



## **Sahara-Roots Newsletter 2011** a year of ups and downs.

### **February 2011: Green Wall, Groasis Waterboxx's and replanting grafts.**

In February 2011 I travelled with a group from Essence College to M'hamid. I was curious to see how Jan de Graaf would react in seeing the trees that we had planted in February 2009. He had not been back since. He was pleasantly surprised in seeing that some of the trees that had managed to survive now stood at least 3 meters high and that our "green wall" was indeed starting to work in keeping the sand a way from the village.

However during this visit it also became clear that the 120 grafts we had planted together with 10 Groasis Waterboxx's in a new area, where the proposed Taragalte Eco-lodge project was going to be built, had not grown. Due to the fact that we had acted on information given to us that the building of Taragalte Eco-lodge was to start in November 2010, we had decided to start our part of this project. We built a "technical palm leaf wall" to help stop desertification on the proposed terrain as well as help repair the existing water pump. We planted 120 Tamarisk grafts. A local man had been appointed to take care of these fragile grafts. Unfortunately the building of the Eco-lodge was postponed and the caretaker had not taken care of the grafts. Once it became clear what had happened, we realized that the grafts would need to be replanted and we are happy to say that 60 grafts and trees have now been replanted around bivouac "Le Petit Prince" where they will be well taken care of. The remaining 60 grafts will once again be planted on the Taragalte Eco-lodge site as soon as the building starts.

Arriving at Bivouac Le Petit Prince in the desert of M'hamid El Ghizlane, we found that 20 Groasis Waterboxx's had now been placed and that these grafts were doing well. Green branches were sprouting, the Groasis Waterboxx's are "miracle boxes" and the local people were impressed especially now knowing that so little water is needed due to the working of these "incubators". About 90% of the tamarisk grafts had signs of "life" showing buds or little sprouting branches. Only a couple of the grafts planted in the same area, the traditional way in Nov 2010 had survived.

### **Inner Wheel Club, Leeuwarden**

February was a busy month as next to travelling to Morocco, I also gave a presentation to the ladies of the Inner Wheel Club Leeuwarden. It was a good opportunity to explain what Sahara Roots is actually working on in the Sahara and in this way it also enables us to receive donations for our work either by selling our booklet "Me and my Sahara" or by receiving donations towards planting trees. The members enjoyed the presentation and were impressed by the work we do, so much so, that they decided to nominate our projects as their project of the year! What a great honor it was to hear that the vote was a big YES for us! Thank you all so much for your support.

### **June 2011: Groasis Waterboxx's around Bivouac Le Petit Prince**

With 30 Groasis Waterboxx's planted with tamarisk grafts and acacia trees between November 2010 and March 2011 around bivouac Le Petit Prince, we anxiously waited to hear about their progress from Halim and Ibrahim Sbaï (with whom we work in Morocco) who were monitoring the results for us. Talking to them via Skype we had heard that 90% of the trees were now growing. In June we finally received photo's and we were so happy to see the results. Among the sand dunes the small trees were now sprouting out of their green and cream colored incubators, some were even 30cm already, what a great success after such a short time!!

### **October 2011: Walking sand dunes**

The summer of 2011 was a particularly harsh one in the Sahara. During these months the winds caused terrible sand storms. The "walking sand dunes" marched over our waterboxx's leaving most of them buried under



mountains of sand. As Halim and Ibrahim returned to the “shell” of their desert camp (each year they take away the tents during the summer months) not only had their camp almost disappeared, 25 of the 30 waterboxx’s, together with their precious trees, were nowhere to be found. It wasn’t until they started to dig the sand away that they found 20 waterboxx’s. Unfortunately the small trees had not survived. It was a big disappointment for all of us. But, 5 waterboxx’s had managed to escape the wrath of the sandstorms, the trees stood small but strong and proud and are testament to the fact that the Groasis waterboxx’s really work, giving us hope and determination to continue planting in this way.

### **Rain in the Sahara**

Together with Cora van Vliet of Essence College we traveled to M’hamid not only to check on our projects but also to enjoy the peace of the Sahara. It hardly ever rains in the Sahara but this was not the case on the day we decided to travel by camel to check on the tamarisk grafts that had been planted in Sidi Khalil during the tour that we had made with the group traveling with us in February. As we rode at gentle pace of the camels, raindrops splattered onto the sand. Not before long our guides handed us “umbrella’s” to make sure that we had a “dry” journey as the rain began to pour down. Incredible! Arriving at the planting site we discovered that only 4 grafts had survived. After discussing our findings with Halim, we came to the conclusion that they had not received the required attention needed to survive the hot summer. This definitely has to change! To help heal our disappointment we replanted the empty Groasis Waterboxx’s which were stacked against a wall in the bivouac (the second planting area) after the rains had stopped leaving the usually dry sand, now wet.

### **November 2011: 3rd Taragalte Festival**

The 3rd Taragalte Festival date had been set for 11-11-11 and after having received an invitation from the organisers, Halim and Ibrahim Sbaï, my husband Adriaan decided to join me and also attend this 3<sup>rd</sup> musical, cultural and environmental event in the Moroccan Sahara. Next to the tree planting activities that had been planned, we were also asked to explain how the Groasis Waterboxx works as well as to hand out our children booklet “ Me and My Sahara” to interested children attending the festival. We were also pleasantly surprised to receive a copy of the cultural page of one of the largest newspapers in Morocco “Le Matin” presenting our children booklet “Me and my Sahara”. Journalists had been interested in our projects during a press conference that had been given in October about the Taragalte Festival as well as the Taragalte Eco-lodge and Cultural projects. Sahara Roots is involved in the environmental part of this project.

### **Sahara Roots in 2012**

In the coming year Sahara Roots will continue working on our different projects. For the tree planting projects our local partners are now testing a new caretaker. We are also in the process of revitalizing our local school activities by giving presentations on conservation and tree planting .We will also continue to handout our booklet “ Me and My Sahara” to children. 2012 will be a decisive year concerning the building of the Taragalte Eco-lodge project. We are waiting for the approval of the government and if this is not forthcoming this year, we will have to reconsider this project. It’s not possible to start planting a botanical garden if the eco-lodge has not been constructed as we have already experienced by planting on the Taragalte Eco lodge site in Nov 2010. We are investigating alternative ways to use the donations, that we received during the fundraiser in September 2010, properly, such as wind energy, water storage and irrigation systems.

We would like to thank you all for supporting our projects and we look forward to continuing our work in the coming year. Sahara Roots team wishes you a sustainable, green, happy, and healthy 2012!

**Wanda Hebly,**