
revegetation notes

Restoration ecology – bringing back in a few decades what would take nature hundreds of years – is the subject of an article entitled “Tropical Vision,” appearing in the February 1988 issue of *Outside* magazine and describing the work in Costa Rica of *Outside*’s “1987 Outsider of the Year,” Biologist Daniel Janzen.

The site of Janzen’s restoration effort is the proposed Guanacaste National Park, 280 square miles of mostly pastureland in a beef-cattle region of Costa Rica – “scrubland today, but tomorrow the park, after a thorough ecological overhaul, will be restored to tropical dry forest, a rare species-rich ecosystem that once covered the boundaries of this park as well as the entire Pacific Coast of Central America.”

The article, by Todd Balf, describes Janzen’s “completely novel approach,” that is “not only saving a major piece of land, but providing a pioneering blueprint to be used elsewhere.” The words are a quote from Thomas Eisner, Cornell professor of biology. Michael Robinson, the director of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Zoological Park, adds: “I considered his (Janzen’s) idea impossible. Obviously I was wrong. He’s turned the conservation world upside down.”

Janzen is fund-raiser, chief land negotiator, and architect for Guanacaste. The rest of his life, writes Balf, is on hold. The *Outside* article and illustrations explain why Robinson says of Janzen: “He’s the Leonardo da Vinci of the tropics. He’s worked on everything.”

In 1965 Janzen helped found the Organization for Tropical Studies and the prestigious Costa Rican-based field study program, and later he developed the New World’s first course in tropical ecology. His books and papers (more than 250) have initiated several “convulsive scientific debates.” His topics range from adult beaver-beetles and coral snake-mimics to “Mice, big mammals, and seeds: it matters who defecates what where.”

In 1984 he won the equivalent of the Nobel in biology – the Crafoord Prize, for his work in coevolutionary ecology, which focused on how plants adapt to predatory pressure from animals and vice versa.

His recipe for restoration is full of his hallmark sign – controversy. Stop the fires, he said. And allow cattle grazing. Also install special permit areas. Along with land that could not be touched in perpetuity should go soccer fields, campsites, water holes for bathing, and a two-acre, pick-your-own collecting plot on the parkland – to accommodate wealthy tourists who want to buy exotic tropical plants.

“If you can conserve 1,000 square acres by destroying two square acres, you come out on top by 998,” Janzen reasons.

Word of this article came from John Tanacredi, Gateway NRA.