



Bring the forest to the playground

Preserving Laurel Forest of Azores

Aim of the Case Study

The Laurel forest is a type of vegetation, restricted to the Macaronesia region. In the Azores Islands, located on the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, we can find in this forest a variety of plants that include several endemic species. Some of these are endangered, mostly due to deforestation and alteration of land uses that caused a severe reduction of this forest area in the Azores. Besides, this forest is also under threat, as a result of the introduction and expansion of invasive alien species. Priolo (Azores Bullfinch) is an endemic bird species that can only be found in São Miguel, in this type of habitat. This bird species was once one of the most endangered in Europe. Habitat conservation actions implemented by SPEA are benefiting this species and all the other species that can be found in the laurel forest of the Azores. Due to these factors, it is very important to raise awareness among the local population and enable children and young students to contact with these species, in special the ones located further away from the remaining areas of Laurel Forest.

Who was involved?

Students, teachers and school attendants of São Miguel Island.

What happened?

In order to be able to increase knowledge and awareness about the laurel forest as an important habitat that needs to be preserved, actions on several levels were undertaken:

Kinder: plant in the classroom (Experience)

In this case, several visits to the schools of Nordeste and Livramento, in Ponta Delgada, were done. In each one, we took some native plants of Laurel forest, in order to let children smell, touch and keep the plants on their classroom. The teachers, carried out further work with their classes, and some of the visits were done during several years, from 2013 until 2017.

Basic and high school level

With these students, we did field trips and volunteer planting actions of Laurel Forest. Some volunteer actions in the plant nurseries were also promoted, and in some cases, a native garden was created in the playgrounds of the schools. Additionally, the exhibition “One Forest, one future” was made available for schools.

In this case, given the bigger engagement of the participants, several field trips were undertaken to restored areas of Laurel Forest. During these field trips, students could get to know this habitat and also observe several of the conservation actions undertaken by SPEA in the LIFE+ [Laurel Forest](#) , [Priolo](#) and [Lands of Priolo](#) projects. Some of these students were also involved in volunteer actions to plant native vegetation in these areas and helped producing these plants in the plant nurseries of the project. Some schools created a native garden in their playground areas, with plants produced in the conservation’s projects plant nurseries. In order to raise awareness of more students than the ones involved in the field trips and volunteer actions, when possible, the exhibition “One forest, one future “ was made available for all schools for a period of at least one week and when requested activities were made around it.

In other cases, some schools suggested bringing the forest to the school in other way. It is the case of the Secondary School in Povoação, where a mural was painted, representing one of the most iconic areas of forest in the Island- Serra da Tronqueira- bringing life and green to the playground, that had few green areas and small space available.



Figure 1 and 2 - Painting a mural in Povoação.

Special classes

Field trips and plantation of native gardens in the school playground areas and in the Interpretation Centre of Priolo.

Some activities were created for special education classes. In this case, the classes involved were proposed to create a garden in their school, but were also asked to create identification plates for a garden in the [Interpretation Centre of Priolo](#), where they would later plant and identify plants, during a field trip with a program of activities created especially for them.



Figure 3- Visiting the Plant Nurseries of the Life Lands of Priolo Project

Outcomes

In this case study, SPEA in the Azores collaborated with more than 15 schools of São Miguel Island, reaching school levels from the youngest to the oldest. Overall, more than 21000 students participated during the 11 years these programs were occurring. Several native gardens were created in Nordeste and Povoação (municipalities close to the bigger pockets of the remaining laurel forest in S. Miguel Island) but also in several schools located further away like Ponta Delgada, Vila Franca do Campo and Lagoa. By doing this, we were able to reach students with the least contact with the Laurel forest. In addition, due to the rurality of Nordeste and Povoação, it was possible to work closely to classes and maintain contact with Schools. In Povoação, there is a school where several students had limitations and lack of resources to attend these activities. Upon this knowledge, several activities were designed for them, enabling them to visit laurel forest, the Interpretation Centre of Priolo, and make a difference by planting a native garden in the surrounding areas of the Centre and identifying the plants with plates of their own creation. After the beginning of these projects, several entities like the Natural Museum of Ponta Delgada contacted SPEA to create their own garden, with schools attending to their own school program.



Figure 4 and 5 – From the left planting in an area of laurel forest and in the right planting in the Interpretation Centre of Priolo

Key messages

- Students respect what they are responsible for
- Planting a tree is a great way to connect with nature
- Planting in your school grounds is a great way to maintain the connection with nature and improve the students outdoor experience

Reflection

- How can you save something you don't know?
- When you plant something you give back to nature, therefore you become a part of something bigger!

References and Links

- <http://umaflorestaumfuturo.blogspot.com/>
- <http://umaflorestaumfuturo.spea.pt/>