

Transcript of Earth Matters radio show and podcast Episode #1451

Surging interest in the work that reconnects: Deep Ecology workshops with John Seed happening now.

Produced by Bec Horridge for 3cr radio station and the Community Radio Network on 05/05.24

00:06 Bec Horridge

Hello. Welcome to Earth Matters, environment justice stories from Australia and around the world. Produced at the studios of 3CR on Wurundjeri country in Naarm, Melbourne, and broadcast across this continent via the Community radio network. I'm your host, Bec Horridge.

How close to the living earth do you feel? Today's Earth Matters guest is John Seed, co-creator and facilitator of Deep Ecology workshops, helping people find their ecological self.

John Seed [Leading Quote]

“As I say, it's the intention that does the work and that once people have that intention to heal the illusion of separation, it hardly matters what you do after that.

You know, it's just like it's that intention that creates the extraordinary consciousness that always and inevitably emerges of people experiencing a kind of deepening of any sense of rootedness in the living earth and feeling empowerment and vision coming up through those roots that give us a sense of direction and meaning in our lives.”

Bec Horridge

That's John Seed, today's guest. I found John in the calmness of Narara eco village on Darkinjung Country, near Gosford, New South Wales.

John Seed

I'll just start off with a quick sort of summary of the last 40 years of my life. So I came into this in 1979. I was living up near Nimbin in a community called Bodhi Farm that we'd started some years earlier, a Buddhist community.

I was organizing meditation retreats. We'd built a meditation center in the forest. I was growing my own food, building our own houses, delivering our own babies and I thought I was going to spend the rest of my life like that, when mysteriously, in August of 1979, I just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time when a neighbor called for help to stop the logging of the rainforest at the end of Terania Creek road.

So I'd never been to the end of Terania Creek road. I didn't know there was a rainforest there. I didn't know there were rainforests in Australia. I didn't know what a rainforest was but I was into helping the neighbors and so I showed up and then I was zapped.

Something happened that I still haven't recovered from and I felt like I could hear the trees calling out to me. They knew me and they wanted me and I couldn't resist. So I ran away with that nascent ecology circus. Those first years were incredibly successful. We started out as 200 hippies against the world and a year and a half later, an opinion poll found that more than 70% of the people of New South Wales wanted an end to rainforest logging.

Neville Wran's government responded with a string of national parks that stretched from the Border Ranges down to Barrington tops, including the Nightcap National park where the end of Terania Creek Road was, where we'd been playing our little games and climbing up into the trees and chaining ourselves to machinery and getting arrested.

So from there a couple of Kombi loads went down to Tassie after an appeal, from what was then called the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, to help them set up a blockade to stop the damming of the Franklin river.

We were part of helping set up the base camp at Strahan and teaching people the protest songs we had learned around the fire at Terania Creek and Mount Nardi and that was the biggest such event in Australian history. More than 3000 people came from all over the country.

More than 1500 of us were arrested and once again we got a national park. The dam was stopped and from there up to the Daintree, far North Queensland, the tropical rainforests, a couple of years in a row.

And although we were unable to stop the road that they were trying to build from Cape Tribulation to Bloomfield, we did stop the development, all the real estate development that was supposed to happen alongside that road, and that was the purpose for the road, and a national park was declared again and as in New South Wales and Tasmania, these are now part of the World Heritage list and the most protection that the world has to offer to an area.

However, by the mid 1980s I'd created the Rainforest Information Centre and was working on helping to see what we could do to protect rainforests all over the world because I'd learned by then that these rainforests are the very womb of life.

They're home to more than half the species of plants and animals in the world and the satellite photographs were showing them disappearing at a rate so that less than a single human lifetime remained at those rates of destruction before the home of half of the species in the world was utterly annihilated.

And I'd also learned by that time that in spite of our incredible successes in Australia worldwide, for every forest saved during the first half of the 1980s, a thousand forests had been lost and

clearly there was no way to save the planet one forest at a time; that unless we could somehow address the underlying psychological disease that allows modern humans to imagine that we can somehow profit from the destruction of our own life support systems, clearly these actions would be of no particular use for the future of the world, would have nothing to do with stopping the slide to oblivion the 6th mass extinction, which clearly we're in the middle of.

And so it was trying to understand this psychological or spiritual dimension to the environmental crisis that brought me to the philosophy of Deep Ecology.

Deep ecology is a term that was coined by the late Arne Ness, who was professor of philosophy at Oslo University and according to him, underlying all of the symptoms of the environmental crisis lies the illusion of separation between human beings and the rest of the natural world.

The illusion of separation.

