

Joss Brooks

Remembering the Future Garden



This is a story of turning severely degraded wastelands into green places where Nature thrives in diversity.

- The first step was the transformation of a barren, eroded land in Tamilnadu, South India, into a place where forests grow once more; sheltering a multitude of wildlife, and where an international township devoted to human unity is gradually taking shape.

- A second step was the sharing of experience, gathered over decades of experimentation, in environmental restoration and sustainable technologies with the wider bioregion, revitalising cultural life in the villages, and evolving new educational models for rural India.

- A further outreach has transformed a large dumping ground in the middle of Chennai, the state's sprawling capital of 10 million people, by removing 60'000 tons of garbage and rubble and recreating a wetland ecosystem, into a vibrant coastal park, teeming with indigenous plants, returned wildlife and nature-inspired art, home to eco-clubs and pride of neighbouring communities who now have an oasis to re-gain peace and health.

Grown up on the green island of Tasmania (Australia), Joss Brooks arrived on the parched, treeless plateau that was destined to be Auroville, at the time of the early pioneers.

Volunteers drawn from some 30 countries, with the help and knowledge of people from the local villages, started the journey of healing the land.

The first necessity was to stop further erosion through a concerted water management programme, building thousands of check-dams, bunds and levees to retain the monsoon rains.

As ground cover emerged, birds brought seeds and the indigenous flora started to reappear.

Millions of trees were planted over the years in an area where only two centuries earlier tigers and elephants had roamed the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest, a now almost vanished vegetation type of which only rare patches remained.

Seeds were collected from sacred temple groves across the region where indigenous plants had survived.

Ethno-botanical sanctuaries were established, and today Auroville's greenbelt includes 1000 acres of protected forest, while outreach programmes bring back forest cover, precious traditional knowledge and sustainable livelihoods to the region of the Coromandel Coast.