

The Perch

An occasional (mainly) light-hearted look at life in and around Cabanyes

Number Eleven: Winter 2011/12

Palm Plague Peril

An Asian beetle is attacking thousands of palms in our immediate area, including Cabanyes, Mas Ambrós and Sant Antoni and it is spreading fast. It has officially been described as a plague and as 'a very serious matter'. We reported in our last issue on the beautiful but destructive Paysandisia archon moth that is attacking our palms. We are now confronted by an even more devastating insect called the Red Palm Weevil (Picudo Rojo/Morrut Roig – Rhynchophorus ferrugineus Olivier).

The first affected trees in Catalonia were identified after massive decimation of palms in other parts of Spain, particularly the Costa Blanca. The main species affected in Catalonia are Phoenix Canariensis (Canary Island Date Palm) and Phoenix Dactylifera (Date Palm) although 25 species of palm are considered susceptible.

Detection of the beetle is difficult, as frequently it is not until months after infestation that you can see evidence of a problem, when in fact it may be too late to save the tree. It attacks the crown of the tree and it is there that you start to see changes in the form of irregularities, gaps and asymmetry. As the



problem worsens, the fronds lose their natural colour and turn yellow/grey and droop. You may even hear the larvae at work if you "listen" to the tree as well as smell rotting vegetation and see brown liquid oozing from the wounds of the tree.

The adult weevil is between two and five centimetres long and is usually a rusty red in colour. It has a very characteristic elongated extremely tough snout. Although the adult weevil can cause damage, it is the larvae which are the problem as they can bore holes into the interior of the palm where, unseen, they feed on the soft tissue, thus weakening and eventually killing the tree. A female can produce on average over 200 eggs which she lays in the crown of the tree or in

wounds on the trunk. In three to four months the insect develops from egg to adult and a range of generations can live inside the same tree, at various stages of development. Although they prefer to settle in younger palms (under 12 years old) that are already weakened by other factors, they will colonize healthy trees. The insect can fly vast distances, up to 10 kilometres in a day.

The Perch: Financially Challenged

What is the value of a copy of *The Perch*? How many people would care if it ceased to exist? What does it cost to produce? Who pays for it? And who cares?

A lot of questions, some of which we can answer and some not. But mostly we are faced with serious questions that need serious answers. About money.

The finances of *The Perch* are incredibly simple because, in terms of expenditure, apart from the printer and a photographic agency (a minuscule amount), nobody gets paid a single euro. The writing, photography, cartooning, designing, editing, production and distribution are all done for free.

To cover much of these costs, we are generously supported corporately by Quality Estates and Al Vent. The rest needs to come out of readers' pockets and purses. And sometimes it does and often it doesn't. When it doesn't happen, guess who covers the shortfall?

We produce four editions annually, each at a cost of around €500 thus €2,000 per annum. Each year we hope the shortfall of €500 or more, after the corporate contributions, will come from our readers. We have one particularly generous supporter and a handful of regular valued donors but we need more.

500 copies are distributed each quarter; the readership is probably double that number. If a further eight of those readers would regularly and reliably pay just €10 per edition we could make ends meet. It is embarrassing to keep asking, begging, reminding, cajoling, I promise you. Whenever our best supporters find a new copy of *The Perch* in their caseta they immediately pop €10 in ours (#275, emptied daily).

It would help us if you could follow their example...

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iHola!

Welcome to the eleventh edition of *The Perch*.

Welcome to our Winter edition which, if published much later than this might have been a combined Sprinter publication. (Spring + Winter. Do try and keep up.) But here we are again, despite the combined efforts of the weather, Ryanair, the economy, the passage of time coupled with health and efficiency. (And if you know of a magazine with that title you could be quite old and either a naturist or a voyeur.)

Nothing much seems to have changed during the three months since we were last up to our elbows in printers' ink, but at least there has been an encouraging increase in the number of votes cast in favour of what is now apparently labelled the Owners' Community. Dare we hope that the 86 votes required to achieve a majority will be in the bag or ballot box a long time before our next edition? It will be a bad sad situation if they are not.