And this illusion, he said, was the result of anthropocentrism, or human centeredness, the idea that:

- human beings are the center of everything, that we are the crown of creation, we are the measure of all being

- the world consists of human beings on the one hand, and resources for human beings on the other hand

- nothing has intrinsic value except humans

- other things may have instrumental value if they are a resource for us

So this incredible arrogance, he said, stretches back thousands and thousands of years, at least as far as the Old Testament when we learn that humans are to subdue and dominate nature, and nature is to be in fear and trembling of us.

And as a result, Arne said, we won't be able to think our way out of the mess that's been created. He said that ecological ideas won't be enough to save us. What we need is ecological identity or ecological self.

And so for a couple of years, I was stuck with having these great ideas but the man who'd given me the ideas let me know that ideas by themselves were of no use, but he had said that what was needed were community therapies to heal that illusion of separation and to nourish ecological identity.

And so in 1986, when I met Joanna Macy, who was in Australia doing her workshops, and she showed me the extraordinary spiritual technology that she had developed that allows us to make incredible changes in ourselves and our relationship with the world.

And so together with the philosophy of Deep Ecology, which excited her as much as her ideas excited me, or her technologies excited me, we then went on to create the Council of all beings, which was the first of the experiential Deep Ecology workshops, which both of us continue to facilitate to this day, although she's now in her mid nineties and which was our attempt to come up with an answer to Arnes's call for community therapies to heal that illusion of separation.

8:26 Bec Horridge

Yes, John, I myself attended those workshops so long ago now, in my twenties, and that really turned things around for me. It led me into a life that was so much more happy and meaningful. I'm just so glad that I went to those workshops. My life was so enriched, and I've been encouraging people to attend, and some of them have and they went and said it was fantastic. They met great people who they're going to be meeting again.

What are we going to talk about now John?

8:52 John Seed

Well, you asked me if I had any stories that honour others that I've worked with, and I've got a story that I like, which helps to explain further what Deep Ecology is about.

And this was a story about one of the ancestors of the Deep Ecology movement, the great American poet Gary Schneider, who's also in his nineties now and living in California.

But back 40 or 50 years ago, Gary, he was one of the early Beatniks that led to the hippies, that led to the sixties and he was a famous poet with a Pulitzer Prize for his poetry, but at a certain point, he was working in the cabinet of Jerry Brown when Jerry was the governor of California for the first time in the sixties, which was a very radical time in California. It was the most radical administration that California had ever seen but somehow Gary was still just an irritant.

And one day his boss, the governor, says to him;

"Gary, why is it that whatever the issue, you're always going against the flow?"

To which Gary replied,

"Gerry, what you call the flow is just a 16,000 year eddy. I'm going with the actual flow."

So to me, that's a great way of seeing Deep Ecology as broadening our lens away from the 16,000 year eddy and being able to understand that it was we who emerged through the ages of ice, that it's our our ancestors who crawled out of the water onto the land, that every cell in our bodies is descended in an unbroken chain through these incredible events and, you know, part of ecological identity is actually experiencing ourselves that way, rather than that being some dry piece of information in a textbook, you're talking about the ecological self.

10:41 Bec Horridge

How can someone experience that?

John Seed

Well, that's the purpose of these workshops. So by attending a workshop which is mostly called Deep Ecology in Australia. In America these days, it's mostly called 'the work that reconnects'.and you can find out lots about these by doing a simple search.

And the purpose of these workshops is to bring our ecological identity into focus and to nourish our ecological identity.

Yes and for the longest time, it was just like hippies, pagans and witches who attended and then environmentalists who understood that it's a kind of a, it's a way of burnout proofing activists, but lately it's been every man and his dog and all the workshops are filling up with, you know, IT professionals and students and professors, and the last two years I've been training lots and lots of people to facilitate this work because it's really easy to learn how to do it.

Luckily, it doesn't need skilled facilitation, luckily for me, because I'd never facilitated anything in my life, because what we found is that it's the intention that does the heavy lifting, that any time a circle of people gets together with the shared intention to heal that illusion of separation between ourselves and the living earth the earth comes rushing back in.

It's only ever been from our side that the separation has emerged. The earth never pushed us away and the moment that we make a gesture of reconciliation, that's just all that it takes.

But anyway, so I've been training other people to do this work and my last four or five workshops have filled up with a waiting list and next weekend in Melbourne is full with a waiting list and next month in Kangaroo Valley, I think there's like three or four places left.

But I'm delighted to see that, you know, at the ripe young age of 78, my work finally seems to be coming into its own and one of the things that I'm hoping for from people listening to this, I'm wanting to use podcasts to spread the word about Deep Ecology to the world, and in particular beyond the usual suspects. You know, people who listen to an Earth [Matters] radio program are the usual suspects but there's lots of people out there who will be interested in this and so if anybody's got any connections in the podcast world could introduce me to podcasts that may be about different subjects, but that somehow we could frame Deep Ecology and my work so that it would be of interest to them.

