



From Biodiversity to

FORESTS in 2011

By Jeanie Clark

A new year - a new IY!

Forests! Here we come. It is your year - 2011. And after so much rain, the forests are ripe for exploration... once any floodwater and mud have dried up, take a walk through your nearest forest and get to know it. Each forest is different and repeated trips enable you to really know and understand a forest and how it changes. So let's wander away this year, into forests!



Young River Redgum forest in flood, Donald. Photo: J. Clark

Some background first. Since 1959, the United Nations has set the International Days, Years and Decades. Why? To encourage people around the world to focus on improving our world.¹ The International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) last year was “a celebration of life on earth and of the value of biodiversity for our lives. ... [and to encourage action] to safeguard the variety of life on earth: biodiversity.” (www.cbd.int/2010/welcome).



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In 2011, the International Year of Forests (IYF) aims to “raise awareness on sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.” (www.un.org/en/events/iyof2011/). The main page on the IYF website (www.un.org/forests) has a photo album with forest facts – a good introduction to the IYF. Both IYs come in the midst of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) which aims to develop “respect: respect for others and respect for the planet and what it provides us with (resources, fauna and flora).”

Looking at Logos

Let's start off by investigating communication! Logos are a specific form of communication, intended to tell us something at a glance. Look for some links between the two logos. Comparing them will give children an opportunity to learn about design elements as well as these IY's. What do your children most notice in each? What do they think the logo is trying to tell them?

You could make it easier to explore these IY logos by copying the ones on this page, or going to the websites and printing them in colour, then cutting up the bits and physically matching the similar parts from each. Can you find water, bird life, water creatures, plants and people in both logos? How are they represented differently in each? What is left unmatched? Are these extra details of value or repetitious? Which logo gives a better quick understanding of what its IY is about? What is it about the design that makes it work that way?

Has the IYF logo worked the way it was intended? In the box is the description of what the IYF logo was to communicate. As you read this, it would be a help to stop and find how each thing in the description is shown in the logo. At the end, can your children create a better one?

Defining 'forest'

Whether your children have been for a walk in a forest or not, or want to use the River Redgum photos in this article as the base, (which can be used with any of the activities on this page) you could explore what 'forest' means to

them. Each word or phrase that they use to describe 'forest' could be put onto a leaf shape and these could be collated into a tree shaped poster. Once this first list is made, other branches could be added to collate other words or phrases for the local range of forests, then nationally and then world wide.

When you have finished you could use a dictionary (or a couple for comparison) for their definition(s) of 'forest', write this out on brown paper and place it as the soil for the tree that you have created. From this you could extend out to what else there is in forests beside trees, especially drawing on any knowledge that your children may have gained in explorations during the IYB. As you add to your experiences during this IYF, add other branches to this poster, reflecting growing knowledge.

Focussing on one tree

What importance does one tree have? Perth Zoo has an IYF global project that involves photography and commentary. The Zoo seeks 500 emailed photos of people with a tree native to their area, accompanied by a couple of sentences stating "why the tree is important to you, either environmentally, socially or economically." These will go on a photo album located on Perth Zoo's Facebook page. (For more details, see www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au/Whats-On/2011-International-Year-of-Forests/.)

Another idea based on one tree comes from the United Postal Union's International Letter Writing Competition for Young People. "Imagine you are a tree living in a forest. Write a letter to someone to explain why it is important to protect forests." Only one entry per member country can be accepted, so if you are interested in taking this further contact Australia Post (which at this time has no mention of it on their website.) Otherwise you could use it as a good writing topic based on a tree/forest you know whether by visits or secondhand from books.

The Green Wave is a UN CBD program to encourage action; a small step - planting one tree per school across the world to form a virtual forest. The planting takes place on as close as possible to International Day for Biological Diversity (22 May) but you need to do some planning beforehand (see www.greenwave.cbd.int/en/). As trees are planted, they are logged onto a global map at this website. This website is also linked to www.cbd.int/idb.

Forest types

If you haven't had a good look at how vegetation varies around the world and how that is partly linked to climate, this could be a good year to do so. Just take any atlas, and find the World Vegetation map and the World Climatic regions map. As you match the colour shadings, some links between forest types and climates should become apparent. There are even some climates named after forest types on a Köppen system. Then do the same for Australia, probably using a 'natural vegetation' map. How well do Australia's key forest areas match the climate regions? Can you find 'wetland forests'?

People often forget there are forests associated with wetlands. These have a focus each year as part of World Wetlands Day (Feb 2). What about exploring some of these this year? For a good introductory article see *Forested Wetlands*, one of the Wetland Care fact sheets, on their website, www.wetlandcare.com.au/. This names seven

"The International Year of Forests 2011 (Forests 2011) logo is designed to convey the theme of "Forests for People" celebrating the central role of people in the sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of our world's forests.

The iconographic elements in the design depict some of the multiple values of forests and the need for a 360° degree perspective:

- forests provide shelter to people and habitat to biodiversity;
- are a source of food, medicine and clean water;
- and play a vital role in maintaining a stable global climate and environment.

All of these elements taken together reinforce the message that forests are vital to the survival and well being of people everywhere, all 7 billion of us."

<http://www.un.org/en/events/iyof2011/logo>



Mature River Redgums along dry creek bed, Silverton. Photo: J. Clark

types of forested wetlands in Australia, based on the key trees which inhabit their waters. Of these, the best known would be the River Redgum and Mangrove Forests. They vary greatly between their dry and flood phases as shown in the photos in this article.

Across the Murray Darling Basin, including Victoria, where the flooding has been this summer, the main forest to benefit will be the River Redgum forests either as blocks of land or as strips along streams. You could choose a particular place to get to know better this year, and make monthly visits to see how that local ecosystem changes over time, especially if the La Nina event continues further into the year. You could also use this as the basis for a Science Talent Search. Many projects are possible eg. a photography or research project for these annual competitions, beginning in February and being submitted in July. (see www.sciencevictoria.com.au/sts/)

As we commence the IYF, we are also starting another IY Decade. The UN has just declared 2011-2020 the International Decade of Biodiversity. So those who enjoy learning about the environment will be set for years!

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Additional Notes

1 For a quick chronological list, see UNA-Canada http://www.unac.org/en/news_events/un_days/international_years.asp 2002.

For more detailed and up-to-date lists, see United Nations Observances on <http://www.un.org/en/events/index.shtml> for links to Days, Weeks, Years and Decades.