Since we launched this modest publication we've received a variety of messages in a variety of ways. None have been particularly unpleasant, some have been very kind, some helpful and some, interestingly, anonymous. Most recently, a reader commented on Wine of the Month but didn't sign the note. He or she obviously knows one end of a wine bottle from the other and could have been a contributor but we don't know you so...

And on the subject of contributors, it's vitally important that we are a community publication and benefit from the knowledge, experiences and ideas of 'Cabanyesians.' If you write well, that is a bonus; if you don't then we can knock what you send us into shape. We are always looking, for example, for everything from trips and travels for 'Here We Go' to eats and exercise for 'Community Corner.' So don't be shy, have a try, you could just be, a Stephen Fry.



There's a welcome innovation at Quality-Estates.com where the company's shiny new website not only tells you more about its range of services but also lets you access every issue of *The Perch*. Just go to 'Lifestyle' to find them all in PDF Format. Nice one. And be reminded that we can email each new edition to you when it is published, again in PDF format. Just email us and you will go straight on the list. (Contact details are on the back page.)

Talking of the back page, we are sad to report the disappearance of 'Letters to the Editor.' We asked the editor himself why this popular, witty, entertaining, informative, educational and amusing section had stopped. He told us that after 40 or so letters in ten Perch editions he couldn't think of anything else new to write to himself.

And we now total eleven. One of my favourite numbers, probably because of an obsession with cricket and football. I really must get out more.

JD

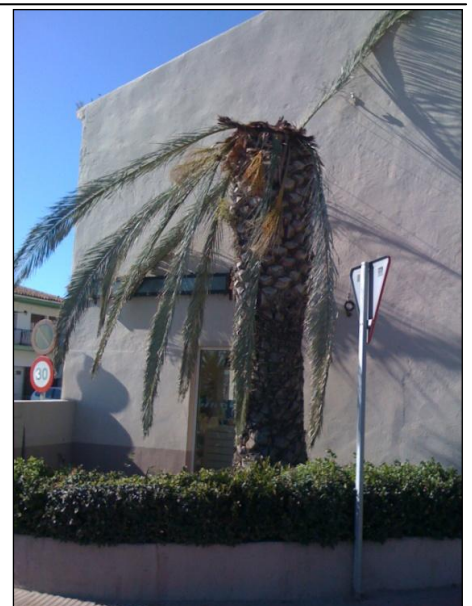
Palm Plague Peril (continued)

So how can this plague be contained? Firstly, prevention is important. If you currently have a healthy tree, be very careful when pruning your palm, ensuring that any wounds are sealed as well as watching out for damage on the trunk and dealing with it promptly. The weevils will always be attracted to these areas. Pruning is best carried out between December to February; outside this time, you should try to use an appropriate insecticide after pruning.

If you feel you already have a problem palm, it is best to call in the professionals. Affected leaves need to be removed from the crown and disposed of adequately (there are very strict regulations on disposal of palms). If the tree is not too far gone, then authorised solutions can be applied to the crown. Treatment needs to be repeated on a regular basis. Sadly, if the infestation is advanced, the only way to deal with the problem is to have the tree culled and removed, and quickly.

If you need advice, there are a number of sources. Professional gardeners should be well clued up on the problem. There is also a company based in a white portakabin in the Deixelleria in Calonge called Sfera Garden. They are a company authorised to deal with the disposal of palm trees and although it cannot carry out the treatment or culling of palms it can refer you to a number of gardeners who can. Sylvia from Sfera was very helpful and provided a good deal of information on the subject of the plague. You can also visit <http://www.gencat.cat/dar/sanitat-vegetal/> for further information.

Sadly, this is a massive problem in our area. As one professional gardener said "This is the end of the palm trees". Let's hope not.



HD

Community Majority Inches Closer

With the handover of Cabanyes to Calonge Council control now less than three months away we are told that 340 of the required 426 votes have been cast in favour of the Owners' Community. This means that close to 80% of the required total has been achieved with support from a further 86 proprietors still needed to achieve an overall majority.

340

The estate shifts over to full Council control on 14th May 2012 at which time the E.U.C. will cease to exist. It is estimated that the cost for each proprietor for running a legal Community for the care and maintenance of Cabanyes will be well under half of the current payment for the EUC.