13:25 Bec Horridge

If you go to the 3CR Earth Matters homepage, all the links for the upcoming workshops are there and the link for the Rainforest Information Centre, one of Australia's longest running, mostly independently funded conservation organizations.....still going. You can still participate in that. Check out their website.

13:44 Bec Horridge

You're listening to Earth Matters; broadcast nationally across these stolen lands via the community radio network. Here is John seed singing his song expanding universe.

14:02 John Seed

So you may have heard this song before, but stay tuned because I've changed the last couple of lines from the version that you know.

Bec Horridge

Okay, I better not sing along. Let's go, John.

14:16 [John Seed sings sweetly, while playing guitar]:

Remember that you're standing on a planet that's evolving, revolving at 900 miles an hour.

It's orbiting at 19 miles/second so it's reckoned.

A sun that is the source of all our power.

The sun and you and me and all the stars that you can see

Are moving at a million miles a day.

In an outer spiral all about forty thousand miles an hour,

in a galaxy they call the Milky Way.

The Milky Way.

Our Galaxy contains two hundred billion stars.

It's a hundred thousand light years side to side.

It bulges in the middle, sixteen thousand light years thick,

but out by us is just two thousand light years wide.

With thirty thousand light years from galactic central point we go round every two hundred million years And this galaxy is only one of millions and billions in this amazing and expanding universe.

Expanding universe.

The universe itself keeps on expanding and expanding in all of the directions it can whiz.

As fast as it can go at the speed of light, you know, 12 million mile a minute and that's the fastest speed there is.

So remember when you're feeling very small and insecure how amazingly

unlikely is your birth and sink your roots deep into the galaxy, dance of life planet Earth.

Sink your roots deep into reality, dance your life for planet earth.

00:16:46 Bec Horridge

Bringing us back to the cosmic basics: "Expanding Universe" with John Seed.

John Seed is the founder of the Rainforest Information Centre. The Rainforest Information Centre has been a central link in the radical environment movement for over three decades. It has been involved in hundreds of campaigns and practical conservation projects in Australia and internationally to protect the Earth and at the same time recognise the legitimate aspirations of indigenous peoples.

We are with John Seed, who has co created and facilitated Deep Ecology workshops for so many people. Over the decades, the popularity of the workshops has taken off but what about the nitty gritty of these workshops? If somebody was going to go, what can they expect? Is it camping or what?

17:37 John Seed

Well, it depends on the workshop. But next weekend, which is at Muramoorra, an intentional community near Healesville outside Melbourne, there's going to be mostly.... people will be camping or in.... driving up in vans and sleeping in their vans, but there's, I think, eight dorm beds and a couple of better, you know, better accommodation than that and some people who live nearby will be going back home at night and so, but it depends. I try and set up the workshops so that there is opportunities for something more comfortable than sleeping in a tent, but don't always succeed.

And the particular things that we'll be doing, people can read about on the Rainforest Information Center website. There's a page on Deep Ecology that has links to everything that we do.

But it's really, as I say, it's the intention that does the work, and that once people have that intention to heal the illusion of separation, it hardly matters what you do after that.

You know, it's just like it's that intention that creates the extraordinary consciousness that always and inevitably emerges of people experiencing a kind of deepening of any sense of rootedness in the living earth and feeling empowerment and vision coming up through those roots that give us a sense of direction and meaning in our lives.

18:58 Bec Horridge

This work can help give direction, because I know personally, for me, it's quite difficult to establish what to do next. Everything is changing. Even the technology I work with is changing. The world is changing. Feels like the world's falling apart, people say, and yet there's new things

starting, new shoots are growing.

How do people decide what to do next? Especially young people.

19:21 John Seed

The workshops have definitely been a place that answered that question for a lot of people, and certainly not for everyone. You know, like, I think that the answer to that question has to be..... just hold that question very tight and understand the importance of that question.

And the translation 'Vision Quest', I think a more accurate translation of what peoples throughout time have done in response to that question.....a better translation is 'lamenting for a vision."

So it gives you the sense that you have to actually willingly experience the anguish of not having an answer to that. Do you know? And then the answer will come in its own good time.

20:13 Bec Horridge

I'm reassured to see you again, and I'm reassured that it's possible to live a meaningful life and make good change in this world. John seed, I'd like to thank you personally for everything you've done for me and my friends, and I'd like to thank you on behalf of thousands of people who are standing with us.

20:31 John Seed

Thanks. Thanks so much. Bec

Bec Horridge

Is there anything else?

20:34 John Seed

Yeah. The last time that we met was at Rising Tide in Newcastle.

I want to say, you know, one of the great flowerings in my life in the last year has been getting arrested at the kayak blockade in Newcastle a few months ago, I was one of 107 arrested blockading the port of Newcastle, where coal ships leaving that port are responsible for 1% of all the greenhouse gases in the world today. Like a hugely important issue.

