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Rotarians: Plant the RIGHT Trees!

This month ESRAG lifts up the quest to protect biodiversity. In 2017-18, Rotarians around the world embraced then-RI President Ian Riseley's challenge to plant 1.2 million trees. In this issue, two Rotarians report from the front lines on how lives depend on our choosing the right trees to restore devastated soil, water cycles, and local economies.

This issue is packed with inspiring projects, upcoming events, and industry awards honoring ESRAG members for dedicating their professional expertise to environmental projects that create jobs, resilience, and energy justice. Here's the May lineup:



- Why Kenyans must replace Eucalyptus with indigenous trees
- The historic High Seas Treaty: how Rotarians can help it succeed
- Rotarians racing to restore the Cedars of Lebanon
- Dr. Prakash Tata and RC Napierville win engineering grand prize for social enterprise
- Aur Beck's Solar Habitat work wins humanitarian award
- Kenyan students win several Climate Innovation Awards!
- Heading to Melbourne? Watch ESRAG's AI Rap video to discover this sustainable city
- ESRAG's Latin American Environmental Symposium FREE June 5-6, in Ciudad Juárez
- Climate and Peace Forum Finale on Earth Day
- Dr. Rebecca Huntley to keynote ESRAG's Annual Membership Meeting June 22
- ESRAG by the numbers (good news!)
- Order free, virtual ESRAG business cards

Photo: Kenyan educator and ESRAG member Mercy Wambui announcing African student winners in CAVU's global Climate Innovation Awards



Why Kenyans Must Replace Eucalyptus with Indigenous Trees



On the left: trees, crops, and beehives at the farm of science teacher and ESRAG member Mercy Wambui's mother near Nairobi.
On the right, parched land under a plantation of eucalyptus trees just 500 meters away. Photo by Mercy Wambui, Lavington Eco R.C.

By Najjar Nyakio Munyinyi

*RC Laikipia Highlanders,
Nanyuki, Kenya*

Biological diversity is essential to human well-being. The more complex and diversified a trophic system is, the healthier the environment, and the higher the quality of air, soil and water. Africa has the greatest diversity of fruit and food trees on earth, with a whopping 1,200 species of fruit

and food trees specific and indigenous to the African Continent. These constitute an important biological resource in both farm and forest ecosystems.

In Africa, all our animals, birds, bees, butterflies and bugs – our biological diversity - are an essential and integral function of our eco- and tropic system. As environmentalists working on forestation, we must identify and determine the tropic and food/plant web system of each zone of all our countries, and teach our communities that foreign and exotic trees cannot maintain ecological stability.

Eucalyptus, an exotic here, is depleting Kenyan soil and water. The word “exotic” contains the same letters that form the word “toxic.” Exotic means “foreign” and “not at home”. When you place an entity outside its environment, it becomes toxic.

Because of plantations of trees foreign to Kenya, we are experiencing an extreme disruption in tropic levels. The planting of thousands upon thousands of exotic trees in our water catchment areas, our mountain areas, and our plains has caused a massive imbalance of the entire ecosystem. The result is that we continue to lose thousands of living creatures in our forests and plains daily.

Mercy Wambui's photos above show the contrast between her mother's farm, flourishing with trees, crops, and pollinators, and a Eucalyptus plantation just 500 meters away.

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The Historic High Seas Treaty: How Rotarians Can Help it Succeed

By Päivi Kippo-Edlund, ESRAG Director

While watching birds with my binoculars by the Baltic Sea, I'm thinking about the 2023 High Seas Treaty, and how important it is to protect high seas ecosystems, habitats and species. For me, protecting the Baltic Sea is an issue of my heart. The

Baltic Sea is an arm of the Atlantic Ocean that is enclosed by Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The Baltic Sea is among the most polluted sea in the world, even though many achievements in environmental protection have improved its state over the last few decades.

There are inner seas, rivers, lakes and other bodies of water almost everywhere in the world. Their catchment areas are far wider than these bodies of water themselves. Every measure taken to decrease the emissions of nutrients and harmful chemicals in the catchment areas influences the state of the body of water they lead to. Decreased nutrient loads have a positive effect on climate change too.