There has been considerable and detailed debate over all of the issues arising from the handover much of which has been covered in *The Perch*. One small but significant matter is worth adding to the pile. The postal building is important to most proprietors. Without the EUC or Community who will look after it? Answers on a postcard. Or a voting slip.

MW/JD

Cats – caring and controlling

Cats sometimes get a bad press but it is easy to overlook the important part they play in keeping down the rodent population as well as the enormous joy and comfort they give to very many people. It would be hard to estimate how many feral or semi-feral cats there are in Cabanyes and other neighbouring urbanisations.

One thing for sure is that they are fast reproducers!

A kitten can have her own litter at six months old and can produce three or four kittens in a litter. The gestation length on average is nine weeks as opposed to the human's nine months. So it is very obvious that just one female with the help of the occasional tom, can kick start the production of dozens and dozens of cats in a matter of months. Even though some kittens will not survive for a variety of reasons, without human intervention, Cabanyes would literally be littered with litters.

It is essential for there to be a humane, loving way to keep the numbers of cats under control. This is for the benefit of all, both human and feline, but it calls for dedication, expertise and money. There are fortunately already a number of caring individuals in Cabanyes and beyond who undertake this task, often paying out of their own pockets or raising euros to fund it and these individuals make a huge difference to the cat numbers in the urbanisation.

In particular, Monika and Rolf Troost work hard to control the cat population and encourage others to do so. As Monika says "It is important that we take care of the cats and this includes neutering them. Otherwise we will have an epidemic. My motivation is to keep the numbers under control and keep them safe and well"

The best and most practical process that she and others use is commonly called *Catch, Neuter and Release*. The cats are caught using a humane trap cage, with no harm to the animal, taken to the vet,

neutered, cared for overnight and then released back into their original territory to get on with their lives. (Neutering a female costs around €70 and a tom €35 which are discounted rates from the vet in Platja d'Aro to help with the programme.) Monika has on a number of occasions also domesticated wild or abandoned



kittens and then found them loving homes. All this is done out of her own pocket. She deserves a medal!

If you have cats in your garden in Cabanyes and would like help trapping and neutering them, are willing to pay for the vet's neutering costs or wish to become involved in some other way, please contact Monika on 972 653 580.

Also of relevance is an important organisation in Catalunya called Progat, a not-for-profit entity, rather like a Spanish version of the Cats Protection League. Its objectives primarily are to promote the welfare of non-domestic or abandoned cats, ensure they are treated well and with respect, and looked after ethically. It also seeks to control the population of the numerous cat colonies through neutering. There is already a Palamos branch of Progat and a strongly supported petition is to be presented to the Council in the near future for the creation of a branch in Sant Antoni. However, to do this a minimum of three people are needed as President, Treasurer and Secretary. If successful it will be a vital step forward in cat welfare, as sadly there are those dangerous people that think killing the cats with poison is the solution.

HD

Here We Go.....

Modern Sculpture Gem in Palafrugell

I have always found Palafrugell an unexpected delight, with a lovely old town, good market and friendly people. Imagine my joy when I found that slap bang in the middle of town is an extremely interesting contemporary sculpture museum. Called Can Mario, it is housed in a sympathetically restored and iconic cork factory.

The outside space of the sculpture museum sets the tone with interesting works of art in Can Mario square, dominated by the factory's emblematic tower constructed in 1905 which, if you have the energy, can be climbed with the aid of about 187 steps! I declined the challenge, due to lack of time...

Inside, the collection includes works by many famous Catalan sculptors including Joan Miró (born Barcelona 1893), Antoni Tàpies (who coincidentally had died the week I visited) as well the aptly named Xicu Cabanyes (more on him in the next *Here We Go*).

There are some truly beautiful works, suiting every taste with all pieces dating between the 1960's until the present. Extremely well displayed and thoughtfully conceived, the permanent collection is presented in a series of open "rooms" which invite you to sit and take stock. I found a real sense of peace there. The collection is added to and changed from time to time, with the current exhibition having been just reopened after its winter makeover (I visited in February). There are also temporary seasonal collections on display.

Another reason to visit this year is that they will be holding the Fundació Vila Casas sculpture prize 2012, with the finalists' work on display between 16 June to 16 September.