And Rising Tide is this fantastic young organization. It's the best thing that I've seen on the horizon for yonks, and it's becoming a national organization.

And later this week, I'm helping set up a Central Coast hub. I'll be screening their new film called The First Wave, and it really is the first wave in a huge deluge of movement to bring us back to sanity with regard to the climate.

And so I appeared in court and the magistrate that I was seeing had dealt rather harshly....all

the magistrates dealt with people differently. This one had been rather harsh and so everyone was thinking that I would get some severe punishment but the passionate statement I made about climate, or maybe my age, but in any case, she...although she found the charge was proven, she said there was no conviction.

22:04 Bec Horridge

Yeah, there's been a few judges making decisions like that for climate activists.

22:09 John Seed

One of the things you asked me for when you emailed me, Bec, was you asked whether I had a toolkit. And I tried to think about that and so two things that I'd like to say to people is: one is that there's a colleague of mine, one of the facilitators of the work that reconnects Nettie Hulme

22:28 John Seed

[John spells out the name]

N e t t i e h u l m e in Tasmania.

And on Sundays at five, she does an hour long, short journey through the work that reconnects, which is really beautiful. And I make it along once every four Sundays myself. But you'll find the URL in the show notes.

And the second is that another of my colleagues, Sky, is doing an online ten week webinar called Plant Intelligence and the Imaginal realm, which I'm hoping to participate in, although it's Saturday mornings when I'm usually doing a workshop, so I'll just have to see how I go. But the last one was filled up and was, you know, the reviews were incredible and I, you know, heartily recommend that to anybody.

23:17 Bec Horridge

John, it's been so great to catch up with you again.

23:20 John Seed

Well, next time I'd love to talk about Narara Eco Village and that, that kind of part of my life. We could do another show about that.

23:29 Bec Horridge

Look forward to it.

See you, John.

John Seed

Yeah, see you, Bec.

23:33 Bec Horridge

If you would like to receive emails from John Seed when there's any Deep Ecology near you, please email him with your name, email address and postcode to johnseed1@ozemail.com.au

johnseed one at ozemail.com dot au. That's John s double e d one at o z e m a i l.com dot au.

johnseed1@ozemail.com.au

Or Google him. You'll find out lots about John Seed.

24:05 Bec Horridge

And you can find a link to the Rainforest Information Centre's website on the Earth Matters home page, and it's full of information about their projects to save rainforests around the world, as well as John Seeds schedule for upcoming workshops and a link to the "Plant Intelligence and the Imaginal Realm", a ten week online and in person study group and also the link to "Falling in Love with the World: Active hope Spiral", free online Sundays at 05:00 p.m.Australian Eastern time with Nettie Hulme.

Here are some sounds from the People's Blockade of the world's largest Coal Port on Awabakal Country at Nobby's Beach, Newcastle, last November.

24:46 [A huge crowd chants with drums]

We say no apocalypse

We say no apocalypse.

We say no apocalypse.

24:58 Bec Horridge

Well, it does seem strange that the citizens of a country should have to block their own coal port due to government inaction and it does seem strange that a democratically elected government can't seem to represent the interests of its people.

We await next November when Rising Tide will attempt to block the coal shipping channel again. They've done it before, closed down the coal port terminal for 30 hours and sustained over 100 arrests.

This time the open plan is to block the export of coal for 48 hours, and that would be quite a financial impact on the port operation, I should think, but nothing compared to what everyday Australians are paying to deal with climate impacts, such as damage from floods and fires.

And of course, all over the world people are paying for the impacts of CO2 emissions.

This blockade will be a demonstration of the will of Australians to join the global effort to cut CO2 emissions, in contrast to the startling lack of political will by people who hold political and financial power.

25:59 [A huge crowd chants with drums]

No more coal. No more ships

We say no apocalypse.

26:06 Bec Horridge

You've been listening to Earth matters, Community radio's national environment justice program.

I'm Bec Horridge. If you've missed any of today's show, you can find our podcasts at three.cr.org.au forward slash earthmatters

<https://www.3cr.org.au/earthmatters>

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Earth matters would like to thank the Community Broadcasting Foundation for their financial support and the Community Radio Network for getting the program out to you.

Earth Matters is produced in the studios of 3CR on Wurundjeri country.

If you'd like to get in contact, you can send us an email at earthmatters@three.cr.org.au or go to our Facebook page. I hope you can tune in next time for one more Earth Matters.

26:57 John Seed.[sings sweetly, while playing guitar]

The Universe itself keeps on expanding and expanding in all of the directions it can whiz.

As fast as it can go at the speed of light, you know, twelve million miles a minute, and that's the fastest speed there is.

So remember when you're feeling very small and insecure, how amazingly unlikely is your birth and sink your roots deep into the galaxy, dance of life planet Earth.

Sink your roots deep into reality, dance your life for planet Earth.

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