The High Seas Treaty is an agreement on protecting marine biodiversity in international waters. It was adopted by the delegates of the United Nations in March. The Treaty is a [monumental and historic win](#) to ocean protection and a sign of mutual will of the nations. The Treaty would put more money into marine conservation and use of marine genetic resources. As UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres explains, [the treaty is crucial](#) for addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution.

From Finland, I am writing to share with you some of the ways Rotarians from the Baltic Region are working to protect our inland sea, and how we can help this treaty succeed.

Photo by Päivi Kippo-Edlund: view of the Baltic Sea from her house.

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Rotarians Racing to Restore Cedars of Lebanon

By Ariel Miller, ESRAG Newsletter Editor



Lebanese Rotarians are racing to qualify for a [global grant](#) to plant a cedar forest on dessicated land on the slopes of Mount Lebanon this fall. The project will protect the region's priceless biodiversity and boost eco-tourism. Called Arztrak Hawytak ("Your Cedar, Your Stamp"), it is rooted in love for their country and hope for its recovery from violence, disaster, and diaspora.

Lebanon has suffered the loss of 80% of its forests, a trend exacerbated by massive wildfires last summer. But the

Rotary project team embraces the long view. “The cedar is the symbol of our identity and our resilience,” says Samar Salman, District 2452 Environmental Chair, who is leading the campaign to plant and nurture 4,000 cedars on land donated by the resort town of Ehden on the slopes of Mount Lebanon. “If the seedlings survive the first three years, they can live for 600 years. Tomorrow has to be built *today*. Tomorrow is too late.”

Her club and district are taking on this cause despite appalling setbacks, including the [2020 explosion](#) at the Port of Beirut which caused at least \$15 billion in property damage and left hundreds of thousands of people homeless. The Rotary Clubs of Beirut raised funds to help rebuild four hospitals, including the restoration of an intensive care unit. Hard on the heels of this disaster, the nation has endured an 162% inflation rate over the past year, 208% in food costs.

Nevertheless, Lebanese Rotarians have succeeded in raising funds for Arztrak Hawytrak from their clubs, district, Zone, and the business community. Samar Salman's club, Beirut Cadmos, is partnering with ESRAG Past Chair Christopher Puttock's Rotary Club of Honolulu in the quest to complete the fundraising. Donations from clubs in as many districts as possible would maximize the 80% Rotary Global Grant match for District Designated Funds (DDF). The project team needs \$35,000 in DDF to reach the project budget of \$102,880.

Samar Salman's slide shows the arid, deforested slopes of Mt. Lebanon above a grove of cedars.

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Dr Prakash Tata and RC Naperville Win Engineering Grand Prize

The innovative plastics recycling social enterprise designed by Rotarian Prakasam (Prakash) Tata, PhD has won the [2023 Grand Prize for Small Projects](#) from the American Academy of Environmental Engineers and Scientists for the Rotary Club of Naperville, IL.

Financed by Rotarians and other donors in India and the US, the plant employs 25 young people who collect and shred 2 tons of plastic waste a day in the coastal city of Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India. The pellets they produce will be sold to bulk recyclers, with a projected annual net income of \$43,000, sufficient to recover all the equipment costs in three years. The project team sees a potential to scale up the enterprise to process 100 tons of plastic waste daily in Visakhapatnam, which can yield an income of \$4.3 million and employ 1,250 youth.

The new enterprise was born through a partnership between a nonprofit youth organization, India Youth For Society (IYFS), the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC), Rotary Clubs and Districts, foundations, and companies that embrace corporate social responsibility.

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Aur Beck's Solar Habitat Work Wins Humanitarian Award

American Rotarian Aur Beck has won the 2023 Walt Ratterman Award from the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners for providing free solar systems to Habitat for Humanity homeowners for whom this technology would otherwise be impossible to afford. It also recognizes his contributions to forging the [Habitat Solar partnership](#) between Rotary and Habitat for Humanity, so families anywhere in the world where both non-profits serve will have the chance to reduce their monthly utility bills.