Can Mario is one of five exhibition spaces owned by La Fundació Vila Casas, a private not-for-profit foundation whose aim is to promote contemporary Catalan art. In Torroella de Montgrí, there is a collection of contemporary photography, while in Barcelona there is a permanent exhibition of contemporary art and two exhibition spaces for temporary collections.

To get to the museum from Calonge, take the first exit on the C31 (Palafrugell Sud) and follow the signs to the centre of town. You will very quickly pick up a sign for Fundació Vila Casas which takes you Can Mario square. There is an underground car park in the square.

Museum details: Can Mario, Plaça Can Mario, 7. 17200 Palafrugell. Tel: 972 306 246. Winter, Spring and Autumn open Saturday 11.00 – 14.00 and 16.30 – 20.30, Sunday 11.00 – 14.00. Summer: Tuesday to Sunday 17.00 to 21.00 except festivals.



HD



Les Estrelles go live with Queen at the Carnival

Feathered Friends

The Black Redstart

It's hard to watch this perky and bright little bird without it bringing a smile to your face. It is very entertaining to watch as it darts, dashes and leaps after insects or drops like a stone from a high perch to pick up beetles, grubs, worms, berries or seeds.

Here all year round it is, nevertheless a welcome winter sight. More likely to be spotted on a post, boulder or building than in a tree or bush, it is an urban bird, inquisitive and tolerant of people and nests in ruins, old buildings, industrial sites or our garage (given the chance!)

So, how to recognise it? The Black Redstart is a little bigger than a robin and shares its charm being upright and alert, with a similar habit of bobbing its head and body.

The male has a smart black and grey body with a white wing patch and very black legs; the female (and males in their first year) are overall grey brown. It is the tail that is so distinctive in both sexes. Always restless, when perched *"it flashes its irresistible trembling tail, as red and warm as the shards of a terracotta pot."*



Only the Redstart family and closely related rock thrushes have this quivering tail. Starting at 10-13 days of age, this flicking seems not to be an expression of any emotion or excitement, rather as a means of exhibiting to other members of the same species. The movement can be imitated by holding the tip of a knife blade on the edge of a table then depressing and suddenly releasing the handle. *"It is beautiful, it is vivid, it moves, it says "I am here"."*

It seems to be the favourite of many birders and the above quotations are from a remarkable book on bird-watching and life, called *The Running Sky: A Bird-Watching Life* by Tim Dee. In one chapter he writes about prisoners of war

watching these lovely little birds from the camp and I will end with a few words from one of them.

"They lightened (if only for a little while) the very weight of all this unintelligible world simply by their unconcern in our affairs, and by the beauty and pathos and vivacity of their lives".

Goosebumpy stuff – get the book.

Photos by Jim Weare Words by Helen Weare

Come Fly With Me

For the past four years, we have been keeping a record of birds seen in (or over) our garden, by month and year. It becomes increasingly interesting as the years go by in tracking species, migration etc. In the first two days of February, we saw 15 different birds.

Part of the beauty of 'the hill' is that not only do the views vary from each house, it seems that the wildlife does too.

If anyone is interested in swapping information on sightings in the garden or around the local area, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please email to: birdsoncabanyes@gmail.com

Mark My Word - You know it makes sense

As I sit here contemplating my navel-oranges, pondering the perfect, picturesque panorama present in all its perfumed profusion – “that’s easy for you to say,” you murmur, - I wonder how to make sense of it all. So before the censor censors my senses, I



decided to gaze into my crystal ball (which I am assured is not against the law if done in private) and share my thoughts with you about the

potentially very interesting year ahead for Cabanyes and all who sail in her.

So here are some predictions from Gipsy Rose Mark:

Sight

The views from our properties should not alter greatly unless, like ours, your villa tends to continue slipping gradually down the hillside. But the upside of looking downwards is that I can see an amazing re-growth of trees, bushes, flowering shrubs and undergrowth since the snowstorm decimated so much of it. This can only improve further in time. After all, doesn't your hair grow more vigorously after a good haircut? (Apologies to any follically challenged readers.)

