academics/round-square/
A passion to observe: How my love for observation allowed me to understand and appreciate wildlife.

The more time we spend with someone the better we understand them. The same is true of animals, a fact which is easily ignored unless you actually take the time to observe their often complex behaviours. Sandeep tells us how he learned to stop and observe life.

As a kid growing up in a small town in the Western Ghats of South India, my day to day life was filled with encounters with creepy crawlies. During the monsoons, we encountered tree frogs, toads, spiders, snakes, lizards, beetles and of course, lots of mosquitoes. Growing up, I saw many adults killing these creepy crawlies and every time I questioned their intentions, the adults usually excused their actions by saying, “They are dangerous animals.” To my young mind, this never made sense. Back then, my grandfather was the only figure in my family to whom I could approach with any sort of question. As a man of science, he always encouraged me to ask questions and to observe. He guided me to think logically when the things didn’t make sense and this directed me to start observing in order to find answers.

The more critters I encountered, the more time I spent observing them. And the more I observed, the more I noticed familiar patterns of behaviour. This changed my fear into curiosity. I used to watch a lot of television when I was younger and the late Steve Irwin was one of my idols. He was always interacting with a variety of potentially dangerous animals yet he only had good experiences to share with us. Even when he got bitten by a crocodile or whipped by a monitor lizard, he never killed the animal like the adults in my life and he never spoke ill about the animals he was interacting with. This encouraged me to put any fear I had aside and from there I began to develop a deep respect for these misunderstood creatures.

Growing up, I always wanted to be a Herpetologist (someone who studies amphibians and reptiles). Inspired by my idols on television, I used to go to my backyard and lift up rocks and pieces of wood looking for anything interesting. Doing this, I used to encounter a lot of snakes. Whenever I encountered one, I used to back up a few steps, sit down and then observe them. By the time I was in senior school I had observed birds teaching their chicks to fly, scorpions nursing their scorplings, and lots of snakes using their long, slender muscles to scale up walls and climb trees. The more I observed, the more I noticed familiarities between their behaviour and my own. My mum used to spoon feed me when I was a toddler and I observed the same behaviour in mama scorpions, who use their pincers to feed their babies. I also observed how wolf spiders carry their young on their back, just as I had been carried by my dad on his shoulders. Observing these critters changed my life.

After leaving school, I got an opportunity to work with Dr Deepak Veerappan, a Herpetologist who was at that time studying the turtles and tortoises of South India. He gave me the chance to travel with him through the entirety of South India and showed me the beautiful biodiversity that resided in the region’s evergreen forests. This inspired me to take a master’s degree in Conservation Biology. This allowed me to work with and observe some of the larger misunderstood creatures of this planet, like crocodiles. This opportunity helped me realise more about myself as an individual and humans as a species.
Now, after working for more than eight years in the field of wildlife conservation, I have realised that my grandfather’s advice to observe was the biggest gift I ever received. It truly changed my life. I have developed a passion for observation, for viewing the world without presumption or prejudice. This has allowed me to understand and appreciate the millions of living things around me and also to understand and appreciate my fellow human beings.

In this day and age where life is fast, we humans have almost lost the art of observation. We are too lost in the bright screens in front of our eyes. We fail to observe both the significant and the minute behaviours exhibited by even our friends and family members. We then fail to react properly and thus make life more chaotic and unnecessarily painful. Observation can help us to be mindful, compassionate and to interact properly with friends, family and strangers. It can teach us to respect everyone and to appreciate the millions of large and small lives that share this planet with us.

In the Cosmic Calendar concept proposed by Carl Sagan, which maps the 13.8 billion year lifetime of the universe onto a single year, the Big Bang happened on the 1st of January, then, eventually, primates evolved into being on this planet on the 30th of December. Modern human beings evolved at 11:52 pm on the 31st of December and then modern science and technology was born just one second before midnight. Within just one second on the cosmic calendar, our species has managed to destroy most of the biodiversity that existed around us.

It is highly doubtful that the next generation will be able to see and appreciate animals like elephants, orangutans, tigers, whales, dolphins and so on. A world without these magnificent creatures would be a far less valuable world to pass on. So, readers, please don’t kill the next creepy crawly that you come across. Take a step back and observe them. Call your children and encourage them to observe them too. This will not only open up a whole new world to you but will also help you recognise the magic of life. Remember, Man did not weave the web of life, He is merely a strand of it. Understand and appreciate the life around you. There is only one planet for us to call home.