The Walt Ratterman Award, NABCEP's top humanitarian honor, is named for the dedicated solar professional who gave up a lucrative business to found and run the nonprofit Sun Energy Power International providing solar power to

impoverished regions in countries including Rwanda and Afghanistan, until he died tragically in the 2010 earthquake while volunteering in Haiti.

Aur Bec, who chairs ESRAG's Renewable Energy Task Force, is passionate about both sustainability and energy justice. Since joining the board of the Habitat for Humanity affiliate in Carbondale, Illinois (USA) in 2013, he has been donating two solar PV systems a year to Habitat and supervising free installation by students in his solar training class at a local college.

"Habitat for Humanity assists responsible people that deserve a helping hand," wrote Jeff Speis, President of Planet Plan Sets, who nominated Aur. "The utility bill tends to be a financial make or break, and ... using solar power keeps their utility bills manageable and allows them the benefits of home ownership." Spies also praised Aur for his contribution to the Habitat Solar Guidebook which is now available free online through the [Habitat-Rotary solar initiative](#) spearheaded by ESRAG. This resource provides invaluable technical assistance which Rotarians, Rotaractors and Habitat affiliates are using in a growing number of communities to make practical decisions from right-sizing solar systems to finding grants and rebates to help cover the upfront capital cost.

"By providing this support to hard-working valuable members of his community, Aur is helping to make a stronger, more compassionate community where people can support and help one another," wrote Spies in his nomination, in which he also cited Aur's role in many other vital civic and non-profit groups including the Good Samaritan Homeless Shelter and serving as chair of the City of Carbondale Sustainability Committee. "Aur has trained hundreds of local residents in how to design and install a solar system, leading many to work in the industry in the local market."

[Aur has lived completely off-grid](#) for almost four decades, including traveling widely with his family by horse-drawn wagon. His book *Living Off Grid Really?!?!* has recently been accepted for publication. Congratulations, Aur, on the Walt Ratterman Award, and on using your knowledge so generously to make solar energy affordable for low-income families through the Rotary-Habitat partnership!

*Aur Beck (left) receiving the 2023 Walt Ratterman Award from NABCEP President and CEO Shawn O'Brien.
Photo: NABCEP.*

Kenyan Students Win Climate Innovation Awards!

Congratulations to the Kenyan students whose environmental projects won awards in CAVU's 4th Annual Students' Climate Innovation Challenge! The Lake Bogoria Girls High School (pictured here) won the Outstanding International Entry award for their

[powerful film](#) documenting the devastating impact of climate change on their community, and their passionate call to action.

The prize for Most Practical/Effective Concept, Middle School was won by students at Magarini Children's Centre and Organic Farm for their film "Deforestation." Third and fourth-graders Matthew and Elle of The Living Learning Homeschool in Nairobi won for Most Creative or Engaging Project in Elementary School for their "Wild Our World" project. An honorable mention was awarded to "Making Places Green," by Minerva from the Shree Cutchi Leva Patel Samaj School in Nairobi.

Hearty congratulations to environmental educator Mercy Wambui of Lavington Eco Rotary Club, who serves as Africa Education Liaison for CAVU. She has been coaching African teachers on CAVU's environmental and storytelling curriculum, inspiring 17 schools in Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria to take part in the Climate Innovation Challenge during the 2022-23 school year. Mercy Wambui is an ESRAG member and incoming Environmental Chair of District 9212.

She organized a watch party, hosted by Africa's Talking, for a group of educators to watch the awards announcement broadcast May 10 while enjoying a fireside chat and movie night. The excitement was palpable when one of the group, Furaha Patrick, who teaches German and math at Magarini Children's Centre, heard his school announced as one of the winners! You can watch the awards in this 13-minute [video showcase](#).

Schools worldwide are eligible to participate in the Climate Innovation Challenge for free, with a curriculum provided by CAVU to teach climate science, critical thinking, and effective video storytelling. A wide array of professionals in environmental science and documentary filmmaking volunteer as judges in the contest, which engages over 11,000 students a year in schools from elementary through high school. Learn more and sign up at [Climate Innovation Challenge](#).