Sound

Eleven years after moving here I am still trying to assemble a professionally sounding choir of cement mixers, so anyone hearing a tuneful specimen in the vicinity is requested to contact me. I fear that, to achieve a complete churning chord of G

major, I may need to listen further afield, since the good news is that the rate of construction on Cabanyes has slowed considerably and is predicted to continue to do so.

Smell

I envisage a summer of slightly different outdoor cooking aromas. Since those wild pigs are still causing havoc and mayhem, I forecast a rise in the number of boar-becues; enjoy them with relish! (They are also very tasty with pickle or mustard.) And if you like your steak sizzling, it will be in vogue this year, your ribs will also be in, although your tongue is out. Please put it away.

Touch

Whatever you do, don't put your hand or foot where you can't see it. “That's obvious,” you may say. But our former neighbour once disturbed a gecko the size of his swimming pool. But don't panic; since said neighbour and I didn't share a common language it could have been the size of one of his swimming pool **tiles**. All I will say is that it's best not to touch anything you can't have an intelligent conversation with.

Taste

My crystal ball is resigned to certain local restaurants closing down. But never fear: try to be more adventurous; you may say nay to chewing horse, or crow about eating birds, but salmon up courage, and have a go at something new, as long as it doesn't wriggle around on your fork too much. Oh, and keep your taste-buds alert to possible happenings at La Bodega / Cabanyes Sport. This could finally be a year of action.

Here's to a happy 2012 for one and all – in every sense!

Mark Woolf

Thanks

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972 652 119 or by email at alvent@alvent.cat and the website is at www.alvent.cat

We are grateful as ever to both companies for their tremendous support and to those special individuals who continue to generously help finance *The Perch*.

Stay Healthy..... or say it with flowers

Health at the Hands of Heidi

We've written about Heidi Widmer before but make no apology for doing so again now. In the words of long term Cabanyes resident and *Perch* contributor Andrea Broom, "She is such a professional and speaks wonderful English. She completely sorted out my shoulder and neck problems and keeps my repetitive strain at bay. The craniosacral massage is a real boon."

Heidi's full range of treatments which include acupuncture, homeopathy and massage, are now available in her new premises at 17 C/ Sant Antoni which you will find clearly branded *Dao San*. She can treat those suffering from a wide variety of conditions including neck, cervical or back pain; anxiety, depression or insomnia; menstrual, PMS or menopause problems; arthritis, obesity and many more.

In addition, the services of an experienced qualified osteopath, Vadim Zadoinov, are also available as an important part of a business dedicated to making life less painful and more comfortable for those who might otherwise just have to just grin and bear it.

For further details and appointments call Heidi on 671 805 256 and Vadim on 650 078 863.



Magnificent blooms from Montse



If when you leave *Dao San* you turn left and head towards Palamos, in 100 metres or so you will reach a flower lover's paradise, *Flors Montse*. Nothing warms the heart quite like flowers – the perfect present to give or receive at any time - and for top quality long lasting blooms this is undoubtedly the place.

If you have a particular weakness for roses with straight long stems and deep crimson petals, for example, then Montse has the answer. She can also make gorgeous arrangements and beautifully presented bouquets and provides an Interflora service.

Montse has considerable experience in providing exactly the right cost effective floral arrangements and tributes for all occasions including weddings and funerals. You will find her at 43 C/ Sant Antoni or you can call 972 651 338. Go on - treat yourself or your loved one. At least one of you must deserve it...

Fancy a nibble in Peratallada? We are blessed with a number of good restaurants on our doorstep, although winter makes it a little more challenging. Coming highly recommended by our regular contributors, Pat and Denis Hartley is "Pistachio" in Peratallada. This time of year they are only open Friday, Saturday and Sunday and it is best to book. The cuisine is an interesting mix. Go very British with Fish and Chips on Friday or a roast lunch on Sunday or a little more exotic with Persian on Saturday lunchtimes, as well as their usual menu. Calle Riera 4, Peratallada, 17113. Tel: 972 634 292/620 050 067.