Sandeep Varma is Head of Activities at Traidhos Three-Generation Farm.

Photos: Sandeep, Wikicommons
My New year’s resolution was to lower my impact on the environment. One of the easiest ways I’ve found to achieve this is by switching internet search engines. The internet requires a huge amount of electricity to run its servers, making this a worthy area to focus on when trying to lower energy consumption. In fact, if the internet was a country it would be the third largest consumer of electricity, behind China and the USA. I have therefore chosen to switch out Google in favour of Ecosia.

Ecosia is a non-profit search engine that is not only carbon neutral but carbon positive, due to its initiative to plant trees with eighty per cent of its profits. It costs Ecosia 0.2 Euros to plant a tree, which is around forty-five average searches, meaning over two million trees are planted every month. If Google had the same business model it would plant enough trees to absorb fifteen per cent of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions.

Ecosia has a diverse range of projects across five continents, with tree planting largely targeted at endangered biodiversity hotspots and areas where local communities will benefit most. They are planting green belts between stranded forest habitats, halting desertification, and providing communities with access to water and the ability to grow food. The green corridors Ecosia creates to link isolated patches of forest are vital for protecting forest dwelling species, like chimpanzees in Uganda and Lemurs in Madagascar, and for extending the habitats of endangered species like orangutans and forest elephants in Sumatra. Ecosia targets ecosystems with specialised plants and trees that help bring moisture back to the soil, allowing for crop cultivation on previously arid land. Other Ecosia projects include fighting forest fires in Brazil and helping cultivate land in former guerrilla held territories in Columbia. Ecosia also donates to various green charities and publishes a full financial report of its spending every month. Unlike Google, Apple and Microsoft, Ecosia is also committed to protecting user privacy by not storing individual search data.

The downside: change is hard. Using a new search engine felt strange at first but I adapted fast. Ecosia uses the Microsoft Bing engine to power its searches, providing a first class browsing experience. Of course, Google is always just a search away if needed. Cynics may view this as a form of slacktivism, however, I think this misses the point. Yes, ditching Google is no great sacrifice but if it was difficult then nobody would do it. This is an ideal green solution because it achieves tangible results while requiring minimal effort. With a few clicks, you can set your default search engine to Ecosia and begin planting trees. After three months my searches have led to approximately twenty trees being planted. In the past, the money generated by my searches was just adding to Google’s astronomical profits; I only wish I’d switched sooner. Imagine if all three billion internet users began planting trees with Ecosia; with each search removing roughly one kilogram of carbon dioxide from the air, this would quickly bring sorely needed change.

Ultimately, Ecosia highlights an alternative way – a path that puts the greater good ahead of individual profiteering. Its founders have vowed not to take any money out of the company and so Ecosia exists solely to provide a vital service that benefits all. The company is essentially a Robin Hood-like venture, wherein Ecosia steals users from the rich (Google) in order to give back to the poor (the environment). It is a wonderful example of utopian principles at work. Ecosia’s business model is refreshing in a culture where the status quo is profit maximisation and growth at all costs must end. We should be celebrating and supporting those who choose to enrich the environment ahead of themselves. Ecosia offers an easy way for everyone to help the environment and bring positive change.

Jacob Smith, Editor of Traidhos Quarterly.

Photos: Ecosia
Creature Feature by
Traidhos Three-Generation Farm

Wildlife expert and Head of Activities at Traidhos Farm, Sandeep Varma, shows off some helpful species that call our campus home.

Deli Paddy Frog (*Micryletta inornata*) is a common species of narrow-mouthed frog found inside the premises of Traidhos Community for Learning. These frogs can be found in and around small water bodies inside the campus and can be seen floating on the surface of the water. Research needs to be done into their ecology and natural history as no information is currently available. They are beautiful, small, harmless frogs that are essential to the sustainability of the campus ecosystem. They help humans by getting rid of harmful insects and pests.

Signature Spider (*Argiope sp.*) is also a very common species of spider found in and around the Traidhos campus. They can be identified by their ‘X’ posture and intricate zig-zag webbing. Here, in the photograph, you can see a male next to the female. Female spiders are generally much larger than males. They are also called a wasp spiders because of their yellow and black colouration or cross spiders, for their distinct posture. They are harmless to humans and help us by controlling the population of pests like mosquitoes.
Passion-infused learning environments allow students to discover and have learning opportunities beyond the classroom.