Heading to Melbourne? Rap Video Reveals This Sustainable City

ESRAG's RICON planning team have organized an amazing series of events to help you explore and discover how the host city is advancing sustainability. Sustainability team chair Vic Grosjean starts you off with a [rap video tour](#), the first ESRAG anthem entirely written by Artificial Intelligence.

Here's your [guide to ESRAG's RICON events](#). You can choose among five environmental field trips on May 25 and May 26, showcasing Rotary service projects and biodiversity from bats to botanical gardens. Don't miss the



[Environment Action Summit](#) May 25. Bring your lunch to the Rotary Fellowship lunch on May 27.

ESRAG's Green Events Handbook will be officially launched at the Melbourne Rotary

International Convention, which itself showcases sustainable transportation, food, and waste management. And don't forget to offset your travel by a donation to Rotary's environmental global grant funds using [ESRAG's Flight Carbon Estimator](#).

Simposio Latinoamericano de Medio Ambiente June 5-6

By Carlos Iván Montoya Pérez, ESRAG Director

Join us June 5-6 for ESRAG's Latin American Environmental Symposium on World Environment Day, hybrid for the first time! [Register here](#) and see the lineup of outstanding speakers.

After the great experience of the World Environment Conference organized by ESRAG's Latin American (LATAM) Chapter in 2021 on Zoom, we decided to have our own event, from Latinoamericanos to Latinoamericanos, on Zoom in 2022. With pandemic problems receding, the Latinos have decided to have this event in hybrid format, hosted by a different city of the region each year, the first event of its kind for the region. This year's Simposio Latinoamericano de Medioambiente will be on June 5th and 6th at Ciudad Juárez, México, on the borderland with El Paso, Texas: just where Latin America begins. Follow our [ESRAG LATAM Facebook page](#) to learn more about the speakers and the whole event. It will be free!



Ciudad Juárez, famous for its industrial investment, is the economic capitol of its state, Chihuahua. ESRAG LATAM members chose the main topics and speakers to fit this setting in the middle of the North American desert. These include climate change financial mitigation strategies, carbon credits, green entrepreneurship, environmental law, water management, Sustainable Development Goals in business, industrial symbiosis and circular economy, green building, and citizen participation in climate solutions.

Just as with the 2021 World Environment Conference, this symposium is being led by Rotarators! One of them is me, the ESRAG board member born and raised in Juárez.

Climate and Peace Forum Finale June 6

Celebrate World Environment Day with the finale of the Climate and Peace Forum, the Australian webinar series which has inspired Rotarians around the world with quarterly talks by innovators in environmental science, green technology, business, agriculture, finance, law, and public policy. The final forum of this three-year series is Building for Tomorrow – Collaborating Across the Generations. Register for this free webinar [here](#). The forum will be presented live at 6:00 pm AEST (8 am UTC), and the recording will be posted on the website within two weeks.

The speakers are:

- Author and activist Anna Rose, CEO of Environmental Leadership Australia
- Tim Washington, CEO and co-founder of JET Charge, Australia's largest EV charging technology firm, and
- Dr Sophie Scamps, MP, Independent Member for the Federal Electorate of Mackellar, who won election in 2022 on a platform of climate action, integrity, and equality



Each speaker will give a 15-minute talk followed by questions and answers. [Email your questions](#) in advance or post them online during the forum.

This quarterly series has been an initiative of the Rotary Club of Sydney Cove, supported by the Rotary Clubs of Sydney, Darling Harbor and Corrimal. The goals of the series were to promote climate action by all sectors, highlight emission reduction projects with commercial outcomes, and influence others within and beyond Rotary, creating partnerships for action. Every forum in the three-year series has been recorded and posted on the Climate and Peace website.

Heartfelt congratulations to Australian Rotarians for convening outstanding sustainability leaders for this series, and, starting in the early months of the pandemic, building on the world's growing fluency with Zoom to bring the speakers' knowledge and vision to people in every part of the globe.