Pharmacy Favourite One thing we are not short of are pharmacists in the area, but one where you will always receive friendly, caring service is Farmàcia Granell. This is found on the road leading from the Sant Antoni roundabout down to the main square, next to the Clinica. They do speak some English and are very helpful. They also have an opticians on the same premises. (Av Costa Brava 6-8, tel: 972 652 705)

Ryanair to fly 19 new routes from Girona After reaching an agreement with the Catalan government, Ryanair has announced a further 19 new routes to add to its current 40 from Girona, due to start in late March.

The Girona-Madrid flight has been reinstated (two per day), as has the Girona-Ibiza flight and for the first time, there will be a flight to Greece (Thessaloniki) three times a week. New routes also include: Aarhus in Denmark, Cagliari and Perugia in Italy, Cork and Knock in Ireland, Doncaster in the United Kingdom, Dusseldorf in Germany, Bydgoszcz, Krakow and Gdansk in Poland, Nador in Morocco, Poitiers in France, Malmo, Skelleftea and Stockholm Skavsta in Sweden and Turku in Finland.



I wanna tell you a story.....

Well, more of a travellers' tale really. I had to have a bit of assistance on and off our flight out here from Birmingham. (Strangely enough a very efficient route to Girona when Stansted flights don't exist. But I digress.) When all other passengers had disembarked the local team then helped us out into a raised cabin suspended at the side of the fuselage some 20 feet or so above the ground. All that then remained was to be strapped safely into a seat before they lowered the whole thing to terra firma.

It is while we were hovering in a semi-detached state, so to speak, that I was asked to rate the service on a scale of one to five. A balanced judgement just at this somewhat early stage seemed difficult but the team leader has one hand on the lever that would control our rate of descent and the other on the release buckle of my safety belt. 'Five is excellent' he explained helpfully 'but one is not good for any of us.' I marked 'five' clearly on his form and hastily signed it. It just seemed to add up somehow.

JD

Wine of the Month

During the last few years I have been drinking my way around the globe (quite happily I must say) trying to find new countries, new regions and grape varieties to taste. And all the while, the old, traditional "tasted through and through" Rioja was not high on my list.

But recently I have re-discovered it and the one that has impressed me the most is **Cune Vina Real Oro, Reserva, 2001**. The quality of this, from once the most old-fashioned traditional Rioja producer, is extremely high. Labels include Imperial for finesse, Vina Real for a plummier, fatter style, a white, wood-aged Monopole and a new all-Tempranillo wine called Real de Asua.

2001 was an excellent year with perfect weather conditions. I found this Vina Real Oro much more French in style; not a blockbuster but elegant, fully matured, velvety and rich. It is made of 90% Tempranillo and 10% Garnacha, Graciano and Mazuelo. Of course price is an important factor and at 14,18 euros in Grau it is well worth the little bit extra. Try to get hold of 2001 if you still can, as there are mostly 2005 on sale now.



Alyona Strange

That's Entertainment!

Andy Ball's new rock band "RollaCosta" made its second public appearance at a Valentine's night dinner dance at Samal restaurant in Calonge. The event was held in favour of Friends of the Fallen, a charity formed last year by Cabanyes' bundle of energy, Trevor Holt, following the closure of local branches of The Royal British legion. Nathan Drohm guested on saxophone as did classy vocalist Libbie van Geert. (The dynamic duo's second creative funky jazzy poppy Loop Alley CD 'Long Filler' is out now. More at www.loopalley.com)

But musical talent can sometimes emerge unexpectedly to surprise and entertain! So it was at a recent birthday bash when a guest settled at the keyboards and brought the villa down with a polished version of 'If I was a Rich Man.' We knew him well as unpaid unofficial assistant editor of *The Perch* and businessman, committee person, translator and much more. But Mark Woolf (pictured), born again Topol, well, that was a pleasant surprise.



JD

The Last Word

Speed camera a real cash cow

The Catalan Traffic Department has now installed a flashing sign to warn drivers to slow down to 80km on the C-31 between Castell and Platja d'Aro, where a controversial radar had succeeded in clocking up 20,973 speeding fines in the space of only five months (half the fines for the whole of Girona province in 2010).

The Perch was created and is edited and designed by John and Helen Duncan.

We are helped enormously by those who contribute articles, photographs, anecdotes, research and ideas. Our thanks to each and every one of them.

Comments and donations are welcome at caseta 275 or email us at viewfromtheperch@gmail.com