June 22: ESRAG's Annual General Membership Meeting Keynoted by Dr Rebecca Huntley

By Laurie Zuckerman, ESRAG Director and Communications Chair

What's the perfect antidote to eco-blues? Environmental Action! As a people of action, we create hope through our environmental projects and work.

So how can we talk about climate change in a way that will lead to positive action in time to make a difference? Join us to hear Rebecca Huntley, Director of The Mind & Mood Report, researcher for [Essential Media Communications](#), attorney, and PhD in gender studies, and author of [How to Talk about Climate Change in a Way That Makes a Difference](#).

Following Dr. Huntley's presentation, we will



The ESRAG Annual General Meeting will take place on Zoom on Thursday, 22 June, 2023 from 1:00 to 2:30 pm UTC. Press [WorldTimeBuddy](#) for a time zone near you. Here is the [registration link](#).

ESRAG by the Numbers

Concerned about the environment? Depending on your country, most polls show those concerns are increasing. Rotary is no exception, as evidenced by the addition of the Environment to our Areas of Focus, grants supporting the environment, and articles in our different Rotary magazines.

ESRAG has and continues to reflect humanity's global desire to take action to protect our planet. Our membership leaped from a few hundred to over a thousand with the announcement of Rotary's Environment Area of Focus. I've heard Rotary International leadership refer to ESRAG as Rotary's fastest-growing action group. That kind of recognition makes it possible for us to make bigger changes in both the local and international Rotary communities.



Furthermore, our numbers continue to grow, despite what is considered normal attrition due to death and changing circumstances. In fact, we **average 38 or more new members every month** depending on how you slice and dice the data. That's more than one member each day!

Why is ESRAG membership important to your desire to protect and save our planet?

- Together, we have the power to make big changes for both the environment and the human systems that can cause many of the problems. "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." -- African proverb
- ESRAG empowers members of the Rotary Family worldwide to take actions to sustain our environment, particularly to stabilize our climate.
- ESRAG provides an organizing point and informational resources to share information with clubs and communities about sustainable practices and the global humanitarian crisis of climate change.
- We identify and help develop environmental leaders within the Rotary world, people like you. Together, we initiate environmental service projects and share your work.
- We need each other to help expand Rotary's ability to respond to and prevent global environmental crises.

Imagine seeing one or more new members coming into your inbox every day from people around the world who are working to save our planet. That's what I see. That's why I know that I am right where

I'm supposed to be – working for ESRAG and people like YOU!

Informing and empowering the community: Rotarian Cindy Volyn took the new D5060 environmental display to the Wenatchee Earth Fair and Apple Blossom Youth Day in April. Designed by Michelle Shermer, D5060 Environmental Committee Chair, the materials were funded with district public image funds, and are available for any club in the district to use. Photo by Kris Cameron, Wenatchee Confluence Rotary Club, Washington, USA.

ESRAG Virtual Business Cards

Heading to RICON or other travels?

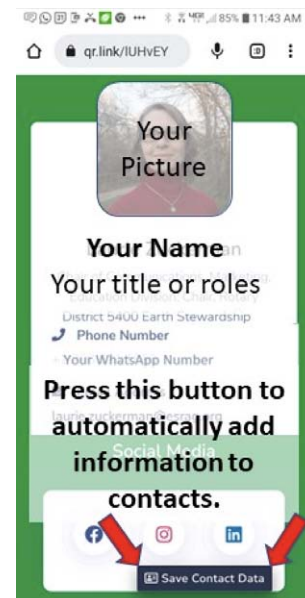
Why bother with wasteful paper business cards when you can use a virtual business card?

It's easy as 1-2-3:

1. Fill out the [ESRAG Digital Business Card](#) order form. We'll send you a QR code.
2. Print the QR at your hotel or home printer.
3. Ask your friends to scan. They will instantly be able to save your contact information.

No more fumbling for and losing slips of paper. No more typing information into your contacts which is especially hard on phones. Best of all, no more paper waste.

These are FREE to ESRAG members. Not an ESRAG member? Please [join ESRAG](#). It's just \$30 a year for Rotarians, \$15 for Rotaractors.



The Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group

operates in accordance with Rotary International policy, but is not an agency of, or controlled by Rotary International.
